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**TURNING AROUND A SUPERTANKER:
Media-military relations in Canada in the CNN age**

by
Daniel Terrance Hurley, B.A. (Winnipeg)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
May 1, 2000

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acceptance of the thesis

**“Turning Around A Supertanker:
Media-military relations in Canada in the CNN age”**

Submitted by Daniel T. Hurley, B.A.

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Journalism

Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University
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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the Department of National Defence introduced a new public affairs policy pledging greater openness and transparency with the Canadian public. The military endured five years of bad publicity following the death of a Somali teenager at the hands of Canadian soldiers in 1993. During the “Somalia Affair,” the military was portrayed as a closed and secret culture, intolerant of diversity and internal dissent, and hostile towards the media. The affair turned from bad to worse when amateur videos showing soldiers engaged in racist and violent activities were released. Public support for DND plummeted. The Canadian military needed to become more open and transparent because advances in communication technology have made the public more aware and the media more critical of its activities. With this in mind, DND has made noticeable changes to achieve this goal. However, recent events have proven that old habits die hard with the Canadian military.

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INTRODUCTION

For 79 days last spring, the Canadian military engaged in an unusual practice – at least from the perspective of journalists who had been following the military in recent years. Every day around noon, a general would enter a conference room in the concourse of National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa. Dressed in his full service uniform, he stepped up to a podium to brief reporters about the latest developments in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's air attacks on Yugoslavia. That general was often Lieutenant-General Raymond Henault, the deputy chief of defence staff, or Brigadier-General David Jurkowski, the chief of staff for joint operations – two senior officers playing key decision-making roles in the operation.

Before live television cameras, Henault and Jurkowski usually read a statement updating the status of Canada's fighter pilots: how many sorties had taken place, how many CF-18s and pilots were involved and what the Canadian Forces had learned from their allies that day. However, they did not reveal the identity of the pilots. A slide or video presentation often accompanied the briefing. Then for up to an hour afterwards, the officers would answer questions from the media. The whole news conference was usually covered by one of Canada's all-news networks, CBC Newsworld or CTV News One.¹

This daily and relatively cordial interaction between the national news media, and the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces

(DND/CF), was unusual, especially for defence reporters who had become accustomed to a very different type of treatment in the last decade.

“It was really a night-and-day situation,” says John Ward, a senior parliamentary reporter for the Canadian Press in Ottawa. “During the Gulf War, sometimes a senior officer but usually a [more junior] public affairs officer came over to the [National] Press Gallery a few times and said virtually nothing. During the Kosovo conflict, the people responsible for making decisions were out there every day answering questions. They’re a lot more open about these things. They’ve become a lot more savvy.”²

Becoming more savvy and creating a better public image have been some of the most important missions of the Canadian military in the late 1990s. The daily news conference during the Kosovo conflict was one visible sign that a new ethos was beginning to take shape within DND/CF. This tactic was part of a revamped public affairs policy, introduced in 1998, pledging greater “openness and transparency” with the Canadian public. It aimed to improve the military’s relationship with the media – and by extension with the Canadian public – by giving reporters better access to rank-and-file soldiers and officers and by providing quicker responses to inquiries, including the release of documents under the Access to Information Act.

The new policy was devised after DND/CF endured years of negative publicity and “scandals,” which seriously eroded public confidence in the once-respected institution. At the centre of the storm was the Somalia Affair. Questions began to be raised in March 1993, when a Somali teenager, Shidane

Arone, mysteriously died while in the custody of Canadian soldiers serving on a U.S.-led peace enforcement mission in Belut Huen, Somalia. That event led to a series of well-publicized courts-martial, along with revelations of racism and abuse inside the elite Canadian Airborne Regiment and a string of other critical stories.

The affair grew worse when graphic photographs of Arone's bloodied body with his Canadian captors hit the front pages of national newspapers and headlined newscasts in November 1994. Two months later, amateur video footage in which soldiers utter racial slurs and engage in sadistic acts of hazing dominated the news. Public outrage and political pressure forced the federal government to react by disbanding the Airborne and establishing a public inquiry to investigate the root of the problems in the military. The Somalia Inquiry eventually uncovered serious leadership problems and illegal activity by some of the most senior officers in the Canadian Forces. Some journalists realized the documents they obtained from DND/CF under the Access to Information Act had been altered.

The Somalia Affair left many in the military community deeply wounded by the experience. Officials in DND/CF felt besieged by the media's continuing scrutiny of the institution. Meanwhile, for the Canadian media, Somalia served as a wake-up call and defence and military issues became a required beat for every major news organization.

It was a classic clash of cultures – the secretive and closed military comes under the microscope of a suspicious media demanding openness and transparency. This military-media conflict has played out many times before. As early as the Crimean War, military leaders were deeply concerned by the presence of a war

correspondent, W.R. Russell of *The Times* of London, on the battlefield. Even though it may have taken weeks for Russell's dispatches to reach London by ship from the Crimea, his eyewitness reports of the British army's disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade nevertheless eventually brought down the government and led to the first censorship policy.

In the American Civil War, the battlefields were flooded with correspondents who sent their stories back to newspapers by the then-fledgling telegraph. Generals either befriended or expelled reporters from their camps, depending on how favourable their coverage was.

In the First World War, governments learned to regulate the flow of information by seizing control of the telegraph lines and censoring photographs and sanitizing dispatches, effectively muzzling the freedom of war correspondents. During the Second World War, the military co-opted the media to actively promote the war effort.

However, a deep divide opened up once again between the media and the U.S. military in the Vietnam War when American forces tried to stem Communists and fight for the support of the American public. The pictures the public saw on television portrayed a very different story about the war than the official statements from the Pentagon and the White House. The presence of television at the scene of the battle had created a credibility gap. For that reason, many American senior officers continue to blame the media for losing the war.

Maclean's correspondent Luke Fisher goes so far to consider Somalia to be Canada's own Vietnam-like experience in that it taught the Canadian military

valuable lessons on its relationship with the media – what it could and could not keep secret.

One common thread that runs through most of these media-military imbroglios is the influence of technological advances in communication. As the technology used to communicate stories from the battlefield to the public grew more sophisticated, governments and militaries had to develop strategies in response.

Today, militaries face a greater struggle as they attempt to conduct operations in an era of live television and the Internet. According to author Allen Sens, they are heavily influenced by the so-called “CNN factor.” The Cable News Network, the Atlanta-based all-news channel, has pioneered the modern age of international media coverage with its ability to broadcast breaking news events to the world in real time. As a result, governments and militaries now have little or no time to respond to these events, so they are often forced into making knee jerk, perhaps ill-conceived decisions. Author Nik Gowing argues that the public and the media have now become accustomed to this type of reaction and, therefore, demand greater openness from governments and militaries in all of its activities. However, he says this further heightens the tension between the media and the military.

There is a constant conflict between the military’s need for secrecy and the media’s demand for disclosure. Others often see this as a welcome and productive tension keeping both parties up to the mark. As a former British television editor remarked, the military is learning to live with it and to cope with the many problems that the ever-changing new technology brings with it.³

Canada's military has not escaped the CNN factor. The problems DND/CF encountered in the 1990s were driven by the presence of television and other technology used by the media to cover and record military activities. In some cases, such as with the Airborne hazing videos, the technology was used by members of the military themselves to record events that inadvertently reached a much wider audience than originally intended. DND/CF's public image problems came about because of its inexperience with the CNN factor. During the Cold War, military and defence issues in Canada received sporadic coverage at best. Without significant public attention or scrutiny, the institution functioned as a society unto its own, harbouring a culture of secrecy, hierarchy, subservience and intolerance towards dissent. Arguably, many military members grew paranoid of any outside scrutiny.

The situation changed at the end of the Cold War, as the Canadian Forces were called upon to participate in high-profile U.N. peacekeeping missions that were far more dangerous than the Suez and Cyprus. With that responsibility came more interest from the media – something most in DND/CF were unaccustomed to. When problems arose, the military adopted a mostly reactive and, more often than not, defensive approach towards journalists. That is when DND/CF's image problems began

However, the new DND/CF public affairs policy is supposed to address all of this. By pledging openness and transparency in its day-to-day operations, the policy intends to prevent the perception of evasiveness, promote a pro-active approach towards informing the public and turn around the military's tarnished

image. Senior officials in the public affairs branch say the policy had immediate results during the Ice Storm in Eastern Canada in 1998 and the Toronto snowstorm in 1999, when the Canadian Forces gained national profile and respect in the media. Another visible sign, say officials, was the daily news conference during the Kosovo conflict. However, it comes as little surprise that the authors of the policy would trumpet its success, especially in events such as the Ice Storm, when there is little to criticize when the military reacts quickly to help Canadians in distress. Many journalists and others observers argue that DND/CF's "good news" approach to these events are not effective indicators of how open the institution has become. The real tests come when the military's credibility is on the line – when files go missing, when soldiers complain of mistreatment, when senior officers make errors in judgment. In other words, measures of true openness come only when DND/CF is faced with another Somalia-style scandal. Critics say, for the most part, the military has failed every serious test it has faced since the new policy came into place.

Change comes about slowly for the Canadian military – tantamount to turning around a supertanker. Old habits die hard with an institution so steeped in tradition and secrecy.

Endnotes for Introduction

¹ Renamed CTV NewsNet in September 1999.

² John Ward, telephone interview, July 13, 1999.

³ Gowing, Nik. "Conflict, the Military and the Media," *Officer*, May/June 1997.

Chapter 1

THRUST INTO THE LIMELIGHT

They were wearing their trademark maroon berets when the news came in that their regiment, the elite unit of the Canadian Forces, had died on the political battlefield. The Airborne weathered but barely, the torture killing of a 16-year-old Somali teenager, Shidane Arone. Maybe it could have survived the video documenting racist comments made by some soldiers in Somalia but this finally killed it. The home video of a brutal hazing on Canadian Forces Base Petawawa provoked such outrage – not just from Canadians but from around the world – that politically, Defence Minister David Collenette had little choice. The Prime Minister and cabinet colleagues were unanimous: Disband the Airborne immediately.

– CBC-TV national reporter Susan Harada reporting on the death of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, January 23, 1995.¹

It was one of the Canadian military's darkest days in peacetime. Though nothing like the magnitude of Passchendaele, Dieppe or Kapyong, the disbanding of the Canadian Airborne Regiment left psychological scars on the minds of many former and serving soldiers. For almost two years, the proud regiment – once the envy of every soldier in the Army – had been living under a cloud of scandal surrounding its deployment in Somalia. There had been a constant stream of critical media coverage since March 1993, when news first broke that a Somali teenager had been beaten, tortured and, eventually, died at the hands of Canadian soldiers. However, it was not just the original sin that captured the media's attention. Rather, it was the cumulative effect of countless other stories that appeared in that event's aftermath that put the entire military in a crisis situation – allegations of racist conduct, leadership problems and cover-up.

It was, however, the release of amateur photographs and videotapes in late 1994 and early 1995 that sealed the regiment's fate. Those images profoundly

affected the Canadian public's perception of its military and resulted in political action. When the images were broadcast on television and published on the front pages of newspapers across the country, not only was the public shocked and appalled by what it saw, the government of Jean Chretien reacted by disbanding the Airborne and ordering a public inquiry into the tarnished mission. To say this was only the beginning of more difficult times would be an understatement.

Many observers asked why such a respected institution was suddenly the source of so much unparalleled negative news. Why, after more than a century of distinguished service to the nation and the world, was the Canadian military appearing to fall apart? What had gone wrong?

Under the Umbrella: the Canadian Forces during the Cold War

When the Somalia mission began in 1992, the Canadian Forces were involved in more than 30 peacekeeping and other military operations, more than any period since the Korean War. The majority of peacekeepers were deployed to the former Yugoslavia. However, the increased tempo of the military's activities and the increased exposure to international and national media coverage in the early 1990s was a result of the crescendo of events that followed the end of the Cold War.

Military historian and commentator Gwynne Dyer says this is where things began to go awry for the Canadian military. Dyer, a former naval officer who served in the Canadian, American and British navies, says years of budget cuts and lack of combat action took its toll on DND/CF in the post-war period.

“The rot has been there for years,” says Dyer. “Those who had any dealings with the Armed Forces were aware of it. Nobody in the media is paying any attention, because [DND/CF] is about the least interesting government department. There were no huge public smashes, like we got and in the early ‘90s to bring it to the public’s attention. It is only when we actually deployed [the Canadian Forces] in operational circumstances where it had to behave like a professional military force – and of course, it didn’t – that it became clear to the public and to the media, that something was seriously awry. And then we got the avalanche.”²

For almost 45 years, Canada and its NATO allies had shaped their defence strategies around a traditional foe – the Soviet Union. The Cold War created a kind of stability in international relations. The proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout NATO and Warsaw Pact countries was sufficient to destroy mankind many times over. Both sides knew neither could really win a Third World War.³ This stability – or put more bluntly, balance of terror – clarified the role and mission of the Canadian Forces. The Defence White Papers of 1971 and 1987 both spelled out a very specific role for the military within NATO. Land and air forces were to focus the bulk of their operational duties for service in West Germany. The navy, on the other hand, would continue to provide coastal defence by focusing its work on anti-submarine warfare and maintaining a strong reserve component.⁴

The Cold War also signified a turning point for Canada’s traditional allegiances, with the United States replacing Britain as the country’s main strategic

partner. As the nuclear arms race escalated, Canada was forced by geography to seek shelter under the U.S. military umbrella. The North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) agreement guaranteed that both countries would work together to protect the continent against nuclear attack or invasion. The U.S. military would protect Canadian territory if the Americans could establish a Distance Early Warning system, or DEW line, in the Arctic and get access to Canadian air space. In later years, the arrangement allowed U.S. bombers to test cruise missiles over the Northwest Territories and northern Alberta. According to *Toronto Sun* foreign columnist Matthew Fisher, this arrangement has allowed Canada to live in the shadow of American protection.

“Canada has had the United States do all its fighting for it since the Korean War,” says Fisher. “We’ve hidden for just as long under the U.S.’s nuclear umbrella and behind a nuclear-armed U.S. Army Corps in Germany.”⁵

As a result, the Cold War provided few operational challenges for the Canadian military to gain a significant public profile. However, the nature of the media, driven partly by the limits of technology available at the time, was such that it neither exposed or questioned any problems that may have existed within the Canadian military. This will be examined later.

For most of the Cold War, with the exception of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, the Canadian Forces became a peacetime organization; its personnel untested by the lessons of war. Like other democratic countries in peacetime, the military also saw its resources scaled back and reallocated to other priorities. In the post-war period, DND/CF has seen its budget cut on a number of occasions – from

21 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 1950 to just over two per cent in 1996.⁶

The department also underwent significant organizational change.

Unification and Integration

On January 1, 1968, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Canadian Army (along with its separate regimental units) ceased to exist, and a new single military service was born, the Canadian Armed Forces. Unification of the services was the brainchild of Lester Pearson's defence minister, Paul Hellyer, who justified the move as a necessary step to reducing duplication and simplifying the military decision-making process. Initially, the new CF command structure remained separate from the civilian bureaucracy in DND. Established in 1923, DND was staffed by public servants reporting to the deputy minister. However, in 1972, command and control for the CF was integrated with DND.

Unification sparked a nasty debate among veterans and servicemen alike. The disbandment of the separate forces jeopardized service traditions and identity. Hellyer became a wanted man, especially in Navy and Air Force circles, for introducing a single, green uniform for the entire military.⁷ Many veterans, officers and the rank-and-file alike continue to blame unification for the problems that plagued DND/CF in the years that followed. They say unification actually created more bureaucracy and adversely affected the traditional leadership structure.⁸

However, it was the integration of the CF and DND in 1972 that arguably had more serious implications. By combining the military command structure

with the civilian bureaucracy, critics believe staff officers, particularly those at NDHQ in Ottawa, became nothing more than civil servants in uniform. The professional ethic of most officers became less about duty, honour and pragmatic styles of leadership, and more about career advancement, political games and self-preservation. It is a damning assessment. However, Gwynne Dyer suggests the problem was made worse by timing. In the late 1960s, many of the wartime generation were preparing to retire. These were officers and non-commissioned members, explains Dyer, who knew the importance of professional military leadership through experience.

“These people had fought in a big war and knew what our Armed Forces were about,” says Dyer. “That actually induced a certain seriousness and professionalism because they knew people could actually die if they make mistakes. This enforced a degree of honesty and straight forward dealing because soldiers had to trust these people with their lives.”⁹

Dyer says the late 1960s brought a significant generational turnover in the senior ranks – officers who had joined after the Second World War with far less active service under their belts were beginning to move up the chain of command.

“These [were] peacetime soldiers. Now, there’s nothing wrong with that. They’re the best kind to have. But they are people who had not had the lesson war teaches you – that the military profession requires as an operational necessity very high standards of personal morality.”

Unification and, in particular, integration led to what Dyer calls, “a rot,” within the leadership structure, where careerism began to be awarded over

professionalism – where office politics and loyalty to superiors became more important than competence and accountability to the troops.

“People began to be promoted for their political services. And of course they were hated by the bulk of the rank-and-file. So that in self-defence, they promoted people as much like themselves as possible. Certainly, not whistle blowers. They would say, ‘I’m vulnerable because I’ve sold out, I need other people who’ve sold out to protect me.’”

As careerism became more widespread through the institution, a culture of evasiveness and dishonesty began to develop. Dyer says by the 1970s, officials in DND/CF were beginning to lie to the media as a matter of policy – something he claims, they never felt compelled to do before.

“You used to be able to disagree with them and it could be very upfront and unpleasant. But, you knew what they were saying, could be believed.”

That assessment may be overly naïve. Surely, the Canadian military must have been less than forthright from time to time about its activities before unification? Perhaps. However, Dyer’s argument is an appropriate indication of the kind of transition that was taking place in media-military relations in Canada during and after the unification period. It was a relationship that was becoming far more distant and far less cozy that it had been before.

The Growing Gap: The media-military relationship

During the 1950s and ‘60s, many reporters covering national affairs in this country had a deep understanding and appreciation for the military, thanks mainly

to their experience in the Second World War. For example, reporters such as Douglas Fisher and Richard Malone had served in Europe with the Canadian Army, while others such as Charles Lynch and Ross Munro worked as war correspondents. Fisher, who served with an armoured unit in Western Europe, before becoming a CCF MP and later a parliamentary columnist, says this affiliation led to good comradeship between senior officers and journalists.

“When I became a reporter,” says Fisher, “many of the heavyweights in journalism had been war correspondents, like Charles Lynch and Greg Clark. They had an immense respect and interest for the military, which really lasted a long time. [Clark] always seemed to be going hunting or fishing with generals or brigadiers. He was always taking the overseas flights to Lahr [and so on]. There was tremendous respect and a carry over.”¹⁰

Peter Worthington, an infantry officer with the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) in the Korean War and the *Toronto Sun*’s founding editor, says the wartime generation had a better understanding of the military’s mission.

“The media was filled with people who’d been soldiers, sailors, airmen or something and had a visceral understanding of the mentality and could assess it.”¹¹

Colonel Ralph Coleman, the senior military officer in the public affairs branch from 1996 to 1999, says media and military relations were once built on mutual trust and a degree of informality, a relationship he says lasted well into the 1980s.

“Our relations with the press were very good,” says Coleman, who also served as then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau’s principal press secretary in 1983.

“There was an unwritten understanding that we were seen by the press as having an agenda, a viewpoint. We were the flaks or spokesmen for the military . . . and they were the press trying to get good stories. You had a relationship that was friendly. There was no serious hostility. It was like two hockey teams. You’re playing on opposite sides. But at the end of the day, you’d go have a beer together.”¹²

However, this cozy and collegial relationship had a downside and sometimes prevented critical stories from being told. David Bercuson, dean of graduate studies at the University of Calgary and a prominent military historian, admits that with such a close relationship, correspondents were not likely to ask hard questions of people who were offering them free flights to Germany. There were several incidents of misconduct in the Canadian Forces during the post-WWII years, for example, that received minimal news coverage. Bercuson refers to the mutinies of 1949, in which sailors aboard three Royal Canadian Navy ships protested the living conditions and the inability of their officers to deal with the situation. The incidents led to an RCN commission of inquiry that recommended a series of reforms within the divisional system aboard ships throughout the Navy. There were similar incidents involving members of the PPCLI at CFB Lahr in West Germany in 1955.¹³

However, in 1968, there was a case involving a Canadian peacekeeper in Cyprus that had overtones similar to the death of Shidane Arone 25 years later. Sergeant Johnny Carson, a member of the Queen’s Own Rifles, had been drinking at his observation post when he drove to a local village in search of more alcohol. A Turkish-Cypriot police officer tried to prevent Carson from causing a

disturbance. Carson grabbed the officer by the throat and knocked him unconscious. Carson's driver took the officer to a hospital but he died hours later. Meanwhile, two Canadian officers quickly apprehended Carson. They tried him for drunk and disorderly conduct, demoted him to private and had him on a plane back to Canada within hours. Carson was not charged with manslaughter and he later regained his rank. The story was never made public, until Carson told it to *Esprit de Corps* publisher Scott Taylor in 1995.¹⁴

This is just one example of how quickly the military has swept negative stories under the rug – and how the media either were unaware or unwilling to report on them. However, as Bercuson explains, this was the nature of the media-military relationship at the time.

"The military would deny there was anything wrong," says Bercuson. "Half the [reporters] that were writing for the media were good buddies of the military. So the story rarely got out and if it did, it was sugar-coated."¹⁵

However, over time that collegial relationship began to wither. John Ward, who now covers defence issues for Canadian Press in Ottawa, remembers one encounter with a military public affairs at CFB Cold Lake in Northern Alberta in the early 1980s, while the United States was testing cruise missile tests near there.

"He'd basically tell you what day it was," says Ward. "We weren't getting anything out of this guy and it was very frustrating for everyone, including American reporters who'd come up to cover the tests. So, the Americans finally sent up a colonel to speak with us. That guy put on his parka and stood in the parking lot and answered questions literally for hours. I don't know whether or

not the Canadians could tell us anything but they just refused to help us. It took them along time to learn what the Americans already knew [about media relations.]”¹⁶

Still, some retired military officers are quick to blame the role of DND/CF’s public affairs branch for being the agents of disinformation in recent years. Retired major-general Lewis Mackenzie says public affairs officers have become political commissars or spin doctors for the defence minister and civilian bureaucracy, rather than true representatives of the rank and file.¹⁷

However, there’s a long history of public affairs staff in the Canadian military and their role was not significant that it is today. Before unification, all three services had their own public relations branches that were created during the Second World War. However, their role became even more important in the post-war 1950s, according to Colonel Ian Fraser, as both the war and the United Nations operations in Korea became a distant memory.

Canadians began to creep into a pro-disarmament, non-military attitude. Without a perceived threat to security . . . public support for the Canadian military began to slip and for the first time since the Second World War, the Canadian public needed convincing.¹⁸

With this in mind, the ranks of the public relations branches in all three services swelled to 237 members. In the early 1960s, the information officers took on more of an advocacy role, in which they promoted the activities of their service not only to build the public’s support but also to attract the attention of the political decision-makers. It is an activity that was criticized by the Glassco Commission on government organization in 1962, suggesting the public affairs

services were distorting information in order to convince the public to support new equipment purchases and increases to the defence budget.

When [government] departments take the initiative in publicizing their operations, the proper limits of their information activity becomes debatable . . . There is no fixed link between exposition and argument, between publicity and propaganda. What is news to one man is propaganda to another.¹⁹

Fraser questioned the wisdom of this finding in a paper on military public affairs in 1978.

The authors of the report failed to explain how this would be avoided short of the forces telling the public absolutely nothing of its activities.²⁰

Nevertheless, the number of military members serving in a public affairs function was drastically reduced with unification. When a single directorate of information services was formed in 1968, the branch consisted of just 37 information officers along with a small support staff, including photographers, responsible directly to the deputy minister and Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS). According to Gwynne Dyer, there were 200 fewer people “dishing out disinformation” in the early 1970s, than there were 10 years before when they supposedly “could be believed.”

Along with its limited mission in the Cold War, the Canadian military also did not play a major role in contemporary Canadian society. With the exception of the FLQ Crisis of 1970, much of the military news continued to be centered on individual bases and new equipment purchases. Bercuson says most Canadians’ opinions of the military ranged from respectful to apathetic. However, Canada’s military remained detached from the rest of Canadian society most of the time.

Most members of the regular force lived on bases across the country. Some were located in large cities, such as in Edmonton, Winnipeg and Halifax. But most others were situated in more remote, sparsely populated areas, such as Gagetown, New Brunswick; Bagotville, Quebec; and Petawawa, Ontario. While there was occasional interaction with the civilian world, many soldiers lived in barracks, ate in mess halls and spent their leisure time in their own clubs on the base. Even members with families spent most of their lives in these self-contained communities with their own housing, schools, health centres and recreation facilities.²¹

Despite recruiting campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s targeting women and minorities, the military culture continued to be predominantly male and Anglo-Saxon or Francophone in ethnic background. Bercuson says the culture remained, more or less, untested by the outside society it was charged to protect.

“One of the problems that we’ve had in this country for a long time is that we’ve had a real distance between military and society,” says Bercuson. “Anything that comes along to change that makes the problem worse. And technology has changed everything. During the Cold War, the military could get away with nearly everything it wanted, either because the media wasn’t paying attention or they were too close to brass. You certainly did not have something like a video camera there to prove otherwise”²²

The end of the Cold War changed all that.

Emerging from the shadows: The Canadian Forces after the Cold War

Once the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries disintegrated in the early 1990s, the Canadian Forces quickly found itself with a series of new missions. Before Somalia, the national media viewed the military's performance relatively positively. These included the army's performance in handling the Oka standoff in 1990, the navy and air force's limited but untarnished performance in the Gulf War in 1991 and the efforts of UN peacekeepers in early days of the Balkans conflict.

In the summer of 1990, the Quebec government requested the assistance of the Canadian Forces to quell an armed insurrection involving Mohawk warriors at Oka and Kahnawake. It was one of the first times a large contingent of soldiers had been requested to aid the civil power under Section XI of the National Defence Act since the October Crisis of 1970. This time, the army was directed to develop a plan to dismantle the barricades. Coverage of the Oka crisis appeared in all media throughout the summer. The most memorable television image was the famous face-to-face showdown between the masked Mohawk leader, the late Robert "Lasagna" Cross, who shoved and threatened the stone-faced soldier, Private Patrick Cloutier.²³ While there were allegations that both Mohawks and soldiers were guilty of antagonizing one another, this image became the impression most Canadians had of the crisis – one that viewed the military positively and less so for the natives.

Generally speaking, journalists covering the Oka crisis were surprised by the public affairs efforts of the Canadian Forces. The officers assigned to the crisis

were articulate, bilingual and had an organized information plan. During the two months of the siege, DND/CF held 10 press conferences, issued 45 press releases and published video footage of the scene in both English and French. The Canadian Forces' success in this regard was, according to some observers, partly due to the media's general lack of knowledge of military culture such as rank, chain of command or combat tactics. Colonel Doug Taylor, in an analysis of the media's coverage of the crisis, argues that the generally positive spin was also a result of a policy of openness.

Openness attracts the media and this is a lesson that both the Warriors and military learned early on. While openness might not guarantee you good press, it helps. Restrictions generally are accompanied by critical reporting.²⁴

Of course, there was a degree of hypocrisy and self-interest in the military's public affairs strategy at Oka. Charles Bury, a former chair of the Canadian Association of Journalists, complained that the Canadian Forces were actively and deliberately trying to manipulate the media and to thwart their attempts to cover the story objectively.

Journalists soon learned that they were dealing with the smoothest of big-league communications strategists. But that didn't help them do their job. And it led to one of the most serious attacks on freedom of the press in Canadian history.²⁵

That "attack" was the military's refusal to allow food and other supplies such as notebooks, batteries, tapes and film through the barricades to journalists who were observing the crisis from the Mohawk side of the barricades. This resulted in few television images from behind the barricades reached Canadian viewers during the conflict. The commanders on the scene permitted only a bulk

order of basic provisions to reach the contingent and left it up to the Mohawks to distribute it as they wished. Southam reporters Ian McLeod and Ann McLaughlin launched a lawsuit against the Armed Forces complaining that the denial of their material was an infringement on their basic rights and freedom of press. The Federal Court, however, rejected the argument on the grounds that “freedom of the press as a concept does not confer any special status on media people.”²⁶

However, this was a clear sign that the military was willing to suppress the media when it no longer suited their public affairs goals. While many praised DND/CF for its efforts at Oka, it was also harbinger of things to come – that the attitude of the military towards openness with the media in future conflicts would be significantly different. In a media conference following the crisis, an unnamed public affairs officer said if an Oka-style crisis were to reoccur, the military should move quickly to curtail media access.

I would like to see it shut off and tightened much sooner. The need to tighten controls on the media [are] regrettable. However, [they are] absolutely necessary.²⁷

The Oka crisis was barely over when the next major conflict began – the Gulf War. Since most of the Western world watched the air war on CNN after January 16, 1991, media attention on Canada’s participation in the war was limited. Unlike the Oka crisis, Canada’s military commitment was at sea and in the air. Three warships patrolled the southern and central Persian Gulf to enforce sanctions and deliver supplies. Meanwhile, a CF-18 squadron was based in Qatar and participated in air strikes over Iraq. However, most of the pilots flew cover for

more advanced American and British fighter aircraft or bombers. As far as newsworthiness was concerned, the Canadian contribution was a low priority.

Instead, the world was mesmerized by the “Star Wars” spectacle of the air war. The story of the Canadian role in the Combat Logistics Force went virtually unreported in Canada . . . It was difficult to arouse interest in the mundane routine of what was essentially a sideshow of a sideshow.²⁸

Even so, at one point of the war, more than 30 journalists were stationed at the Canadian air base in Qatar covering just 36 CF-18 pilots. However, Qatar was a long way from where the real action was taking place and it was logistically difficult for the media to observe the Canadian Forces in action. Journalists, of course, could not fly with the pilots and access to the ships was strictly controlled.

The news coverage ranged from “good news” portrayals of the naval and air force personnel as they prepared to depart for the Gulf to skeptical articles criticizing the state and age of the ships that were being sent into battle. One, HMCS Terra Nova, was 31 years old at the time. Marjorie Nichols of the *Ottawa Citizen* criticized the federal government of its neglect of the navy and its willingness to put Canadian sailors at risk in “outdated, outmoded ships that are sitting ducks for modern weaponry.”²⁹

The relationship between the media and the military was generally non-confrontational. The Navy accommodated journalists aboard its ships during the early stages of the operation, pledging a policy of “candour and openness.”³⁰ There was, in fact, only one main restriction – any material being sent via the ships’ communication system had to be reviewed for the sake of operational security. In other words, the Navy wanted to prevent the release of any information that could

give away the exact location of the ships or their time of arrival at a certain port to the enemy. This made sense to journalists such as Paul Mooney, formerly of Canadian Press and now army editor with the military's in-house newsletter, *The Maple Leaf*.

For me it was pure common sense . . . not to mention the time of arrival in port. I never put that in my copy. As someone who has covered a lot of military affairs, you don't do anything that's going to put your own people at risk.³¹

While the Navy said it did not have the authority to censor reporters, one correspondent said he was asked to do just that. The *Globe and Mail*'s Paul Koring refused to omit the name of a British ship from one story about the interception of a freighter full of refugees in the Gulf.³² On another occasion, he was asked by Captain (Navy) Dusty Miller to change a more critical story about low morale aboard HMCS Athabaskan.

"I didn't join the navy to get into a war," the steward said. That lament is echoed among Canadian soldiers, especially younger ones on the lower decks . . .³³

Koring's story also revealed the crew's fears, frustrations and desire to return to Canada. Some suggested that sailors were getting "sick" or asking for compassionate leave in order to get sent home. Miller strongly urged the story be changed.

"That's not fair," Miller told Koring. "You're going to affect the morale of the families back home and . . . our morale. I can't tell you to take it out and change it but, if I were you, I'd take it out and change it."³⁴ He didn't.

Miller says Koring did not understand the psyche of sailors – that they complain and moan as part of their existence. Meanwhile, Koring waited until he was ashore to file his story. Later, when he asked to attend a cocktail party aboard the Athabaskan, he was refused. According to Rear-Admiral Ken Summers, this was for his own safety, because the crew was angry about what he wrote.³⁵ However, such conflicts were rare during Canada's participation in the Gulf either because the Canadian media witnessed so little of the active combat or chose to comply with the restrictions laid down by the military.

Only a year later, the Canadian Forces would be called upon to participate in another international hotspot – the former Yugoslavia. This time, a contingent of more than 800 soldiers from both the Royal 22nd Regiment (Vandoos) and the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCRs) were dispatched to help the quickly escalating, multi-racial conflict in Croatia. Canadian troops quickly found themselves in a dangerous situation. The Sirac bombardment of April 1992 was the first time Canadians had come under hostile fire since the Korean War. While the Canadian media reported on this initial deployment, it was only when international television cameras began to focus on the situation in Sarajevo that the Canadian public began to pay real attention.

The main reason was the appearance of a rather blunt but savvy Canadian general, Lewis Mackenzie, on CNN. As deputy commander of the UN's Protection Force (UNPROFOR), he led a contingent of Canadian and French troops into the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina in July 1992. His mission was to reopen the Sarajevo airport so the city's population could begin to receive

humanitarian relief from the outside world. While he negotiated with the belligerents on the ground, Mackenzie became a household name because he was surrounded by a contingent of television reporters who were recording his every word and move. He admits the media's presence was a more effective weapon than a battalion of troops carrying machine guns in successfully negotiating with the Serbs to reopen the airport. With a tiny contingent of only 16 people initially, Mackenzie dealt with the media directly, without the filter of a public affairs officer or other spokesperson.

"It was me and the media," says Mackenzie. "So we sat down and I told them that I would tell them everything, because that's the concept of peacekeeping. You tell both sides or three sides in this case. You want them to understand you're impartial. So I told [the media] . . . I would tell them what they could attribute to me . . . what they could attribute to the senior UN official and . . . what was off the record. And in all the time I dealt with them, not once was I let down."³⁶

Mackenzie says it was often the "little things" that made the difference. For example, while the UN was not permitted to transport journalists around, he would inform them where snipers might be and then suggested they drive beside his armoured personnel carrier for protection. Establishing these kinds of ground rules and the resulting publicity allowed Mackenzie to achieve his goals of forcing the Serbs to reopen the Sarajevo airport to U.N. humanitarian relief flights.

"Having those folks with you from a selfish point of view is a tremendous weapon and gives you an ability to influence decision making at the [UN] Security

Council or in Ottawa or in Washington. I took a certain amount of delight, in being able to do that, because you can get things done.”³⁷

During the siege of Sarajevo, several Canadian soldiers distinguished themselves before the international media for their bravery in helping civilians under fire. In one case, the BBC’s Martin Bell filmed Captain Guy Belisle and Sergeant Mario Forest rescuing two women while under fire from a sniper.³⁸ However, in the early days of the Balkans conflict, most of the coverage of Canada’s participation in the UN operation came to Canadians mainly via international television networks, not through the domestic media.

With some notable exceptions, the Canadian Forces employed a public affairs strategy of some openness and accountability with the media during the Oka crisis, the Gulf War and the Balkans conflict. The main motive, of course, was not altruism but rather a need to generate enough public support for this mission to succeed. However, these were also active operations, in which journalists observed soldiers, sailors and airmen, doing what comes naturally to them and thus creating a working relationship in the field.

This was in stark contrast to the more rigid and confrontational relationship between the media and military’s bureaucracy in Ottawa that was at the centre of the Somalia affair. Without recent experience in handling criticism at this level, the DND/CF’s leadership entered uncharted and rather stormy waters.

A Rude Awakening: Belet Huen and beyond

Sixteen-year-old Shidane Abukar Arone was barely conscious when Master Corporal Clayton Matchee knelt beside him and held a handgun to his head. Matchee did not fire his weapon. He was only posing for a picture – a kind of trophy photo, with Arone as his catch – taken by one of his subordinate troopers, Private Kyle Brown. The pint-sized Somali teenager was a bloody mess. His face was swollen and discoloured, his frail arms tied listlessly behind his back. Within hours, Arone was dead of brain injuries caused by a series of blows to the head.³⁹

The events that transpired on that fateful night on March 16, 1993, in Belut Huen, Somalia, would become as well known to Canadians as anything the Canadian military had done in its history. Arone died in the custody of soldiers with 2 Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, which had been based at Belut Huen during a U.S.-led peacemaking intervention in the country. After being arrested for trespassing on the Canadian base, Arone was apparently beaten and tortured for several hours by at least two soldiers on guard duty. Brown says he only kicked the boy once. Matchee, on the other hand, delivered most of the blows. At one point, he requested a riot baton to assist in the beating. It was later revealed that the soldiers had acted in accordance with their commanding officer's expressed order to "abuse intruders."

A Significant Incident report on Arone's death was sent to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa almost immediately but the details contained in the dispatches were confusing and sparse. A news release announcing the death was issued to the media in Mogadishu on March 18, 1993, but was

ignored by the media there because there were no Canadian reporters in Somalia at the time and the international media was preoccupied with other stories.

However, a DND/CF-sponsored media contingent had just arrived in Somalia from Canada. A newspaper reporter from near the Airborne's home at CFB Petawawa, Ont., was part of the group. But, when Jim Day of the *Pembroke Observer* arrived in Belut Huen with the other reporters, they were quickly whisked away from the camp for two days to observe other Canadians elsewhere in Somalia. He suspects that this hastily organized tour could have been a diversion to clear the area of reporters while the Airborne dealt with the investigation.⁴⁰

However, when the group returned to the base on March 19, Day observed soldiers carrying a stretcher out of the detention bunker. The man on the stretcher turned out to be Matchee, who was unconscious after attempting to hang himself. He had been arrested on March 17 as a suspect in Arone's death. At the time, the mission's public affairs officer told the media contingent that a soldier had been taken into custody but refused to explain why. There had also been a previous shooting incident on March 4, in which troops opened fire on two Somalis as they ran away from the base. One died after being shot in the back. However, the public affairs officer for the mission, Captain Jacques Poitras, says he was kept completely in the dark about the investigations because the Airborne's leadership assured him that the matter would be dealt with internally.⁴¹

Day wrote a story about what he saw. When it appeared in the *Observer* a week later, it was the first time the Canadian public learned there was something wrong in Somalia. Meanwhile, officials at National Defence waited until March 31

to acknowledge the incident took place. Day believes DND/CF went public with the news only after his story was published and doubts it ever would have come to light had he not witnessed Matchee's removal from his cell.⁴²

From the very beginning, many observers believe the highest levels of the leadership at NDHQ intended to keep negative incidents on the Somalia mission out of the public eye as much as possible. It was to be treated the same way as information during in a theatre of war – in secret, to prevent infiltration by belligerent forces and to preserve public support for the mission. The decision to keep a lid on the incidents appeared to have a political motivation. But, it was domestic politics they were concerned about, not Somali warlords sending intelligence officers into the Canadian compound.

In March 1993, the then-defence minister, Kim Campbell, was in the midst of her bid for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. Deputy Defence Minister Robert Fowler made clear to his senior managers and general officers the importance of keeping any and all information that could be damaging to Campbell's campaign out of the public domain. Fowler, who has been described by many observers as a micro-manager and is well-known for his discreet handling of public issues, warned those who attended the daily executive meeting (DEM) on March 1, 1993, that it was necessary to exercise "extreme sensitivity in all matters relating to public statements, speeches, press releases" to avoid jeopardizing her relationship with the media.⁴³ Concurrently, during a visit to Somalia shortly after the March 4th incident, the then-Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral John

Anderson, told Airborne officers that they “should not make any waves” because Campbell was running for prime minister.⁴⁴

However, the military’s leadership was also concerned that publicizing the deaths could threaten the military organization as a whole. Colonel Michael O’Brien, the senior officer responsible for NDHQ’s operations centre when the incoming reports on Somalia arrived, is said to have told a fellow group of officers:

The [top brass] have decided the Canadian public can never know what took place. The public image of the Canadian Forces would never recover if the truth were known.⁴⁵

In hindsight, if those comments are true, officials in DND/CF clearly underestimated the magnitude of that decision and the intense media scrutiny that would follow. This became apparent when the head of the army held a news conference on April 1, 1993, at the National Press Theatre to acknowledge Arone’s death and that military police had four suspects in custody. Lieutenant-General Gordon Reay, chief of Land Forces Command at the time, made only a brief statement and refused to elaborate on the investigation or any other details. But Luke Fisher of *Maclean’s*, who was at the news conference, says it was not Reay’s brevity that was the problem but his actions that led many to believe he had something to hide.

“Reay was a sitting duck,” says Fisher. “He’d been sent over by Admiral Anderson to sit in front of TV cameras and say, ‘We’ve got nothing to say.’ He got asked 500 questions about the murder and investigation. He squirmed through the

whole thing, responded to virtually none. Then, he got up out of his chair and almost literally ran out of the place. He then jumped in a car and zoomed off.”⁴⁶

Reay lashed out at what he described as unfair treatment of soldiers in Somalia by the media, leaving the impression the entire army was in trouble.

They’re tarring hundreds, if not thousands of my soldiers with the same brush on the basis of what is, as of today, no evidence whatsoever. [I’m also upset by] lurid prose that refers to a national scandal or crisis of confidence in leadership.⁴⁷

But in the months that followed, the Department of National Defence faced a serious “credibility gap” of its own over its handling of the investigation in the murders and the media were raising the spectre of a cover-up. Military police collected nearly 1,400 pages of testimony from 81 witnesses on the Somalia mission. But it took them nearly six months to make their findings public, despite an earlier legal challenge by the *Ottawa Citizen*.⁴⁸ Editorials were warning the military early on that keeping the investigation under wraps would only make matters worse. The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* for example wrote:

Sticking to the closed-doors decision will only encourage the public to think someone has something to hide.⁴⁹

The *Winnipeg Free Press* addressed the issue in an editorial later in the year:

If [NDHQ] and the government had wanted to know and publish what had happened at Belut Huen on March 16, they could have done so about March 17 or 18. The government insists there is no cover up but there is amazing, persistent difficulty in learning what happened under the government’s nose. The public has a right to know what went wrong. A potential whitewash is not the way to clean house.⁵⁰

With the heightened media attention following the murder of Shidane Arone, it was expected that the return of the Airborne contingent to Canada in

June 1993 would be widely covered. A public relations strategy was developed to counteract negative media stories; it included emphasis on the positive accomplishments of CF personnel in Somalia. The troops were given some advice and encouragement from their contingent commander, Colonel Serge Labbé.

[T]he vast majority of thinking Canadians, the Department of National Defence and your families are proud of your accomplishments... You must remember that negative, irresponsible journalism generated, for the most part by the misinformed who have never been to Somalia, was propagated for reasons beyond our control and will very quickly [lose] the public interest... The international community recognizes your accomplishments [and] when the dust has settled, even the few who have been [misled] by sensationalist journalism will realize and acknowledge the truly valiant mission you have accomplished in Somalia.⁵¹

Labbe couldn't have been more wrong – the regiment's return was far from a glorious affair. Meanwhile, when the military police investigation on the deaths was finally released in August 1993, it provided little in the way of a full explanation of what had transpired in Somalia. However, DND/CF's then-director general for public affairs, Roberto Gonzales, pointed out to journalists that investigators had discovered a number of racists in the Airborne's ranks.⁵² So began a series of stories exposing possible links between soldiers and white supremacist groups and evidence that many of these soldiers had become undisciplined renegades. Earlier, a photograph of Corporal Matt McKay had appeared in the *Winnipeg Sun* showing him giving a Nazi salute while wearing an Adolf Hitler T-shirt and standing beneath a swastika.⁵³ McKay admitted to joining the Ku Klux Klan for a short time in 1990 but later described his involvement in the neo-Nazi movement as a "stupid mistake."⁵⁴

There were also reports that many Airborne soldiers possessed Confederate flags and were engaging in criminal activity at CFB Petawawa, such as stealing low-grade explosives and setting an officer's car on fire. However, two years later at the Somalia Inquiry, it was revealed that a secret military investigation conducted in 1991 had concluded that racism was on the rise in the Canadian Forces as a whole. It said right-wing groups were infiltrating the military "to gain access to training, weapons, ammunition and explosives."⁵⁵

In all, seven people faced courts-martial for the deaths in Somalia. Private Kyle Brown received the most severe punishment — a conviction of manslaughter and torture resulting in a five-year prison sentence. Major Anthony Seward, Brown's company commander, was convicted of negligent performance of duty but acquitted of unlawfully causing bodily harm. He received a reprimand, a demotion and later, a three-month imprisonment. Brown's platoon sergeant, Mark Boland, pleaded guilty to negligent performance of his duties and was dismissed from the Forces.

Everyone else was exonerated — including the Airborne's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Carol Mathieu, who had given his consent to abusing prisoners. As for Matchee, while he was charged with second-degree murder in Arone's death, his suicide attempt inflicted permanent brain damage making him unfit to stand trial. Military lawyers traveled to his hospital bed in North Battleford, Sask., twice a year to determine his fitness to stand trial.⁵⁶

The apparent imbalance of justice did not go unnoticed by the media or the public. During his imprisonment, Brown joined forces with *The Toronto Sun's*

Peter Worthington to tell his version of events in Somalia. Worthington wrote an article in *Saturday Night* magazine, entitled "The Wrong Man," and co-authored a book with Brown.⁵⁷ The Somalia Inquiry, in the end, never heard from Brown, although he carried most of the criminal burden for Shidane Arone's murder.

The fight to prove Brown's innocence eventually led to the next stage in the Somalia affair – the release of the home videos. On November 8, 1994, after the last court-martial was over, DND/CF released the horrifying pictures of Shidane Arone, bound, bloodied and beaten, in the bunker in Belet Huen. Newspapers, such as the *Ottawa Sun* and *Toronto Star*, ran the photos on the front page that day prompting numerous complaints.⁵⁸ The TV networks did likewise. Some observers believe the photos were released to divert the media's attention from the leadership problems and to re-focus on the crime itself.⁵⁹ It appeared that the strategy was working after the initial shock of the photos. The *Ottawa Sun* declared in an editorial on November 9, 1994, that the end of the courts-martial meant the Somalia affair could finally be put to rest.⁶⁰

However, the military surgeon who was posted to Somalia with the Airborne had a very different opinion. After reading the *Sun's* comments, Major Barry Armstrong publicly revealed how he had been ordered to destroy photos and files on the death of another Somali, Ahmed Aruush, on March 4, 1993. The doctor also believed from the autopsy he performed on the Somali man, that he had been killed "execution-style" by gun shot to the back of the head.

The allegations helped prompt Defence Minister David Collenette to promise a full public inquiry, headed by a civilian judge. However, public affairs

officials released a statement refuting Armstrong's claims by presenting another autopsy report on Arush, conducted by a civilian pathologist two months after his death. It ruled Arush's death was accidental.⁶¹ However, the media continued to pursue the cover-up allegations and applauded Armstrong's public stance.⁶² A military investigation of Armstrong's allegations found no cause to lay charges – a report that was only made public through the Access to Information Act.

The event that galvanized media scrutiny and public outrage against the military bureaucracy came two months later when the home videos were broadcast. A copy of the first video, shot on a camcorder by a member of 2 Commando in Somalia, was handed to *Esprit de Corps* magazine publisher Scott Taylor, who then released it to CBC Newsworld's *Ottawa Inside Out* program on January 15, 1995. The video is two hours long and shows Airborne soldiers doing a variety of routine things. But, there are parts showing soldiers using racist language and displaying violent behavior. Soldiers complain about their living conditions and the Somalis they were supposed to protect. One soldier described Somalis as "lazy," "slobs" and lacking in hygiene. Another one, carrying a riot baton, said he planned to use it for "crackin' those fuckin' small Somalis." Tattooed and intoxicated, Corporal Matt McKay tells the camera how "we ain't killed enough niggers yet," a comment that was widely used in TV and radio reports.⁶³

"We had no idea how powerful video was until we released that thing," said Taylor. "I didn't really think it was that big a deal."⁶⁴

In making it public, Taylor intended to help Kyle Brown's case by proving he was not a racist or violent by nature. Brown could be seen on several occasions looking visibly uncomfortable while his colleagues played to the camera. However, once it was shown on CBC, the focus of the video turned to the vulgarity and racial comments in the video rather than other, more fundamental problems with the regiment.

"There was so much in that video," says Taylor. "The drinking . . . the proximity of those grenades and weapons. How they planned to go out and 'snatch' a few Somalis. It's all described in detail on the tape what they're going to do. All these breakdowns in discipline and everything else that everyone missed because of the obvious shock [of the racist language]."⁶⁵

The controversy caused by the first video put DND/CF officials under severe pressure. However, the pressure became crushing a few days later when a second video was made public. Released to CTV News on January 19, 1995, by another former Airborne soldier, this was the infamous hazing video, shot at CFB Petawawa, the Airborne's home base, during an initiation ritual in the summer of 1992. However, the images in this video were far more disgusting and morally reprehensible than the first. Intoxicated junior soldiers from the Airborne's 1 Commando are seen being forced to eat human feces and vomit and drink urine from beer bottles. A black soldier is seen crawling around with the letters, "J'♥ KKK," written on his back in excrement. Many of the scenes were simply too vile to be shown on television.⁶⁶ Networks across Canada and around the world ran

segments of the video, including the BBC and stations in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the United States.

A third video also containing images of hazing from August 1994 where soldiers administered electric shocks to one another, was never broadcast. However, the Airborne regiment's last commanding officer, Colonel Peter Kenward ordered it destroyed. His explanation for the move was "to keep the media from getting their hands on it and showing specific parts and blowing them out of proportion."⁶⁷

However, the images from the first two videos spoke for themselves. DND/CF had previously reasoned that the Somalia scandal was really the result of "a few bad apples" – soldiers whose conduct was an anomaly compared with the other members of the military. The videos showed otherwise: nearly 60 personnel were involved in the hazing ritual and a few officers were apparently observing the proceedings. This proved that anti-social behavior in the military was not only not isolated but it appeared to be condoned by the institution

This was the breaking point for the federal government. The footage in the hazing video was dated and not directly related to the events in Somalia. The newly appointed senior officers of the Airborne Regiment assured the Chief of the Defence Staff, General John de Chastelain, they had cleaned up the unit by banning hazing rituals, enforcing tighter discipline and transferring the "problem" soldiers elsewhere. Despite his pleas, de Chastelain failed to convince Collennette to save the regiment, who was by then both too livid and embarrassed to let the incident go unanswered. For more than a year, Collennette had answered critics' calls for

action by asking them to wait for a public inquiry into the Somalia affair. This time, he decided to take decisive action and disband the regiment.

Even at the time, Collennette admitted his decision to disband the Airborne was politically motivated. He told CTV's *Canada AM* that the *videos* had tarnished Canada's image in the world.⁶⁸ The rationale of this decision, according to author Martha Armstrong, was not the undesirable behavior that was the problem but the fact the event was filmed and shown on television. Therefore, it became a media event.

What's interesting is not so much what the videos showed about military culture but what they revealed about Canadian culture as the public, media and politicians attempted to make sense of them.⁶⁹

Mea culpa . . . maybe: The Somalia Inquiry

With DND/CF reeling from the after-effects of the videos, the stage was now set for the public inquiry promised months before by Collennette. In March 1995, the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia (CIDCFS) was given powers to subpoena witnesses, a mandate to look into virtually any office in the Defence department and a timeline of nine months to produce a report. In the end, the Somalia Inquiry had cross-examined many of DND/CF's senior officers and bureaucrats, put everything from the military's justice system to its public affairs strategy under scrutiny and lasted more than two years.

During its life, the Somalia inquiry attracted constant media attention. Conducted entirely in Ottawa, the inquiry became a beat for dozens of reporters

from most of the major newspapers and broadcast networks accredited to the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Many of the proceedings were broadcast live across the country on the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) and CBC Newsworld.

When the Inquiry finally got underway in October 1995, thousands of Defence Department documents had been released showing that there were far more problems in Somalia than anyone had imagined. The records showed soldiers and commanders had been involved in countless illegal acts, including more cases in which Somali nationals were detained and abused by soldiers. Most of the documents gave clear evidence that DND/CF had mounted a massive cover-up.⁷⁰ CBC Radio reporter Michael McAuliffe revealed that several documents he had received under the Access to Information Act (AIA) appeared to have been altered, including briefing notes and so-called Requests to Queries (RTQs) used by public affairs officer in responding to media questions. The records relating to the Somalia mission were either re-written or had entire sections edited out. Gen. Jean Boyle, who was appointed Chief of the Defence Staff in early 1996, was in charge of the military's crisis group for the Somalia affair, including media strategy. Many of the documents in question had been approved by Boyle and bore his signature. However, when the CBC requested all media query documents after January 1994 under AIA, Boyle responded that they no longer existed. In truth, the briefing notes had been renamed Media Response Lines (MRLs), a fact that was not shared with the media. Though clearing Boyle of any wrongdoing, Canada's Information Commissioner, John Grace, accused him and other officers in the public affairs branch of being "less than forthright" for renaming the briefing notes.⁷¹

Inquiry commissioners also complained that crucial operations and communications logs maintained by each Airborne unit in Somalia during February and March 1993 were either missing or incomplete. In an extraordinary move, General Boyle ordered the entire Canadian Forces to stop working for a day in April 1996 and search through every desk and file cabinet to find the missing logs. Boyle even recorded a brief statement on video issuing the order and stating categorically that he played no role in the Somalia cover-up.

"I have never seen any evidence of an institutional conspiracy to thwart the Somalia Inquiry," he said. The country's top officer appeared rumpled and edgy in the video, clicking a pen in one hand and holding his script in the other. When General Boyle finally took the stand at the Somalia Inquiry, media and military observers alike lambasted his performance.

"Mea culpa, right here," Boyle told the Inquiry before live television cameras. "I've been . . . living with this in the court of public opinion based on an interview or a media show that was done on me and I accept full responsibility."⁷²

While he acknowledged breaking the spirit of the Access to Information Act, Boyle denied doing anything illegal. He angered many people down the chain of command by trying to shift blame to subordinate officers who he said failed to inform him of the changing documents. In one exchange, he attacked the members of his staff for lacking "moral fibre." His remarks only confirmed in the minds of many military members watching him across the country what they had known for a long time – that their leaders were all too willing to shift the blame on to someone other than themselves.

Boyle's days were numbered after those remarks. He finally fell on his sword and resigned, on October 8, 1996, days after Collenette himself left cabinet after writing an improper letter on behalf of a constituent. It was to be the climax, but certainly not the end, of the Somalia scandal.

When the Somalia Inquiry presented its final report in July 1997, after having its work cut short by the Chretien government, it gave a rather damning assessment of DND/CF's performance in dealing with the public.

The result was to discredit a new system purportedly designed to bring greater transparency to the Department's relations with the media and the public. To the contrary, the actual effect was a gradual erosion of transparency and accountability. Second, the failure by this important government department to obey the spirit of laws enacted by Parliament had the potential to undermine public confidence in the state of civil-military relations. Third, these events served to undermine discipline within the Canadian Forces. Apparently, to judge by these events, disobedience to the spirit of laws (indeed, even the spirit of any lawful order issued through the chain of command) and the shirking of an officer's responsibilities would be condoned.⁷³

Somalia's wide brush

"The media is so pervasive today," says Bercuson. "There's just no way to hide these things any more. Something is going to come out somewhere - and someone will connect the dots. And all of a sudden you'll be answering embarrassing questions you never wanted to answer in the first place."⁷⁴

Bercuson's comments speak volumes. The Somalia Affair and other events became critical lessons for the Canadian military on what it could and could not hide from the media and the public. By initially trying to contain information about the death of Shidane Arone and others in Somalia at the hands of Airborne

soldiers, the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence were forced to endure several years of relentless scrutiny by the Canadian media. This “original sin” led to a series of other embarrassing revelations about racism, immoral conduct and, ultimately, the perception of a high-level cover-up.

“What has been so horrifying,” military analyst Nicholas Stetham told CBC Radio, “is whether we’re dealing the murder of Shidane Arone or the cover-ups afterward is the attempts to conceal, to hide from responsibility at various levels and . . . to manage the situation without dealing with it honestly.”⁷⁵

No group felt the repercussions of the public scrutiny more than members of the Canadian Forces and their families. The unflattering images of the Airborne videos and other *cause celebres* left many feeling as if they were being painted by a very broad brush. They felt under siege, betrayed and abandoned.⁷⁶ Several senior officers and military advocacy groups have laid blame for this on the shoulders of the media – for deliberately portraying all things military as scandalous, whether or not the events warranted the criticism.

Retired vice-admiral Nigel Brodeur, a member of the Defence Associations National Network, accused the *Globe & Mail* of using a “rule of terror” in its reporting of events concerning the army. He also targeted the CBC, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Sun* Media Group and *Maclean’s* for tending to “denounce instead of informing.”⁷⁷ Brodeur even went so far to demand that a military ombudsman be given the right to “protect the Armed Forces against the abuses of the Fourth Estate.”⁷⁸

Retired rear-admiral Peter Haydon echoed Brodeur’s sentiments.

Many members of the press corps are themselves not without bias and, more significantly, far too few of them have adequate knowledge of military structures and procedures. This tends to lead to an excess of misinformation and flawed editorial comment. It [was] difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference between fact, fiction and conjecture.⁷⁹

Donna Winslow, a sociology professor at the University of Ottawa, assessed the socio-cultural attitudes of former Airborne members who served in Somalia. After a series of interviews, she summarized their impressions of the media's handling of the story.

There was a general lack of understanding or basic knowledge of the military within the media . . . [they] saw all the makings of a sensational story – a murder, a political campaign, possible cover-up, etc. They jumped on it and ran with it. They seized and held the agenda and left all the key players in a reactive mode. The Airborne became part of a much larger story and in essence, got sacrificed. The hope was that by disbanding the Regiment the story would go away and with it a lot of political heat – this didn't happen. What bothered [many military members] the most about Somalia was the press.⁸⁰

Even foreign military officers serving in Canada agree that the Canadian Forces received unfair coverage from the media.

"In Canada, [the military] gets a very raw deal," says Group Captain Tim Williams, senior naval and air adviser at the British High Commission in Ottawa. "It's always those bad times that it doesn't work for you that you get the stories. It seems that it takes floods and ice storms for you to get any good press at all."⁸¹

As an example, Williams, an air force pilot, flew into Somalia delivering humanitarian relief supplies alongside pilots and soldiers from the Canadian Forces.

"Your people did a fabulous job over there," he says. "They were professional in every way. An outstanding group."

Despite this good work, Williams says the Canadian media were not there to see it and therefore, the legacy of the Somalia mission continues to linger over the murder of Shidane Arone. It's not an uncommon story.

"Part of the problem for this," says Williams, "is that there is not enough military-related news in Canada to generate sustained interest by journalists. If there was, then perhaps it would not always be negative."

Historian Jack Granatstein, director of the Canadian War Museum, says the news coverage of the Somalia affair was often one-dimensional, scrutinizing only the most scandalous aspects of the problem – the brutality of the murders, the apparent racism and the anti-social behavior.

"The media did not do enough to point out that the problems that had come about in the CF were a result of government decisions or indecisions," says Granatstein. He says the sustained news coverage during Somalia made Canadians feel much less proud about their military – an image he blames on the media's generally negative outlook.

"This view was a reflection of the somewhat 'elite' bias many journalists have about the military," he says. "Most Canadians do not necessarily share these views. While the military was trying to react to the criticism, I'm not sure the poor response was bad P.R. or a result of bad leadership."

Captain Bob Kennedy, a former public affairs officer, believes the Somalia Inquiry and other scandal-like stories only generate media interest because it is convenient for parliamentary reporters in Ottawa to cover it.

The Somalia story only became a story when it became an Ottawa story – who told what to whom about what when. It [was] not a military story. It is a political story, which all of a sudden is happening in Ottawa and finally Somalia could be covered just by strolling over to the National Press Theatre. My contempt is unbounded.⁸²

Coverage of Somalia was for the most part treated by the Ottawa media in the same way as many other political controversies involving public institutions. There were allegations of wrong-doing, revelations of collateral problems, the perception of cover-up, a public airing of these problems and eventually a “sacrificial lamb” to take the fall for the scandal. In Ottawa, as with other centres of government, the propensity for controversy is heightened. That is why, according to retired rear-admiral Dan Mainguy, the military was not solely to blame for lacking accountability during the Somalia chapter.

It is bizarre that the failures of a leadership which is accused of being civilianized and politicized seem to be in the largely civilian political areas of public affairs rather than in any question about their military ability.⁸³

However, the Somalia Affair was much more than a political story. It revealed many more fundamental issues for the Canadian military. It exposed serious lapses in leadership, accountability and discipline within the system that required immediate correction. It highlighted the cultural gap that had developed between the military’s closed culture and the rest of Canadian society. And it displayed how ill-prepared military leaders were to handle the demands of the modern media.

Rebirth of a beat

While Somalia is seen by many in the military as a black mark on its history, others believe it was a necessary and in many ways, positive period for defence coverage in Canada. For more than a decade, Scott Taylor has been trying to draw attention to military affairs as publisher of the magazine *Esprit de Corps*. Having served four years as a soldier in the regular force, Taylor started the publication in 1988 as an in-flight magazine for the military's cross-country service flights. While it originally focused on military history, Taylor decided to expand *Esprit de Corps*' mandate as the Canadian Forces became more active in the early 1990s.

"There was a real niche there," says Taylor. "I mean all this stuff was happening faster than we could cover it as an internal organ on a quarterly basis. So, we decided to go popularize Canadian military news and history and felt the timing was right."⁸⁴

Esprit de Corps still continues to publish articles documenting chapters of Canadian military history. But, both it and Taylor have become best known as a watchdog of DND/CF, a conduit for individual members to air their grievances or expose cases of injustice and corruption and a primary source for defence journalists.

As for Somalia, Taylor says the period signified the rebirth for mainstream coverage of the Canadian military.

"It was a real milestone," he says. "Editors were cutting loose reporters to work on the military beat full time. For the first time, the hard-core Ottawa media

actually understood. People were focused on it. They were reading the documents. They knew intimately the players, the power structure and how this labyrinth of NDHQ worked and why it didn't work. It wasn't just *Esprit de Corps*, Chicken Little, saying they're corrupt. Mainstream journalists realized they *are* corrupt."

Taylor says it was this kind of sustained scrutiny by national media that overwhelmed DND/CF. But early on, much of the mainstream media were missing in action or not following up on key developments in the story. It was partly an indication of the overall lack of knowledge of the military's "complex subculture" by most members of the Ottawa media. Former *Toronto Star* reporter Peter Cheney agrees. He wrote a series of award-winning stories on the Airborne Regiment in 1993 and 1994, documenting racist activities and discipline problems. He admits military coverage in Canada has suffered from the media's short attention span and a dearth of reporters who appreciate the complex military structure. There was ample evidence of this in Somalia.

Few reporters worked hard on the story or sought information outside channels controlled by the military. The few who did ignited the story and kept it alive. But most were content to wait for the courts-martial and inquiries that would, theoretically, reveal the truth.⁸⁵

Denis Stairs, a professor at Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies in Halifax, says Canadians' reaction to Somalia and other negative stories have generally not been "anti-military" in nature but rather a reflection of disappointment, that their once-revered military was not doing its job. The media were dismayed and provoked by the "Machiavellian" attempts to suppress the truth

during the Somalia affair from the highest levels of leadership in DND/CF. The modern-day Canadian Forces became a closed-shop environment, where everyone seemed to be out to protect himself first. This resulted in a perception of corruption.

Far from displaying the straight-talking integrity traditionally associated with the gruff and flatly honest soldier, [the military gave] the appearance of maneuvering without principle in the interstices of bureaucracy. Their mission . . . the search for power, position and resources.⁸⁶

Military commentator Gwynne Dyer says the kind of behaviour displayed by some senior officers during Somalia was symptomatic of the state of the officer corps in Canada. He says traditional values of accountability and integrity became less important than political correctness and career advancement.

"Though there were many very honourable exceptions," says Dyer, "the bulk of the two-star rank and above in the Canadian Forces (during the 1970s and 1980s) consisted of people who were, bluntly, careerists."

The *Sun*'s Matthew Fisher says one of the reasons Somalia became such a scandal was the fact that mainstream journalists were absent during most of the mission to challenge what was going on. If they were there, Fisher argues the military would have found it harder to deny or cover up the events.

"Somalia was covered by press release and later by reporters who became so-called military experts by using the Access to Information Act requests to obtain information or by attending the inquiry."⁸⁷

Bercuson argues the most important story of the Somalia affair was the one most ignored.

How and why did the Airborne get totally out of control? The press didn't care about this story because it is rooted in the large story of the crisis that has been developing in the Canadian army for at least a decade.⁸⁸

Perhaps *Maclean's* Luke Fisher puts the entire period into the proper perspective. The Somalia chapter, he contends, was to the Canadian Forces what the Vietnam War was to the Americans – a necessary period of soul-searching and renewal.

“Unlike the U.S. military,” he says, “which was widely exposed for wrongdoing and incompetence during the ‘60s and ‘70s, we never had that with ours. We never had the close look or purge like the Americans had until the early 1990s.”⁸⁹

It was only when the Canadian Forces were thrust into limelight that it became apparent that change was inevitable. In the aftermath of the Somalia affair, the military would not try to engage an enemy on a battlefield but struggle to regain the trust and support of Canadians. It was clearly time for a new approach. However, it certainly was not the first time this kind of lesson had been learned.

The CNN factor and the Canadian Forces

The introduction of new communication technology used by the media has an enormous impact on government decision-making, particularly in periods of war and conflict. Government institutions are forced to respond to major events once a situation reaches a boiling point and usually after the issue receives wide coverage, regardless if it is through newspaper articles, photographs, television images or the Internet. Author Allen Sens defines this as “the CNN factor” in a

paper on the changing nature of peacekeeping.⁹⁰ He argues that governments are now prone to using short-term, “spasm” responses – ranging from air strikes to the dispatching of peacekeeping troops – rather than offering long-term solutions to long-term problems. It is usually a knee-jerk reaction in which the West will get involved in a crisis once it has reached its peak, rather than in the early stages, when something could be done to prevent it. International attention is focused usually on those hot spots where the media are present, not necessarily those places that are deserving of it. Coverage of crisis situations often fails to provide sufficient context and distorts the root causes of the conflict. Since the coverage is often constant, there are more opportunities for decision makers to make mistakes, focusing the media’s attention on dramatic failures, rather than less spectacular but important successes.⁹¹

One of best examples of how the CNN factor has an influence in Canada came during the Somalia affair. The appearance of both the amateur photos of Shidane Arone’s bloodied body and the Airborne hazing videos in the media captured everyone’s attention. The government reacted by eventually disbanding the Airborne Regiment and initiating a public inquiry. In another case in May 1995, Canadians were shocked by another video involving a Canadian soldier. However, this time it brought the country’s commitment to peacekeeping into question. Captain Patrick Rechner and other UN peacekeepers appeared in an amateur video handcuffed to telephone poles. Bosnian Serbs were using them as human shields to prevent NATO from launching air strikes. The images were

broadcast on Canadian networks and sparked a parliamentary debate over the dangers of peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia.⁹²

In a paper prepared for the Somalia Inquiry, Laval University political scientist Jean-Paul Brodeur argues that the CNN factor is a product of today's "maximum visibility society" – one driven by the proliferation of "real time" communication technology as satellite television and the Internet and the availability of photographic and video cameras. In such a society, Brodeur argues that people are accustomed to and therefore demand, maximum exposure, transparency and openness.⁹³

This presents serious challenges for strict, hierarchical and secretive organizations, such as the military. Such was the case for the Canadian Forces during the Somalia Affair. An inevitable clash ensued between the closed culture of the military and the demands of an increasingly pervasive Canadian media.

Canadians did not originally learn of the events in Somalia by way of CNN or its equivalents. However, the most significant event of the scandal was caused by an act of self-entrapment using a product of the maximum visibility society. The trophy photos of Shidane Arone and the hazing videos involved people acting as self-paparazzi, in which they filmed themselves others around them in situations that were, presumably, intended for a wider audience. However, these incriminating pictures and videos found their way into the hands of the media outlets. Brodeur argues in the case of Somalia, negative media coverage per se was not the real culprit for the military's image problems.

What probably did the most damage to the Canadian Airborne Regiment . . . was the simple showing on television of the gruesome photographs of the distorted face of Shidane Arone next to the smiling faces of his torturers and the retransmission of part of the videotape made during one of the [regiment's] most debasing hazing rituals. It was not the media but CF members that were the agents of their own fall.⁹⁴

Brodeur says the military should be more concerned with such acts of self-entrapment, rather than media entrapment. This was likely on the minds of Major-General Brian Vernon and Colonel Peter Kenward when they chose not to reveal the third hazing video in 1995. Their apprehension over its contents – soldiers administering electric shocks to one another – was motivated by the prospect that the media would get their hands on even more evidence of misconduct in the military.

The Airborne videos had a similar impact on public opinion and political decision making as the outrage over the Rodney King video had on Americans. In the footage of that 1991 incident, an amateur videographer filmed King, a black motorist, as he was being beaten by several white police officers on a Los Angeles street. The incident provoked a massive outrage across America, eventually leading to a series of deadly riots in Los Angeles in 1992. In both the Airborne and King videos, the public saw violent behavior and racist attitudes that were not intended for disclosure but no less serious. Members of institutions authorized to use deadly force in certain circumstances – the military and police – instigated both incidents. As well, both videos were handed directly to the media, instead of over to the institution involved in the situation, which could potentially have hidden or destroyed the evidence.⁹⁵

In a master's thesis entitled, *A Tale of Two Videos*, Martha Armstrong argues that the two Somalia videos had a substantial impact not only on policy making but also on the public opinion and morality of Canadians.

The Airborne's videos . . . sparked a media event, which in turn sparked a moral panic. With attention focused on individual blame and other surface issues, the videos ultimately had a negligible influence on remedying problems in the military. They did, however, shed light on one value that many Canadians seem to cherish and that is their image in the eyes of the world.⁹⁶

Armstrong argues that this media event becomes powerful by tapping into deep-seated cultural anxieties – for Canadians, the videos posed a direct threat to the myths and beliefs Canadians had come to believe about themselves. The moral panic, Armstrong continues, revealed:

. . . just how unwilling many Canadians are to examine the systemic racism and violence in their culture. It also revealed ambivalence toward the military – a desire for it to bring prestige to Canada but also an unwillingness to acknowledge the realities of the work it actually carries out.⁹⁷

While many military supporters say the videos were unfairly blown out of proportion by the media, it was an indication that DND/CF's activities are now under careful and constant scrutiny. Jean-Paul Brodeur reminds the military that this is a fact of life in a "maximum visibility" society.

The prime value of an event for the media is its newsworthiness. Combat is more attractive than peacekeeping, for example. So too is a perceived political scandal, instead of a human-interest story. It is the nature of the media culture.⁹⁸

The military bashing argument is, therefore, a red herring. Those who continue to blame the military's problems on unification and integration of DND/CF, or the perceived bias of journalists, are looking for an easy scapegoat.

The lessons for the Canadian military are simple – media scrutiny is a fact, openness is in demand and the military needs to be prepared to respond quickly and adequately to the media, especially when the integrity of the institution is on the line.

These lessons are not unique however. In fact, militaries and governments have been forced to cope with the growing influence of the media, fuelled by advances in communication technology, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

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Chapter 2

SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF POWER

Every new media technology changes the balance of power between journalists and the diplomats and generals they cover.¹

Author Johanna Neuman examines how many of the major wars in the last two centuries have coincided with the introduction of new communications technology in her 1996 book, *Lights, Camera, War*. Neuman argues that every new innovation has influenced public affairs strategies in major wars: the telegraph in the American Civil War, for example. As a result, there's an inevitable shift in media-military relations.

A clash of cultures

John Murray, a former U.S. Marine general who served in the Vietnam War, described the relationship between the military and the media as a generally hostile one.

Engaging the press while engaging the enemy is taking on one adversary too many. It's easier to straighten out an erratic [military maneuver] than straightening out the misconceptions of the media.²

Murray is not the only one to express this sentiment. It illustrates the underlying conflict between the media and the military. In a democracy, after all, both have essential roles to play. The military exists to defend and protect the state from external threats and to maintain civil order. The media, on the other hand, act on behalf of the public to keep it informed and hold institutions accountable for

their actions. In the free world, the preservation of democracy has historically been seen as the *raison d'être* of both organizations.

However, the media and the military, by the nature of their cultures, often use different means to achieve the same goals. The military subscribes to the time-honoured beliefs in duty, honour and service to sovereign and country. It belongs to well-defined hierarchies and follows a pre-ordained career structure. Political leaders issue orders to generals, whose subordinates carry them out. Conformity, control, discipline, loyalty and cohesion are the characteristics of the military culture. While recruited from society at large, service people typically live within the confines of a separate culture, defined by a code of secrecy and discretion.

Media culture is the polar opposite. Journalists are far less regimented and more independent than soldiers. They believe all public matters (and often private ones, too) must be “open” to public scrutiny. Journalists observe events and generally are not participants. They are suspicious of authority and, while they despise being manipulated or controlled, they often are – sometimes consciously, sometimes not. Finally, journalists are competitive, impatient and, above all, storytellers. In doing so, the media’s work becomes the public record of major events. Hence, the military is concerned with how the media scrutinizes it and portrays its activities to the public.

Sometimes, the two cultures have worked together to achieve a greater good, such as in the Second World War. Of course, the question remains – should they have? The media committed themselves to the objective of winning the war against Hitler, but gave up the freedom to question the actions of the Allied forces.

At other times, the two sides diverge when the objectives are less clear. During the Vietnam War, the clash led to a long period of acrimony and hostility. Many Canadian observers say the Somalia Affair was also such a period. However, the ebb and flow of media-military relations has its historical roots in the origins of reporting of modern warfare.

The lightning wire: The telegraph and the Crimean War

The Crimean War (1854-1856) is often identified as the first military conflict in which a war correspondent influenced decision-making on the battlefield. This was particularly true of the dispatches of William H. Russell, a robust Irishman working for *The Times* of London.³ Russell accompanied the British army to the Crimea in its first major operation since 1815, to prevent Russia's expansion west into Europe. Along the way, Russell saw an army in disarray. He reported that the troops were ill equipped, malnourished and unprepared for the harsh conditions. His most memorable report described the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade.⁴ Without a formal system of censorship, Russell was left to decide on his own what to report in the dispatches that he mailed back to London.

In one case, Russell asked his editor, John T. Delane: "Am I to tell these things or hold my tongue?" He was concerned that publishing unflattering stories about the army could lead to accusations of being unpatriotic. Delane printed many of them and distributed others exposing incompetence in high command directly to government ministers. Russell's candid descriptions inflamed public opinion and eventually led to the government's defeat in January 1855.⁵

However, as a result of such frank and critical coverage in the *Times*, the most widely read paper in Britain, the military leadership became less tolerant of war correspondents. The expedition's leader, Lord Raglan, refused Russell and other correspondents access to the troops and denied them food and accommodations. They saw little of the real action, as a result and depended on the eyewitness accounts of individual officers and soldiers to develop their stories. The British government later reacted by imposing censorship restrictions on what correspondents could report and what kind of access they could have to military operations. On Feb. 25, 1856, Sir William Codrington, the army's commander-in-chief, introduced the first military censorship policy forbidding newspapers from publishing any details of value to the enemy – such as reporting on the size of a battalion or the type of ordinance they were using. The policy also authorized the ejection of correspondents who may have reported such details.⁶

The presence of war correspondents on the battlefield and their ability to send back dispatches so rapidly – within weeks rather than years – forced military and political leaders to take greater control of the information flow. It assured that wars and battles could no longer be fought away from the public eye for very long. Edwin Lawrence Godkin, another correspondent in the Crimea for the *London Daily Times*, assessed the impact of war correspondents:

It led to a real awakening of the official mind. It brought home . . . the fact that the public had something to say about the conduct of wars and that they are not the concern exclusively of sovereigns and statesmen.⁷

With the appearance of the correspondent, the Crimea became the first independently covered war. There was still a significant time delay before the news

reached the public via the mail service – between two and three weeks. Nevertheless, the military and government were forced to respond by imposing censorship.

U.S. Civil War

Only five years later, hundreds of war correspondents would be sent to cover one of the 19th-century's most significant military conflicts, the American Civil War (1861-65). This event coincided with the widespread introduction of the world's newest technological advance – the telegraph. Invented by Samuel Morse, the “lightning wire” was hailed as a revolutionary wonder because of its ability to send encoded messages across vast distances at unprecedented speed. It was a feat, says Johanna Neuman, that in 19th-century terms could “annihilate time and space.”⁸ As the Civil War began, nearly 80,000 kilometres of telegraph line were already operating in the eastern United States, allowing newspapers to receive dispatches from their correspondents in a matter of hours, rather than days or weeks. The growing influence of the telegraph did not go unnoticed by military and political leaders.

Sensing how rapidly news of the war could get back into major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, the federal government realized the telegraph presented a potential security threat. While the service was costly to use, anyone could send any message they wanted to anyone they pleased, which could include information detrimental to the Union cause, such as troop movements. In April 1861, the Lincoln administration took control of the lines and filtered all messages,

especially accounts that reported setbacks for the Union forces. Eventually, the military supervised the wires and subjected all war news to censorship. However, the government never had a clear policy of what news actually could go to print. While President Abraham Lincoln and his advisers debated the merits of suppressing newspapers or allowing them to report freely on the war, especially when the news was positive, they never reached a consensus. Consequently, without a clearly defined censorship policy, many editors and journalists were reluctant to comply with government orders.⁹

Correspondents in the Confederate States faced more difficult obstacles including an unreliable telegraph and mail service and short supplies of newsprint. Most Confederate generals banned journalists from their camps and imposed heavy censorship. However, censorship was unnecessary because most Southern publishers embraced the Confederate cause and avoided criticizing it, encouraging correspondents to self-censor bad news.¹⁰

However, the telegraph had proven to be a formidable tool of communication. The experience of the American Civil War underscored to future political and military leaders that censorship and other measures were necessary evils – to control what the press would transmit via communication technologies to the public on warfare and military activities. Controlling the flow of information would become a near obsession in the next great conflict.

First World War

While the telegraph was still the primary source of communication throughout most of the Western world in 1914, a number of other technological innovations had emerged, including the telephone and the camera, in both its still and film varieties. The technology was primitive, but their existence presented a challenge to government leaders.

The day Britain declared war on Germany on Aug. 2, 1914, the government immediately imposed censorship on all the means of communication, including transatlantic telegraph and telephone lines. They did so to promote public support for the war effort and to prevent strategic information from being leaked to the enemy. In Britain, the legacy of enforcing strict control over information in wartime that began during the Crimean War continued with a vengeance. The new Defence of the Realm Act, passed in 1911, gave the government the power to examine all incoming and outgoing cables and to censor newspapers.¹¹ For Lord Kitchener, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, keeping the public informed involved appointing a single officer to write carefully edited progress reports under the byline, "Eyewitness." Newspaper correspondents were initially banned from the front and those who were discovered there were arrested and expelled.¹²

However, it soon became clear that this arrangement could not last. Newspaper editors urged the government to order the military to accredit correspondents to the battlefield. Though these requests were initially rejected, editors began to recognize the value of not only having a "man on the ground," but

also by getting a story by telephone. American freelance reporter Granville Fortuscue had set the stage by delivering one of the first scoops of the war by confirming that Germany was invading Belgium in August 1914. Fortuscue had been turned down by London's *Daily Telegraph* to work as its correspondent in Brussels earlier that summer. Undaunted, he filed a story about German scouting units inside Belgian territory. Though *The Telegraph* ran the story on August 3, 1914, the editors refused to believe Fortuscue's claims after the Foreign Office denounced it as untrue. Only 24 hours later, Britain was at war with Germany and the editors of *The Telegraph* were on the phone with Fortuscue offering him an apology and a contract to work as their roving war reporter.¹³ It became clear to the editors at *The Telegraph* that having a correspondent in the field, able to communicate back to them in a matter of minutes, was extremely valuable.

However, it also became clear during the Great War that communication would not flow from the battlefield unfiltered. At first, many correspondents had to smuggle themselves into conflict areas because they had little or no access to the Front or to the troops fighting the war. From their dispatches, the British public was beginning to realize they were getting differing accounts of the war. Eventually, the British government recanted with some encouragement from former U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt. He warned Prime Minister David Lloyd George that Germany was winning the information war in America, because the Germans were allowing correspondents from neutral countries to observe their troops in action. A limited number of war correspondents were posted to allied headquarters late in 1915. However, they would continue to work under a strict

system of censorship with every dispatch carefully edited by government-appointed censors. However, far from provoking outrage in the journalistic community, newspaper proprietors and editors openly endorsed censorship and co-operated in trumpeting propaganda to promote the war effort, in exchange for social and political patronage. The government realized that having the media on side was critical for recruiting from the general population.

Canadian political leaders also came to the same conclusion. As a part of the British Empire, Canada was automatically at war with Germany. While troops had served in the Boer War in 1899-1901, the First World War was the young country's first major foray on the international stage. It therefore became imperative for Canada to offer up its best men to serve in an expeditionary force in Western Europe. The nation's growing newspaper industry was used for the government's recruiting and propaganda campaign, as Canadians were becoming more literate and better educated.¹⁴ Canadian newspapers would play a critical role in the Great War by upholding a romantic and supportive view of the Allied war effort, while discrediting the efforts of Germany and any anti-war detractors. According to Dr. J.A. Macdonald, editor of the *Toronto Globe*, it was the duty of those who "wield the pen [to] make every citizen know what Canada is fighting for and what success and failure means."¹⁵

Canada also followed Britain's lead by introducing similar censorship regulations. The leakage of some sensitive information during the opening months of the war convinced Ottawa to create a chief press censor's office. On January 10, 1915, the Borden government appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Chambers to

the job. Chambers was given the power to prohibit criticism of military policy and control any sources, which could encourage the enemy and prevent, embarrass or hinder the success of the war.¹⁶ With the diminutive Chambers as gatekeeper, very little communication got by his office. Everything from weather forecasts to the time and date of ship movements were carefully censored. Personal mail sent by Canadian servicemen to family and friends at home was also scrutinized and “sanitized.” If a soldier wrote home about the deplorable conditions to which he was subjected, for example, the censor would order the soldier to rewrite it or simply destroy the letter. Censorship was justified on the premise that bad news of any kind could be equally as damaging for morale on the home front as informing the enemy.

Still cameras posed a more serious threat. All photographs had to be sanctioned by the authorities and could only depict Allied forces in a positive light. The Canadian public was simply not allowed to see the real graphic images of thousands upon thousands of their own dead and wounded on the battlefield – at least until after the war was over.

Film technology also gave Canadians a very sanitized version of news from the front. They flocked to movie theatres to view newsreels, mainly from Britain, portraying the gallantry and successes of Allied forces. American war movies produced in Hollywood were also crossing the border. These were mostly propaganda films featuring heroic and well-groomed characters on the Allied side and depicting the Germans as barbarians. In *The Kaiser: The Beast of Berlin*, Germans are portrayed as rapists and pillagers in Belgium and in one scene, a

crowd is seen honouring the U-boat captain who torpedoed the British liner *Lusitania*. In another film, *Johanna Enlists*, Canadian-born actress Mary Pickford fights off a German and declares on behalf of the United States: "I was neutral 'til I saw your soldiers destroying women and shooting old men."¹⁷ Close to 72 million metres of motion picture film was imported from the U.S. in 1916 alone. Images of mud, lice and grisly death were noticeably absent from these films.

However, it was the distance between the home front and Western Front, as well the restricted means of communication technology available to journalists at the time (telegraph and telephone were all under government control), that prevented any independent subversion of Canada's censorship regulations. Jeffrey Keshen argues that this was the key factor in its effectiveness.

The Dominion's physical location went a long way towards ensuring that the potential power of the communication media remained geared towards providing a favourable portrayal of warfare. Had overseas journalists, photographers and filmmakers been inclined to disseminate unpleasanties, none enjoyed the technological means to easily by-pass censors.¹⁸

Despite the best efforts of the government and the military to control the media, public support for the war began to wane once people realized the personal toll the war was exacting upon them. What they read in newspapers or saw on the big screen, did not influence them. Rather, it was often when whole communities learned they lost either relatives or neighbours on the battlefield that support for the war effort began to erode. It was for this reason, according to Phillip Knightly, author of *The First Casualty*, that the Canadian government needed such a strict system of censorship and a pro-active propaganda campaign.

To enable the war to go on, the people had to be steeled for further sacrifices and this could not be done if the full story of what was happening on the Western Front was known. [It was] a great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.¹⁹

Officials argued that censorship enabled the public to see their army, their sons, at the front without aiding and abetting the enemy. In reality, their underlying aims were more sinister. Maintaining absolute control of the means of communication allowed the government to tailor the images that Canadians would see or read in order to maintain public enthusiasm for the war and to guarantee a fresh supply of recruits. This became even more important in 1917 as the government considered conscription to shore up the rapidly declining numbers of troops in reserve. These strict guidelines also shielded the high command from criticism in its conduct of the war. While many journalists may have despised these infringements on their freedom to report on events objectively, few complained publicly. Phillip Knightly accuses the press of being far too willing to conform.

Had the correspondents had the moral courage to refuse to play their part in the charade, the government might have been forced to reconsider its attitude. But, they went along with the system, grumbling sometimes, it is true, but saving their protests for the memoirs they published after the war, when it was too late.²⁰

Jeffrey Keshen agrees, arguing that correspondents allowed themselves to be co-opted by the propaganda machine too readily, even though they were in a position to know the true extent of the devastation and death toll on the Western Front. The Canadian government believed that by muzzling the press, it could guarantee the unqualified support of the public. However, that decision

represented, according to Keshen, one of “the most brazen affronts to democracy in Canada’s history.”²¹ Since Canada was still a British colony, the importance of winning the war for King and country was more valuable than any freedom of the press. However, in any conflict, the objective of winning, defeating the enemy, often justifies any infringement of rights to openness and transparency.

It was only after the Armistice that Canadians realized the terrible toll the Great War had exacted upon the country. As many thousands of young men returned home maimed and scarred and many more thousands didn’t come home at all, the public realized they had, as Phillip Knightly described earlier, fallen victim to a great conspiracy of the truth. However, even 20 years later, when Canada again went to war against Germany in the Second World War, the public was overwhelming in its support for the war effort. And the media were again more than willing to play an active role in trumpeting the cause.

In the First World War, it was much easier for the government to censor and propagandize than in the present day, because communication technology was both limited and easier to control. A government in 1916 had much more success in sanitizing telegrams or shutting off telephone lines, than a government in 1999 could ever hope to do with CNN or the Internet. Regardless, without alternative means of communications, Canadians only knew what their government wanted them to know. How different history might have been had CNN been present at Vimy Ridge or the Somme. U.S. Senator and former presidential hopeful John McCain, who served in Vietnam, says the presence of media, with their vast array of “real-time” technology, has a direct impact on the public’s support for a war.

I still believe that World War I wouldn't have lasted three months if people had known what was going on in that conflict.²²

In other words, had television been able to document first hand the futility and horrors of trench warfare, the war may not have lasted because public support could have quickly vanished.

Naturally, it is difficult to use CNN in such a historical context. However, it speaks volumes about how far communication technology has come in less than a century.

Second World War

Even in the Second World War, it was still possible for government to exercise some control over the means of communication, in spite of the widespread use of radio broadcasting. However, it was becoming increasingly more difficult, especially as communication technology became dramatically more sophisticated.

Overseas correspondents prepared their eyewitness reports, censored the sensitive details and returned their dispatches by telegraph or telephone for publication, often the same day. Wireless technology had advanced to a point where reports could make it around the world before military leaders had time to prepare their own official reports. However, it was radio, one of the most powerful communication technologies to that time, which had the most dramatic effect on the public's perception of the war. As newspapers had been the primary source of news during the Great War, radio became the most captivating source of this war. With a radio in almost every living room, North Americans became

active participants in war coverage. They could hear the very real sounds of German bombs dropping on the darkened streets of London. Canadian Lorne Greene of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and American Edward R. Murrow of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) became legendary voices of doom for their gravely serious, but powerfully dramatic deliveries. Few could forget the awesome sounds of explosions and tracer fire heard during the night bombings of London.

It was a wonder in the 1940s that the sound of a falling bomb or an artillery barrage or a description of battle could be put on a record in England or Italy or France one day and heard from coast to coast in Canada the next.²³

The newly created CBC had established an overseas unit early in the war and followed Canadian troops throughout many of the key battles, including Normandy, Sicily and the Scheldt. Radio correspondents did so by converting military trucks into mobile studios where broadcasts were etched onto vinyl record discs and then sent back to Canada. Technicians blended actuality sounds with the commentary of war correspondents into feature-length programs ready for air. The tone of the correspondents such as Matthew Halton and Marcel Ouimet was often dramatic, patriotic and, at times, jingoistic. Two weeks after D-Day, Halton reported from Normandy:

It will be some months before the full story of the Third Canadian Division can be told. The names of the regiments . . . cannot yet be mentioned. But, I'll tell you what I can. These men were new to battle. They'd never heard the screaming shrapnel before. They hadn't been machine-gunned or sniped at. They hadn't had bombs thrown in their faces. But they have now and they know that there are no better fighting men on earth.²⁴

With war correspondents wearing uniforms and traveling in close proximity with the troops, a close working relationship developed between the military and the press throughout the war. American and Canadian military leaders realized the value of keeping the public informed – at least to some extent. U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, made public affairs a command priority and considered correspondents as quasi-staff officers. Canadian generals, such as Major-General Guy Simonds, also enjoyed good relations with correspondents attached with the First Canadian Division in the Sicily campaign.²⁵ However, self-censorship worked so effectively that few criticisms emerged about the Allies' progress in the war. Military affairs commentator Gwynne Dyer says the Canadian media, in both world wars, were generally admiring and supportive of the military.

There was very little criticism during either of those wars and very little in between because they regarded it as disloyal. Above all, I think this is a Canadian nationalist's perspective, the point was not to let our side down in front of the Americans or the Brits.²⁶

In one case, in late 1944, the Canadian media showed a reluctance to publicize details about a small uprising of conscripts at a base in northern British Columbia. The so-called Terrace Mutiny erupted after a brigade of mainly French-speaking draftees learned by radio that the government was preparing to send 16,000 conscripts overseas. Early in the war, to balance the need for new troops with public opposition, especially in Quebec, to drafting Canadians into service, Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King promised conscripts they would only serve in the armed forces on Canadian territory.²⁷ Soldiers protested the decision by

refusing to go on parade, while others stole weapons and ammunition from the base's stores. Government officials claimed that the belligerents were being encouraged by other radio broadcasts reporting that conscripts elsewhere in B.C. were creating their own disturbances. The military and the government were both terrified that the mutiny could set off a widespread revolt in other parts of Canada. Though the mutineers surrendered after six days without further incident, Ottawa believed the time had come to take more direct control over the media to avoid the occurrence of another similar incident. King ordered both the director of censorship and the general-manager of the CBC to increase direct censorship at once. Though the director of censorship, Wilfrid Eggleston,²⁸ warned the prime minister that such a move could be seen as a blatantly political reaction in light of the controversy, King insisted in his diaries:

This was not a matter of politics; it was a matter of patriotism. If once shots were fired and blood began to flow, no one could say where the whole condition of things would end and we as a government were helpless in avoiding a situation without the co-operation of the press and radio.²⁹

However, in truth, the media were reluctant to report most of the events in Terrace out of respect for the spirit of the censorship regulations. While radio had played a role in encouraging the conscripts, by broadcasting unrest elsewhere, it only carried the message; it did not create it.

The Canadian government realized early in the war the necessity of controlling the flow of news coverage. Censorship was only one way to achieve this. However, the defence minister at the time wanted to go further to establish a regular relationship with journalists. Early in 1941, the minister, J.L. Ralston, met

with several influential journalists after a series of critical reports about the army made their way into print and resulted in a bitter debate in the House of Commons. Bruce Hutchinson, David Rogers, Jack Donoghue and Wilfrid Eggleston attended the meeting with Major Richard Malone.³⁰ Malone would later play a major role in Canadian journalism, as president of FP Publications, at one point the largest newspaper chain in Canada, which included the *Globe & Mail*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Montreal Star* and the *Lethbridge Herald*. However, in 1941, Malone was Ralston's communications liaison officer, charged with establishing a complete "public relations and press service" for the military. Within three months, Malone proposed appointing a press officer for each district and battalion, skilled in news writing, giving the senior PR officer in Ottawa direct access to the minister's office and allowing him to join Army Council meetings when policies were decided.

The King government had reintroduced censorship under the Defence of Canada Regulations after declaring war on Germany in September 1939. The policy initially mirrored Britain's Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, which allowed the government to censor mail, cable, wireless or telephone messages. Newspapers were prohibited from "obtaining, recording, communicating to any person or published information helpful to the enemy."³¹ While a director of censorship was appointed to supervise the application of the policy, censorship was completely different from the restrictive system of the First World War. It was a voluntary system, in which the government would not impose the terms of the policy on the press, but rather journalists and editors would be responsible for applying a set of

ground rules specifying the kinds of publishable information to their own work. The media were to submit any questionable stories to the censors for approval before reporting them to the general public. The official censors usually acted only in an advisory role, but would not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of those organizations that failed to comply with the policy. In return, this allowed war correspondents access to a great deal of strategic, even top secret information.

During most of the war, relations between the military and media on the allied side were relatively even and temperate. Both sides worked on the assumption that if disagreements and frictions were inevitable because one needed to close off information while the other existed to open it, all concerned could benefit from a co-operative relationship. However, some of those correspondents regretted their lack of objectivity in hindsight. Long-time Southam columnist Charles Lynch was a correspondent for Reuters and was accredited to the British Army for the D-Day invasion. While enjoying the prestige of being an eyewitness to history on the beaches of Normandy, Lynch admitted in an interview in 1974 of being ashamed of his own conduct as a war correspondent.

It's humiliating to look back at what we wrote during the war. It was crap . . . we were a propaganda arm for our governments. At the start, the censors enforced that, but by the end we were our own censors. We were cheerleaders. I suppose there wasn't an alternative at the time. It was total war. But for God's sake, let's not glorify our role. It wasn't good journalism. It wasn't journalism at all.³²

Ross Munro had a different perspective. The former Canadian Press correspondent was renowned for his "hometown" reports about individual soldiers and his dramatic account of the disastrous Dieppe invasion of 1942.

Munro made no secret that as a correspondent he was proud to be trumpeting the Allied cause.

I don't think young people today could every feel the commitment that we had. We felt the Germans were going to wreck this world of ours and we would have to stop them. The troops were committed to it and I think the correspondents were – I certainly was. But it won't ever happen again. The war we were involved in was very clear cut. It really was a crusade.³³

Warfare is more than just a story for those who cover it. However, the co-operative spirit that existed between the media and the military in the Second World War was, to a great extent, an anomaly. Both the contexts of warfare and the media technology used to cover them would change in the years to come. It became clear that such a relationship would be nearly impossibly to achieve again.

The television factor

Since the Lunar New Year, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have proved they are capable of bold and impressive military moves that American here never dreamed could be achieved. The capture of the U.S. Embassy here for almost seven hours is a psychological victory that will rally and inspire the Vietcong.³⁴

Canadian-born correspondent Don North delivered these words to ABC Television viewers on Jan. 31, 1968, from the garden of the American embassy in Saigon. He had just witnessed an all-out assault on the embassy compound by just 19 Vietcong troops. It was the beginning of the Tet Offensive, a 24-day invasion by Communist forces from North Vietnam of more than 100 cities in the south. Although the U.S. military eventually drove back the invaders and declared a decisive victory, the Tet Offensive left many Americans deeply shocked. But, they were not only disturbed by the graphic images of dead soldiers and the savage

fighting they witnessed on television. More important, the incident ran contrary to what they had been hearing from the White House and the commanders in the field. Throughout the early years of the war, officials had assured the American public that U.S. forces were making good progress in their efforts to defeat the Communists. General William C. Westmoreland, senior commander in Vietnam, even promised the troops would be home by Christmas of that year. Overselling the truth, it was thought, would quell opposition in the American public.³⁵

However, the Tet Offensive was the turning point. It provided visible evidence to the American public that a “credibility gap” was developing between Washington’s portrayal of the war and what the media were reporting. Correspondents started to call the daily press briefing “The Five O’Clock Follies.” People realized the true costs — both financial and human — of the Vietnam War were being deliberately withheld from them. Within weeks, his presidency in ruins, Lyndon Johnson announced he would not seek re-election. Johnson had peppered the public record with so many inconsistencies that when Tet occurred much of the press and many within the administration itself questioned Westmoreland’s accurate assertions that the enemy had suffered a costly setback.³⁶

Undeniably, reports such as North’s and many others that were filmed and packaged from South Vietnam proved that the presence of television cameras profoundly influenced public opinion and strategic decision-making during the war. The impact of unfiltered graphic visual images on Americans’ perceptions of the war cannot be overstated. The images of a naked little girl, Kim Phoc, running from a napalm attack, the U.S. Marine Lieutenant William Calley setting fire to a

village with his Zippo lighter or the Saigon police chief executing a Vietcong terrorist are unforgettable.³⁷ Critics complained that these images distorted and sensationalized the war. However, the public reaction ranged from shock to fury. Many Americans questioned the real necessity of sending hundreds of thousands of troops to South East Asia. It was an ambiguous war from the beginning, fought in a tiny nation most had never heard of. Though the White House repeated the necessity of stopping the domino effect of Communism, the enemy was never clearly identifiable. There was no visible front line, no threat to national security and therefore, no real patriotic cause for the country to rally around. CBS correspondent Bernard Kalb remarked that the U.S. was witnessing the “most faceless foe in history.”³⁸ With continued media coverage, public opposition and civil disobedience related to the war would escalate over the next seven years contributing to the most humiliating military defeat in American history.

Ironically, what would become an acrimonious relationship between the media and military by the end of the war, started out very differently. At the beginning of the war, the U.S. government advocated a system of voluntary guidelines, similar to the Second World War, which gave journalists the responsibility of refraining from publicizing information valuable to the enemy. Since Vietnam was not a declared war *per se*, the American government had no legal right to impose formal censorship. However, with hundreds of war correspondents on the battlefield by the late 1960s, the U.S. military was losing control of the conduct of the media on the ground.

The administration's policy proved self-defeating. By making every facet of the war unusually accessible to any correspondent who turned up in Saigon, it lost control of the situation. When there were eventually nearly 650 war correspondents in South Vietnam, it became inevitable that some of them would refuse to accept the official line at face value and would get out into the field to see things for themselves.³⁹

Tet was only the beginning of a series of such damning revelations in Vietnam. However, it was not the policy of open access or the power of television alone which undermined the American effort. It was the methods employed by the political and military leadership to keep the public informed (or misinformed) which exacerbated the problem. William Hammond, a U.S. Army historian specializing in media-military relations during the Vietnam War, argues the real problem with the war was not whether the media's coverage of the war was biased or whether the military handled them poorly in the field. It was a failure by the military and government to be frank with the media – and thus the public. In fact, he says, the ground rules laid out by the government worked very well.

Despite some notable lapses, most of the reporting was either advantageous to the U.S. government and its policies or . . . a reasonably neutral approximation of what was happening on the field.⁴⁰

Admittedly, the television media tended to be selective in the images they broadcast. Correspondents were sending back far more stories than the networks could broadcast. Don North was surprised two decades later when he found many of his items in the ABC film archive while researching a documentary about Vietnam. North realized many of his reports and footage were never used and many of his scripts had been heavily edited. Pressed for time, he suspects the

editors only used enough material to piece together a coherent story for the newscast. Television networks tended to use combat scenes for maximum effect.

However, in the Vietnam War, many believe it was the attempts by the American government and military to win over the public's support for the war with inflated casualty figures and exaggerated reports of success that led eventually to defeat. It fostered a sense of deep distrust within the journalistic community and the American public for years to come. After having suffered such a setback in Vietnam, many senior officers took aim, not at the failed communication strategy, but at what they perceived to be culprit of their downfall – the media. Some western governments have consequently restricted the media's ability to report military conflicts independently – in the Falklands, Grenada and Panama, for example.

Two decades later, supporters of the Canadian military reacted in much the same way. In fact, the American experience in Vietnam is in many ways similar to Canada's experience in Somalia. The Department of National Defence showed its own "credibility gap" in the aftermath of the murders in Somalia. Television images again played a critical role in the escalation of that debacle. However, it proved that the Vietnam experience continues to influence how the media covers institutions, especially a closed one like the military – with a great deal of distrust and skepticism.

In the years after their withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, the American military underwent significant reform. The operational effectiveness and morale of the troops had been seriously harmed. The Pentagon was also busy finding ways to

refine its system of information control and to improve relations with the media. A few military operations in the 1980s provided them opportunities to do so. In 1982, the Americans observed the British closely during the Falkland's conflict with Argentina. The British government, following in the traditions first established in the Crimean War, imposed a strict system of censorship and information management over the British media. As the Royal Navy made its way south toward the Falklands, the Thatcher government decided only a handful of journalists, hand picked by the Minister of Defence, would accompany them and their access to the theatre of operation would be limited. So much so that the 17 correspondents selected to go were required to sign forms accepting censorship at source. Britain feared a repeat of America's failure in Vietnam if the media was allowed to cover the operation on its own terms. So, in the Falklands, the war was reported exactly the way the military wanted it to be.⁴¹

While the military permitted cameras on the battlefield, the images were heavily censored emphasizing British successes and eliminating negative aspects. Casualty figures and any gains made by the Argentineans were to be minimized or delayed and any graphic images from the war zone were strictly prohibited. The British government learned it was necessary to sanitize the visual images of war, control media access to military theaters, censor information that could upset readers or viewers and exclude journalists who would not write favourable stories.⁴² The experience of the United States in Vietnam was at the forefront of their minds.

The policy of total censorship was possible for two main reasons – the battle was fought in a remote location, nearly half a world away from Britain, and the military controlled all means of communications from the area. Both the BBC and ITN were unable to overcome technical problems in sending back pictures on their own. While satellite technology was limited at the time, both networks believed there was a lack of willingness from the political leadership to do anything about it, such as asking the Americans to adjust one of their satellites.⁴³ Delays of several weeks were not uncommon: in fact, television viewers in 1982 had to wait up to three weeks to see pictures of the stricken HMS Sheffield, longer than it took W.H. Russell's report from the Crimea describing the Charge of the Light Brigade to appear in *The Times*.⁴⁴ Conversely, it would only take a matter of hours for good news such as the surrender of an Argentine division to reach the networks.

The public's consent for these strict measures was also a major factor. A British parliamentary committee concluded that the censorship policy used in the Falklands was justified:

The public is, in general, quite ready to tolerate being misled to some extent if the enemy is also misled, thereby contributing to the success of the campaign.⁴⁵

In his 1982 book, *The Media and the Military*, about the British military in the Falkland War, Alan Hooper observes:

Communication between the military and the media and how that relationship has in turn been affected by the rapid development in the technology of communication and by the considerable changes which have occurred in society and in the military during the last two decades. But the changes during the last 20 years are as nothing to likely changes in the next 20.⁴⁶

Having observed the relative success of Britain's absolute censorship policy, the United States decided to employ a similar technique during its invasion of Grenada in October 1983. While U.S. Marines were dispatched to quell a so-called Marxist coup d'etat and to rescue about 300 medical students, a greater number of journalists – 369 in total – were waiting on nearby islands or vessels to cover the invasion. However, the contingent was not present when the troops hit the beach. The Reagan administration decided to ban the media until two days after the fact. Some reporters tried to reach the island on their own by boat, but were stopped by the U.S. military. In one example, a U.S. destroyer warned off an ABC correspondent by cutting across the bow of the fishing boat he hired.⁴⁷ This kind of exclusion led to widespread criticism of military leaders from correspondents and editors in all corners of American journalism.

Pentagon officials justified denying the media access to the island as necessary precaution to protect the safety of the journalists, to prevent hindering logistics and maintaining the element of surprise.⁴⁸ However, journalists viewed the strategy as another example of the military's widespread disdain of the news media in the post-Vietnam period. The rationale was that if television cameras were present for the invasion, they would not only give the belligerents advanced warning, but might once again show to the American public their troops engaged in unpleasant acts of warfare.

While public opinion polls showed strong support for President Ronald Reagan's decisive action, a serious rift developed between the journalistic community and the Pentagon after banning the media from the operation.

Bombarded with a flurry of complaints from Pentagon correspondents as well as senior news executives and editors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established a commission to propose ways to improve media relations and access to war zones. The Sidle Panel, chaired by retired major-general Winant Sidle, recommended in 1984 that public affairs considerations had to be an integral part of all types of operational planning. The panel proposed the creation of a media "pool" for all major operations in which a large number of correspondents could share video footage and sources, in order to avoid having hundreds of journalists running around a battlefield risking their lives. The pool concept also gave the military better control of who was doing stories and how they were getting them. The panel insisted that pools were to be used temporarily if it was the only way to provide access to a theatre of war. The media were obliged once again to be vigilant in not violating security. The military was urged to offer any equipment, personnel and transportation needed to provide adequate news coverage, so long as it did not interfere with the operation. The Sidle Panel's report was intended to be a wake-up call to the Pentagon of the need to improve communications between the media and the military.⁴⁹

Phillip Knightly offers a more critical assessment. He argues the pool concept had far less to do with improving communication, and far more to do with manipulation. Under a pool system, only a handful of journalists are allowed near the battlefield, they are escorted by officers who only what they want the media to see and, later, journalists have to share their reports and footage with other media. Knightly says the end result means the military controls the news agenda.⁵⁰

There were, however, some problems with the pool system when it was first used in the Panama invasion of December 1989. Participating journalists were either kept cloistered at the American military headquarters or ushered to contained areas of activity, nowhere near the real action. One journalist complained that he learned more from the briefings he was watching on CNN than he did in Panama City.⁵¹ That was a telling statement for it indicated the beginning of yet another shift in the influence of communication technology on international affairs.

War and conflict in the satellite age

The political implications of satellite television and its images have had a significant impact on international relations since the end of the Cold War. The 1991 Persian Gulf War and other crises that followed such as in the former Yugoslavia and Somalia proved that the CNN factor was an undeniably critical force. Images of human suffering – displaced, starving or dead civilians, victims of military aggression by “repressive” regimes – caused outrage in the West and resulted in an outpouring of humanitarian relief and calls for intervention by the United Nations or military alliances to bring an end to these crises. It is a scenario that was once again at work in 1999 as NATO began air strikes on Yugoslavia in response to the so-called “ethnic cleansing” in Kosovo.

The Gulf War was the first “real-time” conflict played out in front of a live audience. CNN and other major networks provided an unprecedented amount of live coverage of the initial stages of the air war from Baghdad beginning on January

16, 1991. The impact of those grainy, green images on television screens around the world showing explosions and laser-like tracer fire was surely even more dramatic than the sounds of falling bombs and air raid sirens had been for the radio listener in 1940 during the London night raids. The Gulf War also marked one of the first times when a contingent of foreign correspondents reported live from behind enemy lines.

Allied leaders immediately recognized the need to carefully control information. The White House left little to chance. When the ground war began, the U.S. commander, General Norman Swartzkopf, limited the number of journalists permitted on the battlefield to just over 150 out of the nearly 1,500 journalists who were in Saudi Arabia.⁵² Everyone else was relegated to the pool, where they were subject to a regimen of daily briefings.

In the early days of the air war, the briefings included videos displaying laser-guided missiles accurately hitting bridges, runways and factories. One of the most memorable videos depicted a missile going down a smokestack. The images gave the exaggerated impression that the air strikes and U.S. weapons were having a near-perfect success rate. However, as time went on, it was learned that these assertions were exaggerated. In fact, U.S. and coalition pilots had not been able to see 40 per cent of their primary targets during the first 10 days of the war, resulting in incidents of collateral damage. Inevitably, some journalists, including the late John Holliman of CNN, who had been in Baghdad during most of the initial stages of the air war, began to question the selective nature of the information and pictures the military was releasing.

We've seen a lot of pictures of the Nintendo-like surgical strikes. We have seen . . . not one picture taken from a B-52 on a carpet-bombing raid. I'd like to see what the B-52s are doing. I'm sure a lot of people have been killed in this war so far. We haven't really seen many people killed. I don't necessarily want to see a long line of dead bodies, but the fact that we aren't seeing any really says to me that we're not getting the full picture.⁵³

However, another television broadcaster says the air war was covered relatively well, given obvious restrictions. Instead, Barrie Dunsmore, ABC's former senior foreign correspondent, says it was the ground war that most journalists found was the real problem.

"The [U.S.] media complained that this was the worst covered war in American history," says Dunsmore, a Canadian expatriate. "Part of the reason was accessibility. The ground war lasted 100 hours. And in that 100 hours we didn't see a great deal of coverage . . . because the U.S. military was very restricting in its rules and regulations. There were also a lot of technical foul-ups that made things more difficult. But, I suspect if that war had gone on for days or weeks than the nature of the coverage would have improved."⁵⁴

The media, for the most part, failed to confirm many of the questionable reports they were getting from the Pentagon or Iraqi officials. However, some media critics point out that the viewing public is cognizant of the media's fallibility. Michael Arlen, author of *Living Room War* on the media in Vietnam, argues that the modern-day audience is more tolerant of mistakes and more aware when it is being duped.⁵⁵ Television networks, such as the CBC, provided signposts for viewers warning of unconfirmed reports. Brian Stewart, host of CBC-TV's *The National Magazine*, was the first Canadian to broadcast from liberated

Kuwait. He believes people now tend to understand that there is a so-called “fog of war” or “bodyguard of lies” which surrounds all reporting in a war zone.

“Does that mean you stop reporting until you have all the facts?” asks Stewart. “If you caution the viewer that your report could contain errors, I believe they’re intelligent enough to realize what that means.”⁵⁶

Since television is “the only medium that can’t live without pictures,”⁵⁷ journalists are therefore far more likely to be subject to manipulation by official sources. However, the proliferation of satellite television technology improves the likelihood that more than just one side can have their voices heard. In the Gulf, “the enemy” was permitted for the first time to become an active participant in the news making process. Allied leaders acknowledged that since Saddam Hussein and his advisers were watching CNN, the enemy would know anything released at the press briefings instantly. News organizations also frequently interviewed Iraqi diplomats or ex-patriots to provide a view from the “other side.” Where possible, the media used reports providing a glimpse of the true extent of damage and casualties to the Iraqi population. Brian Stewart says this irony was a sign that the profession of journalism was maturing.

“The public demands to see both sides,” says Stewart, “rather than only one side of an argument. There’s no way to compare newsreel footage from the Korean War . . . or even from the early Vietnam War. It would seem to the public, preposterously one-sided. Now, civilians are not only shocked by their own dead, but by the number of enemy deaths as well.”⁵⁸

Americans, along with other Allied countries, including Canada, may not have been exposed to the kinds of raw and graphic footage in the Gulf that became synonymous with Vietnam. However, the Gulf War marked yet another shift in the balance of power between the media and the military caused by the introduction of real-time technology. The coverage of international affairs would now be conducted in real-time with CNN and its equivalents as the medium for breaking news, while newspapers were left to provide the details and to try to put events into context.

The arrival of satellite TV in the Persian Gulf War was not so much a revolution as a reminder . . . that the cycle of change, of speed, of influence and finally of acceptance, was about to roll through once again – this time with a loud thunder.⁵⁹

However, it indicated that warfare in the satellite age would be highly managed affair from a military point of view. Public relations specialist Helio Fred Garcia argues one of the most significant changes in the U.S. military's approach towards the media between Grenada and the Gulf was the recognition that coverage is an instrument of policy.

Rather than keep the press away, as in Grenada, or give the press unrestricted access to the war, as in Vietnam, the military devoted significant resources to the active management of press relations.⁶⁰

After the Gulf and in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, there were an increasing number of smaller scale conflicts that gained the attention of the international community, thanks in part to the CNN factor. In the former Yugoslavia, real-time technology entered uncharted territory – a conflict in which the international community was a third party. Lewis Mackenzie recognized the

power of the media as a weapon in modern day warfare. The various sides in the conflict soon found that having an instant audience could be used to their benefit. Many observers say the Croats and Muslim factions were successful in winning the public relations war by appearing to be the victims of Serb aggression. Eventually, ample evidence would show both the Croats and Muslims were guilty of distorting reality; both shelled their own people to make the Serbs the scapegoat. All explanations aside, the images of dead or injured children lying wounded in a crowded marketplace angered Western viewers. Mackenzie says the belligerents quickly realized they could orchestrate a particular situation on the ground that would evidently have a tremendous impact, particularly in North America.

“Watching something on a street corner in Sarajevo was maybe one-one thousandth of what was going on in the rest of Bosnia. But, people, including the White House, were making decisions based on film clips.”⁶¹

Few Western journalists enjoyed the freedom of movement and the degree of respect from all sides, than veteran BBC war correspondent Martin Bell. After nearly three decades of war reporting, Bell realized that the changing nature of the technology made it increasingly more difficult to provide context in Yugoslavia.

“We used to make the joke, ‘Film at Eleven,’” says Bell. “I prepared my story from Lebanon, Afghanistan or even the Gulf. I’d get it back to London. Then maybe they would have three or four hours to put it into some sort of context, interview some other people, give it some balance before going to air. Whereas in Sarajevo, we were describing events in real time and they were going

out immediately to the world. And as a result, the reporting of this very complicated war, frequently had little or no context.⁶²

The reactive effect of the CNN factor was also evident in Somalia. In late 1992, North American viewers began to see stories about mass starvation in the eastern African country caused by escalating violence between local warlords. U.S. President George Bush had already dispatched U.S. Marines when Bill Clinton arrived at the White House. However, the decision to increase American involvement came after media interest in the conflict made the situation appear more pressing. Mackenzie says at least two sources have told him that Clinton ordered the Pentagon to increase manpower in Somalia when he discovered CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour was moving from Sarajevo to Mogadishu to report on the difficulties American troops faced in controlling the Somali warlords.

“It was an acknowledgement,” says Mackenzie, “that a high-profile CNN reporter’s move had an impact on American foreign policy. And it did. As soon as she started reporting from Somalia, there was a movement in the administration to get involved at another level in Mogadishu.”⁶³

The CNN factor played an even more significant role in Clinton’s decision to withdraw from Somalia. The graphic photographs and video footage of a mob of Somalis dragging the body of a naked U.S. Marine through the streets of Mogadishu in August 1993, horrified American viewers and the military was quickly sent home.⁶⁴

Like the telegraph, the camera and other new technologies that followed, satellite television has revolutionized the conduct of international relations. For

generations, the political and military leaders have initially resisted any new advancement in technology — the telegraph, the photograph, the newsreel, the radio, the TV camera. All were either perceived as threats to the status quo or, at times, even ridiculed as useless. Eventually, however, each became more widely used and influenced public opinion. Political and military leaders have been forced to adapt to them and in many cases learned to take control or manipulate the means of communication to serve their political ends.

Technology has always been a burden, calling on leaders in every era to change their habits to adjust to a new speed or a new imperative, to hurry their decisions and address a larger audience. But technology has also been a gift to those who learned to exploit its blessings to shape public debate instead of being driven by the whims of public opinion.⁶⁵

The evidence shows that communication technology has now advanced to such an extent that the ability of government authority to control information is severely limited. However, in the case of the United States, it's not *completely* impossible.

Barrie Dunsmore says that during the Gulf War the U.S. military was prepared to "take action" against journalists who interfered with the operation. Retired general Colin Powell apparently warned reporters that he would arrest them if necessary.

"I'd have locked all of you up," he told Dunsmore, "and you could have taken me to every court in the land. And guess who would have won that battle? I mean the American people would have stripped your skin off."⁶⁶

However, that scenario is tame compared with what the Pentagon could do to the media – or more specifically, its technology – if it jeopardized success on the battlefield.

“There is a plan that is very much in effect,” says Dunsmore, “in which [the military] could jam transmissions to satellites used by TV stations. And I have also been told . . . they would be willing to use as much as a small nuclear device to knock satellites out of the sky. This is something that is actually truly being considered and planned for in a future operation.”⁶⁷

One wonders how many members of the Canadian Forces have dreamed of having similar means to deal with the media on a bad day!

The common military experience

The growing presence of the satellite media culture has also caused militaries in other democratic countries to respond with their own strategies. Australia, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States differ in their public affairs staffing philosophy and rely either on military specialist multi-skilling or dual-tracking to meet their needs.

The Australian Defence Force recruits specialists, usually from the mainstream media and gives them basic military training. These journalists in uniform then provide the interface between the military and the public. As for the media, most newspapers and networks have at least one defence correspondent working in Canberra and each are given accreditation by the Defence department. This entitles them to certain support from the military, such as transportation in

operation settings, access to bases and naval vessels, as well as opportunities to get to know key officials on an informal basis.⁶⁸

Australia, like Canada, contracts civilian firms to offer seminars for senior officers and managers in media awareness, so public affairs considerations become part of their decision-making process. Lieutenant-Colonel Phillip Tyrell, assistant defence adviser at the Australian High Commission in Ottawa, says this is all part of a pro-active philosophy that has improved the military's relations with the Australian media since the Vietnam War.

"We've learned it's better off to be out there and to say something's happened," says Tyrell. "We'll tell the media, 'This is all we know about it at this stage. We'll keep you informed.' Bad news doesn't improve with age, like wine. If you wait until [the media] come to you, you might be second or third on their list and they've already got information from other sources and reporters will be comparing notes. If you go out first, the military becomes the reliable source of information. You're not then trying to defend a position, you're presenting it."⁶⁹

Germany's armed forces take a similar approach to media relations. They operate also on a pro-active basis. "We've always been generally very open because it doesn't pay in the end to trick the media," says Peter Beer, assistant to the German military attaché in Canada. "We've known that from the very beginning and so we handle public information quite strictly."⁷⁰

The Spanish military, on the other hand, operates a more restricted media relations policy. Colonel Agustin Macias, Spain's military attaché in Canada, says first of all the media cannot speak directly to any member of the military. Instead,

requests for interviews with senior military officers must be approved through a central media clearinghouse in the Spanish defence ministry. Journalists must submit a list of questions they wish to ask, which the department has the right to edit, especially if they do not wish to answer some of them. Macias says this is a legacy left over from the Franco regime. However, he admits there are no signs the government intends to change this policy in the near future.

Since the Crimean War, the British military has usually been very tight lipped with the media about its activities. While this attitude is softening over time, the military continues to operate under strict guidelines for making information public. Group Captain Tim Williams, senior naval and air adviser at the British high commission, says the military's attitude towards catering to the public's need to know is changing with the times, particularly in the past decade.

"There was once a great reluctance on behalf of any man in uniform to let the press know anything," says Williams. "Because there was a general view then that it was never [in the public's interest] to provide the information the press was asking for."⁷¹

While Americans operate on the basis of the public's right to know, Britons operate on the basis of the public's *need* to know. The British public, according to author Loren Thompson, generally accepts the fact that "it is considered legitimate to conceal large amounts of information."⁷² In the U.K., when a journalist approaches a serviceperson for comment, the member must immediately call the director of press relations in the Ministry of Defence in London, to authorize the interview and offer advice on what should and should not be publicized. It's a

procedure, Williams says, that allows the ministry to identify and monitor the work of correspondents, so they can be prepared in case an erroneous story appears. The ministry's press office is led by several civilian media specialists and assisted by five officers from each service who usually have more operational than public affairs experience. Therefore, their job descriptions focus less on how to think like a journalist and more on how to find information and contacts.

In the United States, the military and media have come a long way from the Vietnam era. While reporters have worked inside the Pentagon since the Korean War, an unprecedented 25 defence correspondents have regular offices in the facility and they are free to roam throughout most of the building to keep in touch with their sources. Another 30 to 60 journalists arrive from downtown Washington and elsewhere for the bi-weekly news briefings on Tuesdays and Thursdays.⁷³

Near the media offices, a small hall of fame, called '-30-', has been set up where photographs of correspondents hang on the wall and a commemorative plaque bears the names of reporters and cameramen killed in the line of duty while covering U.S. military operations. This is indicative of the kind of more co-operative (some would say *co-optive*) approach the military uses towards the Fourth Estate. Gwynne Dyer compares the level of interest in military affairs in the United States to Canada.

American is a highly militarized society where that's a much higher profile subject that journalists can actually spend a long time in. [Hardly anyone] in Canada does military affairs exclusively. Whereas Washington's got at least a dozen people at any given time who do nothing else. And therefore

they became very knowledgeable. If you hang around with soldiers, you figure out what their priorities are.⁷⁴

The U.S., like Canada, is one of the few Western countries to train its military public affairs officers. The U.S. Army also allows dual tracking, which gives membership in two military occupations, public affairs and the members' primary occupation upon enrollment.

Keeping secrets secret

The Canadian Forces as a hierarchical society is prone to secrecy and wary of external threats, including public criticism. This makes them susceptible to abuse of power and image-consciousness.

The military, like other highly authoritarian organizations, is vulnerable to two systemic evils – abuse of power and obsession with image. Arthur Schafer, director of the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics at the University of Manitoba, says, as a result, any form of criticism from within is not tolerated.

“The culture of secrecy dictates that all criticism . . . tends to be seen as a form of disloyalty. Organization loyalty is often interpreted as requiring from members of every rank a willingness to conceal unpleasant truths or potentially damaging information.”⁷⁵

In performing its role of protecting society from external threats, the military creates a society unto itself in which soldiers and officers entrust each other and the organization with their lives. To maintain such a confidence, the military often strives to create an external appearance of infallibility. However,

fallibility is an inescapable feature of human life. Schafer argues that since imperfection is a natural human characteristic, the need to appear infallible carries with it the need to cover up any errors, mistakes, incompetence, corruption and other moral flaws. Thus, the military system has traditionally resorted to lies and deception in order to meet this objective. While this explains the reason why the military seems so often to be involved in concealment, says Schafer, it certainly does not justify them.⁷⁶

The military's procedure for disseminating information, including to the public and media, is strict and well defined. Violating this practice is viewed harshly.

One of the worst sins a member can commit is passing information to someone outside the chain of command before people in the chain have learned about it.⁷⁷

Many of the military's perceived problems with the media in Canada are a result of a conflict of values. Arthur Schafer identifies the notion of openness, along with individuality and autonomy, as the core values in the culture of liberal democracy. Meanwhile, the military values are the polar opposite – emphasizing group loyalty, rigid obedience to superior orders and strict discipline. Tensions between a democratic society and its armed forces are an inevitable result.⁷⁸ However, these tensions have often boiled over and threatened to widen the gap.

This conflict has led to periods of paranoia or obsession of the military self-image. Senior officers responsible for peacekeeping operations often complain how their actions are often paralyzed by endless delays caused by nitpicking bureaucrats

inside NDHQ. An internal document, issued in April 1996 and released through the Access to Information Act to The Canadian Press, identifies this fact.

There is a CNN factor that causes a significant amount of micromanagement. Mass-media coverage of current events creates innumerable questions for politicians. It results in direct inquiries from the most senior level. For many operations . . . a well-defined mission for the CF is generally unavailable and the commitment of CF resources normally occurs at the 11th hour.⁷⁹

The knee jerk reaction of the CNN factor is an inescapable reality in today's maximum visibility society. DND/CF found that out the hard way in the Somalia Affair. However, after sustaining years of public criticism, leaders in Canada's military had had enough – and the time had come to dig themselves out of the trenches.

Endnotes for Chapter 2

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³ Mathews, 11.

⁴ Knightly, 1975: 8.

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⁶ U.K. Public Record Office, W.O. 28/131.

⁷ Ogden, pg. 102-3, as cited in Knightly, 1975:78.

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⁹ Thompson, 1991: 11.

¹⁰ Thompson, 1991: 13-14.

¹¹ Knightly, 1975: 80.

¹² Knightly, 1975: 86.

¹³ Knightly, 1975: 88.

¹⁴ Kesterton, 1967:131; Keshen, 1996: 11.

¹⁵ Kesterton, 1967: 133.

¹⁶ Keshen, 1996: 66.

¹⁷ Keshen, 1996: 20.

¹⁸ Keshen, 1996: 187.

¹⁹ Knightly, 1975: 80.

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²¹ Keshen, 1996: 185.

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- ²³ Powley, 1975: x.
- ²⁴ Powley, 1975: 97.
- ²⁵ Powley, 1975: 46.
- ²⁶ Dyer, personal interview, July 24, 1998.
- ²⁷ German: 127.
- ²⁸ Eggleston was a co-founder and served as the first director of the Carleton School of Journalism, beginning in 1945.
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- ³⁵ Don North, telephone interview, February 13, 1998.
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- ³⁷ Arlen, 1969: 115.
- ³⁸ Knightly, 1975: 381.
- ³⁹ Knightly, 1975: 350.
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- ⁴¹ Knightly, 2000: 23.
- ⁴² Sharkey, 1991: 62.
- ⁴³ Hastings, 1983: 375.
- ⁴⁴ Mercer, 1984: 39.
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- ⁴⁷ Sharkey, 1991: 73.
- ⁴⁸ Braestrup, 1985: 133.
- ⁴⁹ Sharkey, 1991: Annex B – The Sidle Panel Report.
- ⁵⁰ Knightly, 2000: 23.
- ⁵¹ Sharkey, 1991: 78.
- ⁵² Sharkey, 1991: 144.
- ⁵³ John Holliman speaking on *Larry King Live* on February 9, 1991. Sharkey, 1991: 146.
- ⁵⁴ Dunsmore, telephone interview, August 15, 1999.
- ⁵⁵ Greenwood, 1991: 1008.
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- ⁵⁷ Trueman, 1980: 178.
- ⁵⁸ Stewart, telephone interview, January 29, 1999.
- ⁵⁹ Neuman, 1996, 240.
- ⁶⁰ Garcia, 1991: 31.
- ⁶¹ Mackenzie, telephone Interview, January 5, 1999.
- ⁶² Bell, telephone interview, January 21, 1999.
- ⁶³ Mackenzie, telephone interview, January 5, 1999.
- ⁶⁴ Stevenson, 1995: 91. See also Neuman, 1996.
- ⁶⁵ Neuman, 1996: 24.
- ⁶⁶ Dunsmore, 1996: 1.
- ⁶⁷ Dunsmore, telephone interview, August 15, 1999.
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- ⁶⁹ Tyrell, telephone interview, February 3, 1999.
- ⁷⁰ Beer, telephone interview, February 3, 1999.
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- ⁷³ Glen Flood, Pentagon press officer, telephone interview, April 6, 2000.
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- ⁷⁵ Schafer, telephone interview, March 3, 1999.
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Chapter 3

A NEW APPROACH

Natural disasters are doing wonders for the Canadian military – or for its public image anyway. The ice storm that crippled parts of Eastern Ontario and Quebec for more than two weeks has fostered a newfound love of the Canadian Armed Forces. In the minds of many the images of the Somalia scandal have been replaced by images of troops stepping into the fray during floods in the Saguenay region in Quebec, the rise of the Red Rivers and now the ice storm.¹

– As reported in the *Ottawa Citizen*, January 24, 1998.

Mother Nature seemed to come to the aid of the Canadian Forces' image just when it needed it most. Natural disasters provided the kind of distraction the military had desperately been hoping for to recover from the Somalia affair, giving DND/CF a chance to demonstrate directly to Canadians the "good" things soldiers were capable of doing.

In the case of the ice storm of January 1998, thousands of soldiers were dispatched across Eastern Ontario and Quebec, doing everything from helping hydro workers repair downed power lines, delivering perishable food items to people in shelters and knocking on doors to ensure no one was suffering from hypothermia. While these are not the primary roles of combat and logistics soldiers, the Canadian Forces was fulfilling their mandate by providing emergency assistance at the request of provincial governments. The military pointed out that peacekeepers often did this kind of work in places such as the Balkans. However, these efforts received more attention because they directly affected Canadians. It was the kind of goodwill mission the military needed to boost its public image.

"I get a lot of positive response from the people out there," said one soldier from CFB Petawawa. "[They] were very grateful that [the military] was there to help them. So when you're back doing the combat scenario, you'll remember this. This is reality . . . seeing people smile. I think it makes everyone feel good."²

The military's relationship with the media had also made an about-turn. Public affairs officers, also known as PAffOs, were busy filling requests by journalists to go out and view the disaster areas. Reporters lined up to ride in personnel carriers or helicopters and to interview and photograph soldiers. This time, the soldiers were given permission to speak directly with the media.

The ice storm provided military leaders with a perfect scenario to test run one of their newest innovations – a revamped public affairs policy.

A need for change

A briefing kit on the new public affairs policy sent to all levels of the Department of National Defence in 1998 opened with this statement:

National Defence and the Canadian Forces need to do a better job communicating with Canadians and with our own people. [They] have a right to know what we do . . . and we have a duty to inform.³

Though the new policy was not officially put into force until March 1998, there had been signs for months that some reforms to the military's public affairs strategy were imminent. After the Somalia Inquiry was abruptly brought to an end in 1997, senior defence officials began speaking about the need for a more open approach with the public. First, then-defence minister Doug Young committed to "embed the principles of openness, transparency, responsiveness and accuracy into

the day-to-day operations of the Canadian Forces.”⁴ Later that year, the Somalia commission called on DND/CF in its final report to put in place a series of reforms to improve communication with the public. General Maurice Baril also vowed to make the Armed Forces a more open institution when he became Chief of the Defence Staff in September 1997.

“The men and women of the CF are my best ambassadors and I’m going to let them talk,” he told reporters at his first news conference.⁵

In his response to the Somalia Inquiry, Art Eggleton, who became Defence Minister in June 1997, promised a more open ethos within DND/CF and made these commitments:

- a. to review military regulations to clarify how to assure transparent and effective communication with the public;
- b. to increase the public visibility of the CF by improving the quality of communications material;
- c. to create a communications policy and initiatives such as community and media-outreach programs;
- d. to establish a comprehensive public information and education program;
- e. to develop a new recruiting campaign – one that emphasized “the unique challenges that a life in the military can offer;”
- f. to revamp the Department’s Internet site;
- g. to process Access to Information requests more expeditiously; and
- h. to create a military journal to report on activities in the DND/CF.⁶

While the tumultuous events of the Somalia Affair were certainly the flashpoint and catalyst for change, people behind the scenes in DND/CF were starting to identify the need for reforming public affairs. In mid-1995, the Chief of Review Services section began a program evaluation of the Public Affairs branch. In a confidential report, released under the Access to Information Act, it recommended:

The DND/CF adopt a philosophy of greater openness in the release of information and facilitate its implementation by stressing coordination requirements in the policy and related documentation, together with greater emphasis on public affairs training on all leadership and management courses.⁷

Officials identified one fact that most journalists already knew all too well – that there was not only an inherent attitude within the CF to shy away from talking to the media but also a strong culture of secrecy. They said existing military policies and procedures discouraged, not encouraged, members from disclosing information or opinions to media and constantly warned them of the administrative and disciplinary consequences of doing so.⁸

These [regulations and levels] are intended to address the misuse or uncoordinated use of information, but have led to confusion and apprehension in dealing with the media. This is manifested in the defensive and reactive posture of the public affairs program . . . and self-imposed restrictions on communications concerning matters not impact in on national security. There is a perceived lack of DND response to controversial issues in the public eye and the media continues to carry the debate by obtaining information from third parties.”⁹

The internal study also showed that DND/CF’s strategic planning process for public affairs was not well co-ordinated and was leading to a mainly reactive approach in handling media inquiries. That was partly due to the excessive layers

of bureaucracy between decision-makers such as the DM or the CDS and their advisers in the Public Affairs branch. Many officers found it took them days, even weeks, to respond to media inquiries because they needed to get permission from a series of officers before providing an answer. The problem got worse after the Somalia incident became public. This was leading to an unco-ordinated and reduced flow of information, forcing the public, especially the media, to resort to other means, primarily the Access to Information Act.

The study also pointed out another seemingly obvious point. It admitted that DND/CF was lagging behind in its understanding of “new” technologies – especially those used for releasing information to the public.

The introduction of satellite television, fax machines, e-mail and the Internet are growing faster than expected and is becoming “more difficult to control . . . (especially) over quality and adherence to policy.”¹⁰

More difficult to control – a problem militaries have been trying to overcome for more than a century. It comes as no surprise that the authors of the report called for new policies and guidelines that took into consideration the demands of new technology and a strategy to help gain a better understanding of them, so they could be controlled. If fax machines were considered, perhaps, it reveals how out of touch some in the department were. Still, the report made a number of important recommendations, not the least of which, the need for change. Now, the department needed someone to make it happen.

Send in the spin doctor

While the program evaluation study came out in the spring of 1996, there was not yet an opportunity to implement its recommendations. Senior officials at NDHQ were still embroiled in one of the most difficult episodes of the Somalia Inquiry – the impending testimony of the CDS, General Jean Boyle. However, some officials, including Ken Calder, assistant deputy minister for personnel at the time, realized the department needed a makeover of its public image without delay. Calder and other managers agreed to recruit an outsider, someone with experience in not only handling difficult issues, but with a vision for instigating institutional change within government. Larry Gordon was their candidate.

A career public servant with very little experience in defence, Gordon had an extensive record of dealing with difficult issues in other departments. He had earned respect at Revenue Canada for crafting a public campaign to usher in the Goods and Services Tax under the Mulroney government. He later urged the Chretien Liberals to take a delicate approach in dealing with native anti-tax protests and helping to ease cross-border restrictions for Canadians traveling to the United States.¹¹

Gordon was recruited to DND/CF from Revenue Canada in the summer of 1996 to serve as chief of public affairs on an 18-month term contract with the specific goal to reshape and reform the military's public image. However, Gordon was reluctant at first to accept the military's challenge to their turn their public image around.

"I knew it was going to be virtually impossible to do," says Gordon. "In the process I would come under enormous criticism, especially from the media. There was a real risk of having my career destroyed. And I wouldn't have been the first guy."¹²

Gordon finally accepted the offer, mainly because he was intrigued by how a single issue, such as Somalia, had managed to eat away at the military's leadership to the point that the entire institution was under siege. He admits he was also deeply concerned about the future of the military.

"I am a supporter of the CF," says Gordon. "I was very concerned that in the quest to find out what really happened there, the intensity of the attack on the Canadian Forces was such that the very institution itself was at risk. I felt the truth [about Somalia] had to be found out. But, at the same time, it was a valued institution in this country, done a lot of good things and we shouldn't lose sight of that."¹³

The strain of the Somalia crisis was clearly visible when Gordon arrived at NDHQ. In fact, he says the military was in a state of deep shock and at the point of collapse. This was one of the reasons the Chretien government used to justify closing down the Somalia Inquiry – that the military could not sustain any more criticism. Even the Auditor General recognized that the continuing media scrutiny was causing increased stress for CF members and their families, particularly members of the disbanded Canadian Airborne Regiment.¹⁴ In Ottawa, some CF members working at NDHQ chose to wear civilian clothes in public because they felt embarrassed to be seen in uniform. The low morale extended to the public

affairs branch. Junior officers in the branch were caught in the middle of the crisis, trying to respond to media inquiries on behalf of senior officials in the department. Colonel Ralph Coleman, who served as the military's senior public affairs officer from late in 1996 until his retirement in August 1999, says the crisis began to take its toll on junior officers when some of its senior officers came under scrutiny. Coleman's own predecessor, Colonel Geoff Haswell and another officer, Commander Doug Caie, were charged and convicted by a military court for willfully altering documents requested under the Access to Information Act during the Somalia affair. Haswell admitted to ordering his secretary to dispose of several binders of Media Response Lines (MRLs) relating to the Somalia case, while revised and "sanitized" versions were released to journalists such as CBC Radio's Michael McAuliffe. Both Haswell and Caie left the military as a result.

Several other officers from the branch were called to testify to their role in both the alteration of documents and other parts of the Somalia affair. Coleman says the actions of a few had a detrimental effect on all the men and women of the Forces, especially so for public affairs officers.

"Public Affairs was watching itself on TV every day and going through traumatic times," says Coleman. "People were having nervous breakdowns, being court-martialed and a lot of other people saying, I've had enough of this, I'm going to greener pastures. There was only a small group of tired, burned out people who had to be remotivated."¹⁵

For people working in the branch, Somalia served as first-hand proof that the military was both unaccustomed and unprepared in dealing with serious

scrutiny from the media. As the 1996 internal study had pointed out, DND/CF had clearly underestimated the growth of “new” technologies and the degree of interest the media had for the military’s internal affairs. Not surprisingly, a siege mentality had taken hold of the department. To get out the military out of its funk, Gordon had to convince senior DND/CF staff that they were not only facing a communication problem but a wider, institutional problem.

“The real issue there was not Somalia,” says Gordon. “It became a lightning rod for a lot of things. It was really the final straw. There were very serious questions about the relevance of the military, whether it would be around in a few years.”¹⁶

Gordon says while most officers and senior managers were open to hearing his advice and committed to change, he admits to running into some resistance and especially inter-service competition between senior officers. Some were quick to blame the army for Somalia, after all it was the “bad apples” in the Airborne regiment that had created the mess.

“There was a bit of an ‘it’s-not-my-problem’ attitude, a good deal of parochialism,” says Gordon. “So, I had to deliver a fairly blunt message. I told them, ‘This is about the entire Canadian Forces. It’s not just the army. You’re all in this together. You’re either going to get out of this together or you’re not.’”¹⁷

Gordon encouraged the military’s leadership to view the crisis as a challenge to make the institution better, not as a threat to its existence. The first challenge in regaining public confidence was to deal directly with the perception that the military was a closed-door and unaccountable organization.

“Canadians have a lot of a time for their Canadian Forces and a lot of respect for them,” says Gordon. “But they were, frankly, pissed off after Somalia. [They asked,] how could you have gone out and killed this kid? And more important, how could you have reacted that way? People believed the institution had become too closed door. That was more than fair criticism. So, DND/CF had to prove to the public that was serious about changing its ways.”¹⁸

Gordon says Canadians were particularly angry because the military failed to display any outrage in the face of the events in Somalia and did not act expeditiously enough to do something about it. Other delays and cover-ups, not to mention the continuous negative coverage from the media, fueled that perception. Suddenly, the once-respected military found itself being accused of things that are often associated with the Watergate scandal in the United States.

Having lost credibility with the public, Gordon warned senior defence officials that the situation would not change overnight. In fact, it could take several years before the military’s public image could recover. The solution, therefore, was this: DND/CF needed to “reconnect” with Canadians, by talking to them, by showing them what the Forces do and most importantly, how much more open and transparent the institution has become. That means when mistakes are made, Gordon advised, the military must be honest and admit to them, then move on.¹⁹ This was the starting point for the public affairs policy.

Putting it in writing

Having won agreement in principle for a new public affairs policy, Gordon set to work on developing the details. He formed an advisory committee that included people who understood the military, the media and how to communicate with Canadians. The committee included Queen's University professors Don McNamara and David Haglund; retired lieutenant-general Jack Vance, who served as senior military advisor to the Somalia Commission; former CBC journalist Michael McGivov; Dale Ratcliffe from the Ryerson School of Journalism; and Alex Morrison from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Cornwallis, N.S. Gordon says he wanted to get journalists involved, but none accepted his invitation. In many cases, their editors vetoed their participation.

"I was disappointed that those most critical of the department were not prepared to help develop a policy to increase openness," Gordon remarks.²⁰ However, it comes as little surprise that journalists would be reluctant to participate, not only for ethical reasons, but many were rather skeptical of DND/CF's motives after having endured several years of evasiveness and hostility.

After an initial meeting, the committee had a hard message for DND/CF managers. The time had come to stop finding ways to avoid informing the public and the media and forcing them to use the Access to Information Act to get information that should otherwise be given freely. A new public affairs policy would work only if the spirit of openness became an integral part of day-to-day business. In real terms, allowing CF members and DND employees to speak to the media directly would be the only way to achieve this. One of the fundamental

themes behind Gordon's vision for public affairs reform in DND/CF was the importance of maintaining direct communication with Canadians.

"My experience has taught me," says Gordon, "that the best way to communicate with Canadians effectively today is by doing it directly. The rules are simple. You have to tell Canadians what you are doing and why. When you make a mistake admit to the mistake and tell them what you are doing to ensure it won't happen again. Show Canadians what you are doing. And let Canadians draw their own conclusions."²¹

This became the guiding principle of the new policy. Following along on Art Eggleton's response to the Somalia Inquiry, DND/CF undertook a review of military regulations regarding media relations to improve transparency with the public, a reorganization of the public affairs branch at NDHQ, a redesign of the department's Web site called, D-Net (<http://www.dnd.ca>), a more targeted recruiting advertising campaign emphasizing the combat roles of the military, not just peacekeeping and the creation of a newspaper called the Maple Leaf targeted at the military community to report on activities and issues going on within the department .

Under the direction of Gordon and his consultants, the new public affairs directives for the military were drafted by a working group of senior officers and managers within the Public Affairs branch in the fall of 1997. After the department's Defence Management Committee gave final approval on December 18, 1997, the policy came into force on March 1, 1998. The policy, whose official

title is Public Affairs Defence Administrative Orders and Directives (DAOD), begins:

It is DND and CF policy to inform Canadians of its policies, programs, services, activities, operations and initiatives in a manner that is accurate, complete, objective, timely, relevant, understandable and *open* and *transparent* within the law.²²

Openness and Transparency. These two popular buzzwords appear time and again in the formal public affairs policy itself, in all subsequent briefing material on the topic and in public comments made by senior military officials.

That message is further emphasized:

The policy . . . actively encourages openness and transparency, integrates PA (Public Affairs) into CF and DND operations at all levels, delegates authority and empowers CF members and DND employees to speak more openly to Canadians about what they do and how they make a difference to Canada and the international community.²³

To support the notion of openness, CF members and civilian employees in DND were given permission to be interviewed by the media. Ralph Coleman says this builds on General Baril's desire to allow people to fulfill their roles as the military's "best ambassadors." It allows permits CF members and DND employees who are expert in his or her trade to explain it to the public without being sanitized by a public affairs official.

"[We decided] let's say you don't need permission provided you say within certain parameters," says Coleman. "If you want to talk about other things, you'll have to get permission. But it's your job and what you're doing, you don't need anyone's permission."²⁴

As Coleman says, there are certain parameters with this policy. While members can accept requests for interviews from the media, they are still encouraged to seek “guidance” before agreeing to a media interview and they must inform their base or unit PAffO as soon as possible that the interview took place and what was discussed. There are also guidelines on who makes decisions on public affairs, how to make public announcements, what to do in a crisis, how to apply public affairs policy to military doctrine and CF operations, how to communicate the delivery of services and a policy on Internet publishing.

The policy also reminds members of the limits in the type of information they make public, especially if it involves privacy or operational issues. Soldiers and others are allowed only to discuss what they do – keeping the topic limited to the job, training and personal experience of an individual in her or his official capacity and not as a private citizen. Therefore, it forbids individual members from commenting and offering personal opinions on defence or government policy, as well as releasing classified or restricted information protected by laws such as the *Privacy Act*. An age-old military practice is preserved here as well – “respect the principle of operational security.”

No public-affairs activity should undermine the safety of CF members or other personnel involved in a military operation or undermine the likely success of a military operation or activity.²⁵

In other words, soldiers are warned not to give away the battle plan so the enemy could learn about them in the newspapers or on CBC Newsworld or, worse, on CNN!

By allowing the rank and file the privilege of speaking to reporters at their discretion effectively erases the legacy left behind by the litany of gag orders issued before and after the Somalia Affair. The most severe, CDS 120, an order then-defence chief Vice-Admiral Larry Murray issued during the Somalia affair, forced all members to seek his personal approval before agreeing to news conferences and interviews.

Public communications must be based on the principle of full, timely and accurate disclosure of information within the bounds of security and privacy rights . . . the chain of command must be given early warning of most events and issues, particularly those which could have national implications. Therefore, the approval of the Chief of the Defence Staff must be secured prior to committing to a press conference or issuing a press release.²⁶

Both journalists and soldiers alike reviled the gag orders because they continued to fuel the perception that DND/CF had something to hide and heightened tensions between the media and the military in Canada. Not unlike the so-called “credibility gap” that became the source of acrimony in the United States during the Vietnam war. However, even if the new policy was in place in 1993, soldiers would likely not have been able to talk about the events in Somalia especially while the murder was still under investigation and the suspects were facing their courts martial.

In addition to allowing members to “speak out” on certain issues, the new policy delegates more responsibility for public affairs to lower levels of the military’s chain of command. In other words, commanding officers and other more junior-ranking public affairs officers have the authority to put on public events, send out media releases and hold news conferences, so long as it concerns

the activities of their own units. This makes each level in the institution – such as the Navy, a fleet school or an individual ship – accountable for the information it releases to the public. PAffOs posted to bases or peacekeeping missions are more involved in advising their commanders on communications matters. As a result, says Gordon, more people are thinking about public affairs; in particular, what impact their unit's actions may have on the public image of the military. However, he says part of the motivation behind this strategy is to inform the public directly and not always rely on the media as the sole carrier of that information.

“Our problem was that the federal government communicates with Canadians primarily through the media,” says Gordon. “Unfortunately, the media, like the federal government, doesn't have the highest levels of public support. In fact, they're quite low. So, it was going to be more difficult for me, as a representative of the Canadian Forces, to communicate with Canadians when I knew [journalists] were somewhat skeptical of the kind of information they were getting.”²⁷

After all, the Canadian media was, not surprisingly, rather jaded about the military's activities. So, this is why the department revamped its Internet site, D-Net.²⁸ Similar to most other government departments, the site offers background information on Canadian Forces activities, recent news releases, speeches and statements from the Minister of National Defence (MND) and the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and links to websites from individual units and branches of the Canadian Forces. However, it also provided an update to status report on what documents have been made public under the Access to Information Act. Gordon

says many Canadians are taking advantage of D-Net. In March 2000, the D-Net Website received just under 7 million hits during the month, or 252,000 unique visits.²⁹ That number does not include a myriad of other military-related Web sites that have popped up in recent years.

DND/CF also took a second look at the way it used the media and television for recruiting purposes. In years past, recruiting efforts focused on encouraging people to make the military a full career. Television advertisements of the 1970s and 1980s used the rather appropriate slogan, "There's no life like it." They also emphasized the peacekeeping role of the Canadian Forces, an image equated with non-aggression. Coleman says the emphasis had to change in the 1990s because the Canadian Forces are now involved in more higher-profile and volatile conflicts and he says people need to see why the government needs to spend money on new tanks, ships and planes. This is why recruiting commercials show a stronger emphasis on war and combat functions of our military, to dispel false notions in the mind of young recruits that all they will do is stand at a demilitarized zone.

"You'll see very few blue berets," says Coleman. "We tend to show now people flying F-18s or driving tanks or ships at sea because we want to show the public . . . that we exist to fight the country's wars," says Coleman. "That's our primary purpose. If we can't fight wars, you don't need us, quite frankly. But when we're not fighting wars, there's a whole bunch of other things we can do."³⁰

The military's combat and operational functions were also featured in a five-part series, called "Forbidden Places," broadcast on the Discovery Channel in fall

1998. The one-hour documentaries depicted the military's operational branches in action. In one of the episodes, the camera crew follows the difficult work of search and rescue (SAR) technicians as they performed an aerial rescue at sea. In the program, Engage and Destroy, a contingent of troops from the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) participates in a simulated amphibious assault of the Nova Scotia coastline. Other programs focus on the activities of the navy's clearance divers and the Canadian Rangers – the military's Inuit militia in the Arctic.³¹

By making better use of television and the Internet to communicate directly with Canadians, DND/CF is utilizing two popular forms of modern technology to achieve one of its most important goals, to build and maintain public support for its activities.

"Technology has had a big impact that way," says Coleman. "With television, we're able to see the benefits of our policy right then and there. You could see soldier talk which doesn't come across in a newspaper ... you don't see the physical act of the journalist and the military interacting. Perhaps, that's why we've been more visible in the 90's."

In fact, that is precisely why.

Changing the organization

One of the loudest complaints made by the media and other observers during the Somalia affair was the inconsistent and evasive behaviour of officials at NDHQ, especially within public affairs. Gordon says the intensity of the criticism

led to many knee jerk, CNN factor responses rather than an effective long-term strategy to move past the crisis.

“In Somalia, they were like a deer caught in headlights,” says Gordon. “It paralyzed their ability to handle other matters. They were accustomed to micromanaging issues and were not used to just moving on. I told them they had to find a way to get on with other, more important business.”³²

Therefore, next to putting a new policy and procedure into place, Gordon and his group of advisers recommended a reorganization of NDHQ’s Public Affairs Branch. They suggested splitting personnel in half under the Director General of Public Affairs. One section, known as plans and operations, would be responsible for monitoring news and current affairs issues that affect DND/CF on a day-to-day basis. These PAffOs respond to telephone inquiries from the public and the media, monitor newspaper, radio, television and other news reports for defence-related stories, prepare backgrounders on major domestic and overseas events and operations involving the Canadian Forces and help organizing or conduct news conferences.

“These are front-line officers,” says Ralph Coleman. “They are our spokespeople, they are up to speed with the news and what the Canadian Forces are doing. And they are also in how we plan for major events. That includes Bosnia and Kosovo for example. *Maclean’s* runs a story on sexual harassment. These people work on how we’re going to deal with that.”³³

Certainly, there are a few more television sets on the wall now in the Public Affairs office on the 15th floor of NDHQ’s north tower. At least one PAffO keeps

an eye on CNN, CBC Newsworld, CTV Newsnet and dozens of other networks around the clock in case a story breaks that may be directly or even indirectly related to the Canadian Forces. As well, at the crack of dawn, a few civilian media analysts begin clipping newspapers stories.

Much of this information is then directly relayed to the highest levels of management at NDHQ. At the daily executive meeting every morning, the head of Public Affairs (DGPA) sits at the table with the Associate Deputy Ministers (ADM), the Deputy Minister (DM) and CDS as they review the main issues of the day. The meeting begins with a short briefing from the DGPA, summarizing the headlines and, in particular, any critical stories about the department. The senior leadership then decides how to handle the issue or crisis. This is a different procedure than was in place during Somalia. At that time, PAffOs offered their advice to a junior director general, who would then relay it his or her superior, before it finally reached the DM or CDS, if at all. Coleman says with so many levels of authority in the way, it is no wonder that there were so many missteps.

“We have direct input now,” says Coleman. “You’ve got the professional public affairs advice going unfiltered to the key decision makers. We’re plugged into all the key meetings. Because in order to give advice you have to know what’s going on and what’s going down.”

Coleman admits there is very little new in military officers monitoring the behavior of the media. Most government departments have communications branches now that perform similar functions to DND/CF’s Public Affairs branch. As well, PAffOs have been reacting to media coverage to some degree for years.

However, the military had to do more than watch or play catch up with the media in order to avoid another “deer-in-the-headlights” situation. To do this, Gordon suggested devoting more time and resources to long-term planning. As a result, the other half of the Public Affairs branch now focuses on outreach initiatives and looking for ways to educate Canadians on defence policy. This includes maintaining the D-Net website and improving the military’s recruiting program. Coleman says this allows both long and short-term projects to continue to operate simultaneously.

“Unlike the early ‘90s,” says Coleman, “we don’t have to drop one of these tasks to go deal with another. You’ve got the two halves that keep ticking at the same time.”³⁴

To make this strategy work, Coleman says the Public Affairs branch needed more resources. The branch’s annual budget increased substantially to \$9.9 million in 1999-2000 from only \$1.7 million in 1995-96.³⁵ Next, the branch needed to recruit several dozen new PAffOs, because a combination of budget cuts and the stresses of the Somalia affairs had depleted their ranks to 67 officers. Coleman says the office was in desperate need of support when he took over as senior PAffO at NDHQ in 1996.³⁶ By the summer of 1999, there were just over 100 PAffOs working for the Canadian Forces around the world. Most are junior officers – such as lieutenants, captains and a few majors – who have spent some period of time in the field or at sea. Twenty-six officers and 61 civilians work in the Directorate of Public Affairs at NDHQ, while other PAffOs are posted to

Canadian Forces bases, regional headquarters or training centres across the country. Some are posted overseas with NATO or UN peacekeeping contingents.

In addition to hiring these new officers, a new training program was put into place to help give them more hands-on experience in dealing with the media and in particular demands of today's maximum visibility society. The importance of learning media relations is outlined in a DND/CF public affairs training manual.

Media relations must be planned for and practiced. It cannot be an after-thought or something to be addressed once in the area of operations. Unfortunately, soldiers who spend so much of their careers planning for operations and anticipating courses of action get caught off guard by the media because they did not anticipate media interest in their operation nor were they prepared to deal with this interest. Ignoring the media will not make them go away, but it guarantees that "our side" will not be heard. "We don't win unless CNN says we win," is a phrase often used by the American military. It captures the realities of today's media environment.³⁷

While media awareness seminars have been offered in the past, the new policy called for more intensive training. Some public affairs lectures are now taught to recruits during their basic training courses and to officers in staff college, where they learn how to use the policy and how to prepare for a media interview. When an officer or member in a unit is asked to take on public affairs as a secondary duty, they are often selected for a two-week public affairs course conducted at the Nav Canada training facility in Cornwall, Ontario. Here they learn more about how to be ready to respond to media inquires and how to develop media relations strategies for their individual units. A number of guest speakers are invited from both DGPA and the Ottawa media. The participants engage in a number of role-playing scenarios such as acting as interviewer and interviewee before a video camera and the instructors assess their performance.

Beginning in 1997, just before the new strategy was put into place, officers who were recruited from other branches to work as full-time PAffOs attended a three-month intensive course conducted by the U.S. military at the Defence Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Mead, Maryland. Here officers learn most of the skills they do in Cornwall such as writing news releases and participating in interviews. However, they get more hand-on experience in plying their trade, such as putting together a base newspaper, spending a few days at the Department of Defence press office at the Pentagon and even producing television and radio news items.

“This exposes them to the real world of daily journalism,” explains Michael Gose, a senior instructor at DINFOS. “They experience a newsroom environment and the demands faced by journalists. They also gain a better understanding of why television depends so much on images to tell their stories. We teach them that perception is everything.”³⁸

Gose says the Americans have learned over the last three decades that knowing how the media works is an essential part in the success of any mission. Canadian military officials have decided to tap into that in order to adapt a time honoured battlefield philosophy to public affairs – the more you know about your adversary, the better prepared you are to respond to them. Or so the story goes.

A changing culture

For officers such as Major Tim Dunne, the new policy could not have come soon enough. For more than 25 years, Dunne has served as a PAffO on military

bases and headquarters across Canada. And like many others in his trade, he says he has spent most of his career trying to achieve two conflicting goals – one, to attract the public's attention on occasion when it suited his unit, such as sending out a news release to promote an upcoming event, such as telling the local media about the next Armed Forces Day at the base. The other goal, however, was quite the opposite.

“My job was to keep my commanding officer out of the papers at all times,” says Dunne. “No news was good news to us. Having our unit's name in the paper was considered bad luck. Unless, of course, I was trying to get people to come to an Open House day at the base.”³⁹

Now in Halifax as senior PAffO for Land Forces Command, Atlantic Region, Dunne's role has become far more pro-active. Much of his time is now spent trying to keep the local and regional media in the Maritimes apprised of the day-to-day activities of Army units on bases such as Gagetown, N.B. He also oversees the local Web site to ensure it is up to date with the latest on troop movements. And he is often called upon to provide advice to junior officers and non-commissioned members on how to answer questions from the public. Dunne says allowing members to speak directly with the media helps promote the message that the military is an open and accountable institution. It is a policy, he says, he has been lobbying for throughout his career.

“For a long time, I've believed that we have to assume more corporate responsibility for providing information to the public,” says Dunne. “My job is to answer, not to justify. We need to tell the public how we are spending their tax

dollars. They will decide if it is being done correctly. If the taxpayer has no confidence in the credibility of the Canadian Forces, then we need to respond. We serve at the pleasure of the Canadian people.”⁴⁰

However, Dunne admits the practice of the rank-and-file speaking directly to journalists is actually nothing new. In fact, he says it has been going on for years, especially in the field or on operation.

“When journalists get a chance to sit down one and one with us, to see what it is we do and realize we’re just regular people like them, then the problems vaporize.”⁴¹

In recent years, however, most requests to speak with military members have been funneled through PAffOs such as Dunne. While this practice is not new for the military, having a formal policy of openness and transparency is. Dunne says the idea of allowing soldiers to talk directly to reporters is the best way to forge good relations between the media and the military. The senior non-commissioned officer in the Canadian Navy agrees.

“My sailors love it,” says Terry Meloche, the Command Chief Petty Officer for Maritime Command. “They love showing off what they do on the ships.”

Meloche says there have been many cases where local media near naval bases in Halifax and Victoria have taken advantage of opportunities to meet and view individual sailors at work aboard ship. Using a pro-active approach, allows the navy to get more coverage than they usually do by the media.

“People don’t get to see what we do at sea very often,” says Meloche. “We’re probably the least covered of all the services because we’re away so often.

So, we're trying to encourage the public to take an interest in what we do. The policy let's us do that."⁴²

Meloche says the Navy has undertaken its own active outreach program with Canadian municipalities. Twice a year, Meloche and the head of Maritime Command, Vice-Admiral Greg Maddison, participate on a public affairs tour that takes them to cities that have HMC ships named after them, such as Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary and Ottawa.

"We meet with the mayor, councilors and chambers of commerce," says Meloche. "We try to develop a warm relationship with community stakeholders, by having them show recognition for members of the crew and in turn we honour their city by having landmarks and other attractions depicted on the ships."⁴³

For example, the two main passageways aboard the Esquimalt-based frigate, HMCS Ottawa, are named Bank and Wellington streets. In turn, a large photograph and a ship's bell from the Ottawa are on display in the main council chamber at Ottawa's City Hall. Clearly, these are symbolic gestures, but Meloche says it is a small, but important part of the military's campaign, in Larry Gordon's words, to "reconnect with Canadians."

On the other hand, officials knew there was some risk in letting more the 60,000 members of the Forces to act as spokespeople.

"We accept that bad things will come out," admits Coleman. "People will occasionally misstep. It's inherent with the policy. Let's face it. Our people don't talk to the press every day, so when they talk to a journalist they may have the best

of intentions, but they may overstep their bounds. From a leadership point of view, when it happens, we shouldn't clam up and pull everything back again."⁴⁴

Dunne says the problems that beset the military during Somalia, especially the criticism from the media and the public, were both inevitable and justified. While change is coming about slowly, he says attitudes about releasing information to the media are improving and the lessons of Somalia have engrained the need for openness in the minds of many members.

"We have learned after this difficult period," says Dunne, "that it is incumbent upon the military itself to correct misconceptions, not the media or the public. The answer is to stop whatever activity might be questionable and not to use tactics to restrict journalist's access to the information."⁴⁵

Coleman agrees it was the evasive tactics of some officers within the Public Affairs branch at NDHQ that contributed to the problems during the Somalia affair. He says since Somalia, they have become more sensitive to avoid giving the appearance of a cover-up in their day-to-day operations. It was this kind of blatant disregard for the public's right to know that, Coleman says, the new policy now prevents. Making public affairs a part of daily planning prevents evasiveness – or at least the *perception* of it.

Gordon's parting words

Before leaving DND/CF in March 1998, Larry Gordon laid out the bottom line to senior officials in the department. He told them that though the policy had by then been introduced, the final step was the most critical. Gordon's stern

parting message – *saying* the military is going to be open and transparent is only the beginning. *Acting* in a spirit of openness and transparency is the real challenge. He says these notions must be engrained in the day-to-day activities of the Canadian military in order to maintain the confidence and support of the Canadian public.

“They had shown a willingness to change in the heat of a crisis,” says Gordon. “If [they] do not continue to ‘walk the talk’ and maintain a commitment to openness then Canadians will again withdraw their support.”⁴⁶

People such as Ralph Coleman and Tim Dunne believe the military has risen to this challenge. “The military culture is changing for the better,” assures Coleman. Indeed, there have been instances since 1998 where the Canadian Forces has demonstrated its commitment to acting in a more open and transparent manner. However, there is still plenty of evidence to show that for the Canadian military, old habits die hard.

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⁹ DND, 1258-109, May 31, 1996: 14.

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- ¹³ Larry Gordon, radio interview, *CBO Morning*, August 17, 1999.
 - ¹⁴ Canada, Auditor General, 1996, Chapter 7, section 7.67.
 - ¹⁵ Colonel (Retired) Ralph Coleman, personal interview, January 6, 1999.
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 - ²⁸ D-Net website: <http://www.dnd.ca>.
 - ²⁹ Remy Charreyron, a manager with DND's Internet and Intranet Management Services, says hits include everything from opening the Web site to clicking on a link or even starting up a graphic. Unique visits, however, records the number of occasions just the site is opened – a more accurate reflection of the number of people who are using it. Telephone and e-mail interview, April 4, 2000.
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Chapter 4

A CHANGED CULTURE OR WINDOW DRESSING?

There's a great difference between not releasing information and telling the truth. We're telling the truth, but we're not releasing some information.¹

In a statement reminiscent of William Lyon Mackenzie King's famous "conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription," Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, General Maurice Baril, explains the restrictions DND/CF placed on the information flow during Canada's involvement in the Kosovo conflict in 1999. In the first few weeks of the conflict, Canada kept a tight lid on any information about the activities of the CF-18s participating in air strikes. While senior Canadian officers at the NATO air base in Aviano, Italy, were giving regular media briefings, the people actually carrying out the mission – the pilots flying the planes – were not allowed to speak to the media. This was a marked departure from the commitment of openness and transparency made in DND/CF's public affairs policy.

Meanwhile, the situation was very different for the international media covering the activities of American and British personnel. Correspondents regularly spoke with pilots and even flew aboard AWACK aircraft on surveillance missions over Bosnia and Croatia. Some Canadian reporters, including the CBC-TV's Neil McDonald, were quick to point out the contrast.

What Canadian pilots are actually doing and accomplishing in the night, remains almost unknown . . . In fact, Canada doesn't like to say if its jets have even taken off, which targets they hit or whether they hit them at all. The Americans, by contrast, do. They seem to believe deeply that their soldiers and their public must remain connected. And the British, uncharacteristically, seem the most open.²

At one point, tempers flew between senior Canadian officers in Aviano and the increasingly impatient contingent of Canadian journalists. Under pressure, the Canadian commander, Colonel Dwight Davies, accused the media of being irresponsible by speculating about what CF-18 pilots were doing over Yugoslavia.

My young aviators are reading articles in the press that say stuff like, 'Canadian pilots can't hit large military complex with precision guided munitions.' That to me demonstrates an appalling lack of concern for the guys who are flying the missions.'

However, journalists argued back that they were being forced to depend on speculation from unofficial sources because DND/CF was not telling them anything. For example, the military would only allow the networks to broadcast footage of CF-18s taking off, filmed by military public affairs staff. A few weeks later, though, the Canadian military gradually began to open up to the media again. Some pilots were permitted to speak to journalists, but only for telephone interviews and so long as the pilots remained unidentified. Then on May 7, 1999, a Canadian pilot appeared in a CBC-TV News report wearing his flight goggles and mask, but his name was still not made public.'

General Baril says protecting the safety and security of the pilots was a top priority for the Canadian Forces and therefore, restrictions on media access and openness were justified. If, for example, the media, especially television, reported the fact that a squadron of CF-18s had departed Aviano at a certain time, Baril says it may have put Canadian pilots at risk by giving Serbian forces advance warning of an attack. By broadcasting those images on television, the Serbs would have identified the Maple Leaf flags on the side of planes. There was also a very real

concern that, by revealing the identity of the pilots, their families at home in Canada could have become targets for Serbian protests or violence.

We're a small air force. We're talking of pilots under 100 that we have in Canada. And they're coming from two bases. So they're very easy to identify where they're coming from. And very easy then to identify where their families would be.⁵

When asked by some journalists why Canada was not following the example of its American and British allies, Baril responded bluntly that this was a national decision made on a country-by-country basis and his decision was to be cautious. He says in a conflict situation, the military must carefully judge how openness is applied. In the case of Kosovo, DND/CF chose to limit the information flow in the interest of security, as outlined in the policy, by providing the media with very little access initially and then easing restrictions as the conflict progressed. The means justified the ends, argues Baril, because no Canadian pilots were killed or injured and no family members suffered repercussions. However, no other NATO pilot was killed during the conflict either even though the U.S. and the U.K. allowed greater media access.

Kosovo aside – how successfully has DND/CF applied its new ethos of openness to its other activities outside the conflict zone?

Cautious optimism

There is no question that the Canadian military was forced, almost kicking and screaming, to change its ways in the 1990s. The catastrophe of the Somalia affair left the military's leadership with little choice. However, over the last few

years, senior officials in DND/CF have confidently assured Canadians that the military would turn a new page. Maurice Baril promised as much when he was appointed CDS in September 1997.

There's no place to hide any more and anything that we have been hiding should be corrected and left in the open. [Somalia] will always be a reminder to us that we can make mistakes, but we can also learn from them and make sure they will never happened again.⁶

Now, more than two years later, Canada's Defence Minister, Art Eggleton, says he's satisfied that the Canadian military has learned from those mistakes in Somalia. He made those comments based on the observations of a watchdog committee that oversaw how the military was acting on recommendations from both the Somalia Inquiry and other military investigations. In its final report, released on February 8, 2000, the Minister's Monitoring Committee on Change gave DND/CF a grade of "B" for its overall progress. The committee credits the military for making improvements in light of an increased workload and the strains and stresses of financial and personnel shortages.⁷

The committee's chair, former House of Commons speaker John Fraser, had high praise for DND/CF's efforts to become more open to public scrutiny. In fact, he went so far to say that the institution has changed so much in the seven years since Somalia, that it is unlikely the Canadian Forces will see another incident like it.

The operational procedures that are in place for any contingent of Canadians being selected, trained and going outside this country make it almost impossible for what happened in Somalia to happen again. I don't think it could happen again.⁸

These public assurances are certainly a step in the right direction and vital for the success of the openness policy. However, almost in the same breath, Fraser raises concerns about “the full and lasting success” of this change. In particular, while DND/CF has successfully implemented a public affairs policy and other initiatives – ranging from the overhaul of the military justice system to the appointment of an ombudsman to the introduction of harassment and racism prevention training – it remains to be seen if these reforms will endure in the long term. Long-lasting change requires an overall strategic agenda and vision, driven by strong leadership and determination. As the Fraser report observes, that is something that is still absent from the Canadian military.

This program involves profound cultural change... These measures by themselves will not be sufficient to ensure that the new values will become internalized to the point of being instinctive as, say, loyalty or service to country. And until this degree of cultural shift is attained, there remains a risk that the achievements of the change program will be diminished or that the substance of the changes will lack staying power.⁹

The reason for this apparent lack of vision is partly due to the manner by which the reforms were introduced. DND/CF was handed hundreds of recommendations to put into place in a short period of time in order to prove to the Canadian public that the institution had learned something from Somalia. As a result, the military’s leadership accepted this as a tactical assignment – a sort of “checklist” approach, not much different than a mission on the battlefield. NDHQ identifies objectives – such as writing a new public affairs policy – develops action plans and short-term schedules, tracks progress using graphs and percentages, then declares success once the goal is achieved. While this approach functions well in

the field, it does not necessarily guarantee success when applied to institutional change. A tactical approach involves very little philosophical debate or consideration for the larger picture. In other words, says the Fraser report:

Put simply, the defence team has applied *tactical* solutions to what it considers to be *tactical* problems. What the Committee has stressed over its tenure is that the reform program is a *strategic* challenge that requires *strategic* solutions.¹⁰

The best way to illustrate this is to consider how DND/CF has demonstrated its commitment to the new openness and transparency policy through the media.

Soldiers, storms and savvy

The image was priceless. A soldier, dressed in combat uniform, carries a shivering child out of a freezing house to an emergency shelter. It was the kind of image Canadians saw on newscasts and the front pages of major newspapers during the Ice Storm of 1998 and symbolized the warm sentiments many people came to feel about the involvement of the Canadian Forces in that natural disaster. Likewise, the arrival of scores of tanks and armoured personnel carriers on Toronto's snowbound streets last January reflected well on the reliability of the military in a time of urgency – if not the credibility of the city's mayor, Mel Lastman, who became somewhat of a laughing stock across the country for calling in the military in the first place.

Nevertheless, in both cases, the Armed Forces played a very visible and positive role in both operations. Both were good news stories for DND/CF and

posed no real threat to security or controversy. So, it offered a perfect opportunity for officials at NDHQ to apply the new public affairs policy by allowing soldiers to accept interviews with the media. Both events received wide mainstream media coverage, not to mention front-page treatment in DND/CF's new internal newsletter, *The Maple Leaf*.¹¹

This is the most ideal public affairs situation. It comes as little surprise then that many senior officers continue to use the Ice Storm and the Toronto Snowstorm as proof that the new public affairs policy is working. Realistically, it would have taken a very serious faux pas on the part of the military to prove otherwise. There was virtually no risk of controversy for the military and maximum potential for promoting the work of individual members and for bringing credit to the Canadian Forces as an institution. If offered the media a chance to see the human side of the military at work without the filter of public affairs officers or other second hand sources. For television crews in particular, there were plenty of opportunities for good footage, while the military reaped the benefits of free advertising. Everyone gains from a "good news story" such as this, so, it is easy for the military to be *open* and *pro-active* with the media in such an instance.

However, the Ice Storm and the Toronto snowstorm were only two events out of countless others that have involved DND/CF in the last two years. In fact, in many instances, the military has been a great deal less open and a lot less pro-active.

Pro-active versus reactive approach

The military uses two approaches when dealing with the media – pro-active and reactive. The difference is straightforward: the military either brings a story to the media's attention first or vice versa. The pro-active approach offers the military more benefits; it can decide when to make a story public, it has more control over an issue and generally speaking, it develops a more positive relationship with the media and the public. The reactive approach, on the other hand, puts the institution on the defensive, allows for less control of a story and often leaves the media and the public thinking that the military has something to hide. The Somalia affair, for example, was allowed to carry on for nearly five years because DND/CF chose to react to the story.

Certainly, since the public affairs policy came into effect in March 1998, more stories have fallen into the pro-active category, but not all of them could be described as “good news stories” such as the Ice Storm. For example, the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal's office, the military's senior military police officer, now issues a news release every time a member or officer is charged with an offence under the *National Defence Act* or the *Criminal Code*. The military takes the first step in informing the media and public of a pending court martial, something DND/CF shied away from altogether before Somalia. Brigadier-General Patricia Samson, the Provost Marshal, says it makes little sense not to make these kinds of incidents public. Except, in some instances, for the names of members charged. The *Privacy Act* protects the identity of any member who has been brought up on charges under the *National Defence Act*. These are usually minor infractions such as

showing up late for parade or failing to have a proper haircut. However, they do include more serious offences such as insubordination or “behaviour contrary to good order and discipline.” Samson says revealing the identity of anyone these infractions would cause unnecessary embarrassment to the member involved. However, the Provost Marshal’s office is working with staff from DND/CF’s Privacy office to make the rule more flexible and allow for more openness.

Samson points out, on the other hand, that the military does not hesitate to publish names of members charged under the provisions of the *Criminal Code*. Still, Samson says the military is trying their best to make the public aware when problems arise.

“We are committed to openness and transparency in the military justice system,” she says. “So we have to demonstrate this in everything we do, including when a member of the Canadian Forces has broken the law. We have nothing to hide.”¹²

Since June 1998, Samson’s office has sent out a monthly report on the number of criminal investigations and arrests that have take place throughout the Canadian Forces. This could be considered the “few bad apples” approach – where blame is assigned to a few individuals, rather than the entire institution. Thus, a few bad apples don’t ruin the whole barrel.

Taking this kind of pro-active approach achieves several objectives. First, DND/CF is trying to demonstrate to the public and the media that it is living up to the openness policy by admitting to problems within the institution. Second, it is showing that it is doing something to correct the problem. Third, it is

condemning any inappropriate behavior by individuals, so the reputation of the entire military is not tarnished. Fourth and most important, the military is trying to minimize any negative repercussions by dealing with a story upfront, rather than prolonging it unnecessarily. In other words, DND/CF tries to make these sorts of stories one-day affairs, rather than allowing them to develop into new “scandals.”

One such example involved an incident in which nine army reserve officers were charged with bringing discredit to the Canadian Forces for their parts in showing a pornographic film during a formal mess dinner in Sherbrooke, Quebec, in September 1998. One officer was responsible for projecting the film onto a Canadian flag, several others apparently exposed themselves to the head table, while another man streaked through the room wearing only shoes and a balaclava. All of this was done in mixed company, with civilian dignitaries present, including the mayor of Sherbrooke. DND/CF Public Affairs issued a news release on March 10, 1999, admitting when the incident occurred and how the officers would be charged. Most media, including the *Ottawa Citizen*,¹³ reported on the story the next day. But, as soon as the story arrived in the media, it vanished. In the end, the officers faced disciplinary action less severe than court-martial. The incident had the potential to turn into a scandal reminiscent of the Airborne regiment – particularly if it was made public through a third party or if DND/CF refused comment or, worse, if someone had a amateur video footage of the incident. However, since the military took the first step and there was no known video, it became a one-day story. While the actions of the individuals were unacceptable,

the focus of the media's scrutiny remained on the "few bad apples" and not on the institution as a whole. And as a bonus, no one brought a Camcorder!

Ralph Coleman admits that introducing an openness policy means from time to time negative stories may come out about the military – especially when many soldiers are not used to speaking with the military. "Bad things will inevitably come out," he says. Indeed, Larry Gordon advised the military that airing dirty laundry could actually be a useful way to produce positive results, especially when advancing a political agenda, such as convincing the federal government to invest more in the Defence budget. DND/CF has used this "sympathy" approach on several occasions.

The most notable instance occurred in 1998, when the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs was examining quality of life issues in the military. During cross-country hearings, individual members of the military – mostly non-commissioned members or low-ranking officers and their spouses – came forward to address parliamentarians about the state of their living conditions, everything from housing, to family life, to pay and benefits. Many complained about the hardship and deprivation they faced in their daily lives while trying to serve their country. Many soldiers and their families lived in aging, sub-standard housing. Since salaries had been frozen for several years and had not kept up to the rate of inflation, many military families were having a tough time making ends meet – some were depending on food banks for basic groceries, while some soldiers worked second jobs to help pay the bills. A military report showed that 25 per cent of people leaving the military were doing

so because they could not support a family.¹⁴ *Esprit de Corps*' Scott Taylor says the quality of life hearings were just another sign of a serious confidence problem within the service.

"They no longer trust their officers to take care of them," he says. "This is the modern-day equivalent of mutiny. In the past, troops rose up and killed their officers. Now, they're obviously not going to do that. But, when they speak out before a committee it has the same effect. They're going outside the chain of command directly to the politicians."¹⁵

Even one retired admiral went public with his dismay over what he heard from soldiers about their deplorable living conditions. The former head of Maritime Command, retired vice-admiral Chuck Thomas said:

The members of the military have become the working poor. We put our troops in jeopardy when we don't give them enough money to support their families. Soldiers have never been rich – but I've never seen it like this.¹⁶

However, the quality of life issue did not become an indictment of the military's leadership. Instead, by allowing members to come forward and air these problems to a parliamentary committee, the military made it a political issue to lobby for more funding from the federal government. The CDS, General Maurice Baril, argued that the root of the problem was successive cuts to the Defence budget during the last decade – from \$12.8 billion and 86,000 regular force personnel in 1990 to \$9 billion and 60,000 people in 1998.¹⁷ All the while, salaries remained frozen and promotions stalled, as the military's workload steadily increased.

The military community has long complained that the Canadian Forces are underfunded and improperly equipped to perform their duties. However, the quality of life issue was significant not for the fact that soldiers and their families were living in near-poverty but that DND/CF was encouraging soldiers to speak freely about these problems. This kind of pro-active approach was clearly a political ploy to build public support for increasing the Defence budget.

"It's used as a sympathy tool," says Lewis Mackenzie. "If the minister is attempting to lobby for more funds within Cabinet, then some of these comments are not only welcome, but encouraged. If these same soldiers were complaining about quality of life a decade ago, it would have gotten them thrown in the Brig! So when you see a repetition of this, you know the minister is delighted because it helps his cause."¹⁸ The same model is often applied to stories concerning equipment problems in the Canadian Forces. Nothing could underscore the need for new procurement than newspaper reports about Sea King helicopters making emergency landings in the Atlantic or when a Labrador search and rescue helicopter crashed in the Gaspé region of Quebec in October 1998, killed all six crew members on board. The same could be said about the Hercules aircraft on its way to East Timor last spring that was forced to return to CFB Trenton due to engine problems. These are just a few of the problems that have gained attention about the air force. The army has suffered even more under the strain of budget cuts. Many soldiers have been posted on successive peacekeeping missions with very little leave time in between, some without proper combat clothing. Canada's participation in East Timor was cut short mainly because the army could not

support the mission – 3,500 fresh troops were needed to replace the contingent and were simply not available. The mission also suffered a shortage of medical and other logistical staff. The military is obliged to report these incidents and all major media often cover them when they occur.

The “sympathy” tactic has been successful to some degree. In the spring of 1998, the Chretien government finally purchased 15 state-of-the-art, EH-101 search and rescue helicopters, along with four British Upholder class submarines, to replace the three out-of-date Oberan submarines. Both projects are expected to be ready for service in spring 2001. In the 1999 federal budget, DND/CF received \$375 million towards improving pay, benefits and housing, which meant a 10-per-cent pay increase for entry-level soldiers and modest improvements to base housing across the country. In the present budget, the government went even further by promising an additional \$2.3 billion dollars over four years.

By using this type of proactive, but cynical approach, the military is manipulating the openness policy. It exposes some of its warts to generate a crisis that results in political action. Individual members are allowed to complain about their living conditions or the state of their equipment in public even on live television because, ultimately, the risk will pay off. However, this approach is not terribly innovative. In fact, military public affairs officers have been trying to lobby for increased government spending for decades. What is, of course, different in the year 2000 is that the Canadian Forces are far more visible, far more active and under far more scrutiny than they were in the 1950s or ‘60s. The pervasiveness of the media, especially television news, the end of the Cold War and the legacy of

the Somalia affair have guaranteed that. So, one would assume that DND/CF, with its new openness policy in place, would be reluctant to go back down the road of taking closed, reactive approaches to issues that gain public attention.

Old habits die hard: The reactive approach lingers

Certainly, the Kosovo conflict demonstrated how quickly the Canadian military could revoke its openness policy in the interest of operational security. While it did eventually ease its restrictions on the media – from no access at all, to allowing the pilots to do television interviews with their masks on – DND/CF took a very cautious and closed approach throughout the operation. With the exception of a few journalists, the restrictions attracted little attention or complaint from the Canadian public. Arguably, most believe there should be some limits on information flow in a time of conflict, if it means protecting the lives of the Canadians involved.

The principle of openness or the lack of it on the battlefield is quite different from the day-to-day operations of the Canadian military on the home front. In the case of the Ice Storm or even the quality of life stories, DND/CF applied its openness policy in a pro-active manner to benefit the institution. Even when some individual members have broken the law or acted improperly, it is still considered safe to come out and admit that someone did wrong and the institution is doing something about it.

However, not all issues have been met with the same response. Despite the new policy, DND/CF continues to use a reactive approach, primarily for stories

that uncover a failure within the system and present a serious challenge the institution's credibility and commitment to change. Using this approach increases the potential for another scandal. When this happens, officials at DND/CF react by saying very little at first. They may try to respond by justifying the issue, using statements such as "this is an isolated incident," or "there's no scientific proof of that." In many cases, an individual member – a "whistle blower" – makes a story public by speaking out about how he or she has been wronged by the military. DND/CF may either reacts by offering support to the individual and pledging to correct the situation or, as is often the case, by casting doubt on the person's credibility and defending the institution's actions. When seriously under siege, the military may even resort to a time honoured tradition – by blaming the media for blowing the issue out of proportion.

The reactive approach helped fuel the Somalia affair. While DND/CF has not been forced to deal with any hazing videos or other technology-driven fiascos since Somalia, it has not always lived up to its promise of openness and transparency either – particularly when whistle blowers are involved. Old habits die hard.

"Isolated incidents:" Reacting to the *Maclean's* articles

The first serious test for the openness policy came when *Maclean's* magazine published a series of articles on sexual abuse and harassment in the Canadian Forces in the spring of 1998. The senior writer for the project, Jane O'Hara, stumbled across the story while completing another cover story on the quality of life issue.

In April 1998, she received a call from Ann Margaret Dickey, a former soldier, who was living with her spouse in CFB Gagetown, N.B. Dickey says two soldiers raped her while she was on her basic training course at St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. When she went to complain about the attack, she says her superior officer refused to investigate and warned her not to take the matter further or she would face disciplinary action. Dickey then quit the military several months later, after suffering continued harassment from her fellow soldiers and leaders. She told O'Hara that her story was not unique. In fact, she knew dozens of other women who had similar stories of sexual abuse and harassment to tell, but that most would be unwilling to go public.

"She said there was no way that if she was in the military she could ever talk about it," says O'Hara. "There were many other women who called me too who said they were sexually assaulted. But most of them were too fearful to talk. So they wished me well and asked me not to name them in anyway."¹⁹

Nevertheless, O'Hara ended up interviewing 13 women, many of whom had left the Forces, for a series of articles on sexual abuse in the military, entitled *Rape in the Military*, the first of which appeared in *Maclean's* on May 25, 1998. All the women said they had been raped or assaulted by male colleagues and, in some cases, by superiors.

For example, Corporal B. Urlacher, as she identified herself to *Maclean's*, was raped by a fellow soldier in 1985 at CFB Borden, a training base north of Toronto but never told anyone about it until O'Hara interviewed her. Urlacher says she kept the attack secret for some many years because she says the military

continues to be a closed culture that not only discriminates against women, but frowns upon whistle blowing of any kind, even if it is legitimate.

In the military, we're trained to be team workers. It's not right to tell on your team workers. So you keep it a secret.²⁰

For women who did try to complain, they usually encountered resistance from both military police and senior officers who often refused to take their complaints seriously. In some cases, the victims say they suffered further harassment and were intimidated with threats of reprisals if they continued to pursue charges against the perpetrators.

Maclean's also interviewed male soldiers who faced similar threats when they tried to defend female colleagues. Retired corporal Sean Cummings, a long-time member of the PPCLI, knew his career was over when he tried to take matters into his own hands on behalf of his sister. Ruth Cummings was an ordinary seaman in the Canadian Navy in 1993 when a fellow sailor allegedly raped her. While military police confined her to barracks in Halifax for her protection, they refused to arrest the perpetrator due to lack of evidence. Sean Cummings was aware of the open hostility towards women in the military. He says he witnessed male soldiers, including instructors, engaging in illicit sex with female recruits on training courses over the years. He told *Maclean's*:

If it was ever made public, it would have brought the government down.²¹

The situation became more personal when Cummings learned what happened to his sister. When he attempted to take Ruth home with him, military

police forcibly removed him from the Halifax base because they were concerned he might try to harm the rapist.

They were more concerned with the person who assaulted my sister than with her. I felt that if they could, they were going to try and hide this thing.

While his sister left the navy soon after, Cummings began to suffer reprisals for his actions, including extra duties and a series of poor performance reviews. With no means for redress, these reprisals spelled ruin for his career. Cummings says the military continues use reprisals as a means to prevent soldiers from speaking out and bringing discredit to his unit or superiors.

Reprisals are the unwritten rule of the military. In my case, they kicked in when I put my rights and my sister's needs ahead of the military process. I could never prove it, but I wasn't going anywhere after that.²²

Another retired member, Chief Warrant Officer Everett Boyle, told *Maclean's* says threats, demotion, intimidation, anonymous phone calls and blackmail have all been used to enforce a two-tiered justice system in the Canadian Forces – one for senior officers and one for the rest. Boyle, an experienced and respected base warrant officer, faced his own reprisals when he tried to defend one of his female non-commissioned members at CFB North Bay. Shortly before his retirement, he clashed with his superiors when he demanded to have the base commander, Colonel Gary George, investigated for allegedly sexually harassing one of his married privates. Boyle says the senior officers who once sang his praises, began intimidating him and even threatened to court-martial him.²³ Meanwhile, police began investigating the female private and her husband and not the perpetrator. Through George has since apologized for the incident, Boyle says

this and a number of more recent cases, are clear indications that the military continues to apply an old credo.

When a commander goes down, you surround him like a herd of elephants looking outward and you stay in position until you're dead.²⁴

While most of the incidents detailed in the *Maclean's* articles occurred well before the new policy was introduced, they certainly did not help add credibility to the military's commitment to reform. The reaction to the articles, from both officials at DND/CF and the military community, was decidedly mixed. In a follow up interview with *Maclean's*, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Maurice Baril, admitted he was shocked and appalled by the allegations.

As someone who wears a uniform, I don't like to be called a rapist – nobody likes to be tarred like this.²⁵

However, Baril chose to take a somewhat pro-active approach to the issue. He acknowledged there was a problem that needed to be fixed and he publicly praised those members who came forward to tell their stories because he says they were helping to improve the institution.

Society is asking us to be better, more professional. We're a very visible national institution. When we go out of line, we do so big time. The numbers become irrelevant to me. What your articles have done for me . . . is that I hope some women who have been abused are not going to take this stuff any more.²⁶

Baril then ordered the Provost Marshal's office to begin investigating each individual case mentioned in *Maclean's*. The National Investigation Service then reported the status of their efforts in their monthly news releases. However, in none of the 26 total cases was anyone found guilty of a charge as serious as sexual assault. In Ann Margaret Dickey's case, not only did military police find

insufficient evidence to lay charges against her alleged perpetrators, but her confidential psychiatric files were faxed to the media by a public affairs officer in June 1998, in an attempt to cast doubt on her mental stability. Dickey held a news conference in Ottawa to draw attention to this attack against her reputation. Military police did charge Captain Luc Plourde with “conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline” for releasing the records “without authority.” However, his name was kept secret during the trial under the provisions of *The Privacy Act* and his summary trial was held behind closed doors with no media present and no transcripts recorded. Dickey says:

This only proves why I have no faith in the military’s justice system. The military, because it is such a closed environment, is rotting from the inside out.²⁷

This story not only solicited attempts to discredit the whistle blowers, but it also caused a few members of the military community to adopt the reactive, “blame the media” approach. With the full endorsement of the commanding officers, several women members went public to denounce the image *Maclean’s* painted of sexual abuse in the military. Corporal Karen Westcott, a 15-year veteran who had served on both army bases and naval ships, accused the magazine of bias and blowing the issue out of proportion.

It’s so unfair of the men to be thought of as predators and us to be thought of as playthings. We don’t deserve this. As for the morale of the military, I think that *Maclean’s* has really set us back.²⁸

Another male leading seaman told a *Maclean’s* reporter that the magazine was deliberating trying to make the military look bad by reporting on allegations of sexual abuse and injustice.

In my experience, I've never heard of women being abused. I'm sure it happens, but I'm also sure that some women invite it. It's another smear campaign to tar the image of the Canadian Forces.²⁹

Lewis Mackenzie goes further. He suggests O'Hara and *Maclean's* tried to exploit the military by using a series of isolated incidents to impose their biased self-interest on the story.

"The criticism just becomes so repetitive," says Mackenzie. "I was critical of those cover stories because not only were they misleading, but there was no acknowledgement of the real scope of sexual harassment in the rest of society. I bet if the percentage of cases in a civilian company of the same size were similar as those in the military, it probably would have earned the CEO a gold medal for outstanding performance. They established a standard so much higher for the military than the rest of society was demanding."³⁰

Even Defence Minister Art Eggleton, in a parliamentary scrum after the articles were published, rationalized the institution's response to the allegations.

I have no information that would lead me to believe it is any worse in the military than it is in society over all.³¹

Whether or not these assaults were isolated incidents or whether the percentage of sexual assault in the Canadian Forces is any lower than the rest of society is not the point. What does matter is the ability or inability of the institution to be open and transparent enough to admit when there are problems. In Jane O'Hara's opinion, DND/CF has failed to do that and therefore the new policy is meaningless.

“There is no new openness,” she says. “They cannot come forward with these things if they’re in, despite everything they’re saying. The military does a lot of public things that look like a new public relations openness. But in terms of actually being of open or offering no threat of reprisals for those who do, it’s just not true.”³²

Challenging the whistle blowers

Even after the policy was introduced, reprisals continue to be used against whistle blowers. In an incident similar to that involving Everett Boyle, Captain Bruce Poulin, a DND/CF Public Affairs officer, came under fire for trying to have a senior officer investigated for sexual harassment. Poulin, a former speechwriter and adviser to General Maurice Baril, says he allegedly witnessed Colonel Serge Labbé sexually harass a waitress at CFB Kingston in July 1996. At the time, Poulin was attending a course at the Canadian Forces Staff College and Labbé was the school’s commandant and, ironically, had just testified at the Somalia Inquiry for his role as commander of the Canadian Forces there in 1993. Poulin wrote a memo detailing the incident and hand delivered it to Lieutenant-General Bill Leach, then the commander of the army. He says he believed he was contributing his “two cents worth” toward cleaning up the military institution.

I was alone, armed only with my belief in the military system. It was a belief, which I understood to mean that this military system also depends on its military members to make it work properly. Failure to do so runs the risk of letting the military system change from being an institution of promise, to an institution of promises.³³

Poulin waited nearly two years before anyone responded to his letter. When he did ask about it, senior officers told him they felt no need to report back to a junior officer and he was assured the situation had been handled. Then, on June 17, 1998, Poulin finally saw something come of his letter but the punishment was directed at him. During his lunch hour, he was summoned back to NDHQ and warned not to speak with any reporters along the way. When he returned, Poulin was informed that his memo had been leaked to the media. He was questioned about it and then his superiors watched his every move for several days after. Though he says officers within the chain of command supported his whistle blowing in private, most did not speak out for him and others were even harsher. In one case, an unnamed senior officer at NDHQ tried to explain to *The Ottawa Citizen* the motives behind Poulin's memo. He said Poulin was either trying to show vengeance towards Labbé for giving him a poor performance review or he was suffering from mental delusions as a result of a car accident in 1985. Poulin says he does not recall ever dealing with the officer who offered that analysis.

While military police eventually cleared Labbé of the charge, citing insufficient evidence, Poulin saw his career opportunities diminish. He was transferred out of the media liaison office where he had daily contact with the national media to a low-profile job working with the military's millennium bug project. He was warned that he could be posted to Bosnia at a moment's notice.

In other words, after criticizing a member of the Cosa Nostra, I am being offered an all-expenses paid trip . . . away from the media, away from my family and close friends. Never mind the message, let's shoot the messenger. Does the only alternative to coming forward reside in a shower

of little brown envelopes, as we have witnessed over the course of the last four years?³⁴

In October 1998, Poulin was slated to address a military conference on ethics in Ottawa about his experience in the Labbé case in a speech entitled, "Conviction versus Protection." However, organizers removed him from the agenda at the last minute when they realized a number of journalists would be in attendance. Poulin says this only proves that a whistle blower in the military still receives little protection, even under a new policy of openness.

One of Poulin's former public affairs colleagues challenges that contention. Major Tim Dunne says the principle of openness in DND/CF does not mean a soldier should go running to the media every time there is something wrong.

"I think Poulin had other channels open to him," says Dunne. "If the chain of command wasn't working, a member can take another route. His MP or even the Governor General. But, I don't agree that going to the media will make things better. He shouldn't have done that."³⁵

However, another officer, Captain Patrick Barnes, ignored that kind of advice and went public with his own story in November 1998. Barnes was a Sea King pilot with more than 20 years service in the Canadian air force. He and a U.S. Navy intelligence officer flew a surveillance mission on April 4, 1997, over the Strait of Juan de Fuca, south of Victoria, apparently to photograph a Russian freighter making its way out to sea. Barnes says as he passed over the vessel he could see a bright red light coming from the bridge area. The light is visible in the photographs they took. After returning to base, both he and the American officer

say they began suffering from severe headaches, bloodshot eyes and later, a loss of vision. The Navy's Public Affairs Office in Esquimalt made the incident public the next day and a spokesperson said an investigation was underway.³⁶ More than a year later, a senior physician with the U.S. military determined that a laser beam, pointed at the helicopter by someone aboard Russian freighter, injured both men. The American officer was treated and compensated as a result. Barnes, on the other hand, was not as fortunate. So, he contacted CBC-TV's investigative program, *the fifth estate*, to tell his story.

Barnes says DND/CF was not prepared to accept the laser beam story. Not only did his injury claim go missing, he says his senior officers refused to believe that his pain and vision problems resulted from the flight. In fact, he says one major accused him of fabricating the story so he could qualify for a disability pension. Canadian military doctors ruled that Barnes' eye problems were caused by an unrelated aneurysm detected well after the 1997 incident. According to the CBC report, while the U.S. military filed a complaint with the Russians immediately, the Canadian military decided against it. Even after the Department of Foreign Affairs urged it to do so, DND/CF deemed such an act inappropriate. Barnes told *the fifth estate*'s Victor Malarak that he was frustrated by DND/CF's attempts to question his credibility. To make his point, Barnes agreed to go public, dressed in his full uniform, on television.

I want to be treated with respect. I don't want to be ignored. It's about time that somebody in the higher chain of command did the job that they're required to do. And that's why I'm talking to you. There's a new public affairs policy. I can speak about what I do. This is something I did and it happened to me. Besides what are they going to do, fire me?³⁷

In making such a powerful statement, Barnes is challenging the true meaning of the openness policy. To what extent can members really talk about what they do? In the case of the quality of life story, members were allowed to complain to the media about the low pay and substandard housing because DND/CF saw potential political gain from it. If Barnes had crash landed his Sea King helicopter during the surveillance mission, he might have been encouraged to speak to the media from his hospital bed about how badly the Navy needs new helicopters. However, DND/CF had little to gain from encouraging him to speak out about how the system failed him. As a result, the military reverted to the reactive approach by questioning both the medical evidence and Barnes' motives for making it public. The same could be said in Poulin's case.

However, these cases also show that whistle blowers in the Canadian Forces are more willing to go public now because they know that if the institution refuses to take their complaints seriously, the media will. In the wake of the Somalia Affair, the national media places a much higher priority on defence issues and will give much wider exposure to these stories than they did a decade ago, especially when there's a whistle blower involved. As a result, an increasing number of service people have come to regard the media as a potential channel for action.

Major Tim Dunne says that is precisely what is wrong with the media's coverage of DND/CF. He says by focusing on stories that portray how a victim has been wronged by the "big bad" institution, the media continues to tarnish the military's image and lower the morale of the troops. While he admits DND/CF

must take greater responsibility for critical news stories, Dunne urges the media to be fairer with the institution.

“Whenever there’s a perceived problem with the military, it’s still treated as a military story, not as something wrong with the greater society. [The media] still paints us with a broad brush.”³⁸

However, it is hard for the media paint anything but a negative picture, when DND/CF continues to act in an evasive and reactive fashion – reminiscent of the Somalia days.

Protecting Canadians from the truth in the Balkans

The Balkans War proved to be one of the most active and dangerous peacekeeping missions ever under taken by the Canadian Forces. While most Canadians were aware of Canada’s involvement in UNPROFOR and Operation HARMONY, thanks to Lewis Mackenzie’s appearance on CNN and other networks in 1992, few realized just how hazardous conditions were for the troops. Part of the reason was that there was little media attention paid to the Canadian Forces. With CNN and BBC providing the bulk of the television coverage, the media tended to focus on what was going on in Sarajevo and other major centres. Without the regular presence of journalists on most missions, DND/CF’s public affairs branch becomes the main conduit of information to both the Canadian public and the media. As evidenced on countless occasions, from the First World War to Somalia, that has proven to be problematic.

Nearly 30 Canadians have died in the line of duty in the Balkans. DND/CF typically informs the public shortly after a soldier has died. The most frequent causes of death have been due to motor vehicle accidents. However, the circumstances around several deaths have been questioned. For example, in August 1992, DND/CF reported that Sergeant Mike Ralph died when his truck ran over a landmine. However, some of his platoon mates told *Esprit de Corps* publisher Scott Taylor they found a remote detonating device in the area left behind by Serb soldiers, suggesting that Ralph may have murdered.³⁹ The following year, on June 18, 1993, Corporal Daniel Gunther was killed when the armoured personal carrier he was driving came under attack. In a news release issued later that day, DND/CF stated that Gunther died when he was struck by shrapnel from a stray mortar round – a weapon which is fired into a general area, not at something specific. However, a board of inquiry found that the weapon used was in fact an anti-tank rocket, which is fired at a selected target. In other words, whoever fired the weapon at Gunther, did so deliberately. What angered Gunther's father, Peter, was the fact that the military waited a year before correcting the version of events and it never tried to find out who was responsible for his son's death.

What really upsets me and my wife is: We had a Somali incident; there was a Somali killed. And you notice all the hoopla that [went] on about that... because a Somali was killed by a Canadian. My son was killed by someone and that's it. There was no outcry here in Canada, because it was never stated that this was a murder. It was politically unacceptable to have a murder of a Canadian UN soldier. That's what the problem was.⁴⁰

Gunther's view is shared by a number of other observers. By downplaying events in which the lives of Canadian soldiers may be jeopardized, many believe

DND/CF was attempting to minimize the negative impacts on public opinion. If, for example, the deaths of Ralph and Gunther were publicized as murders, the federal government may have been forced to scale back its participation in peacekeeping missions and the credibility of the military would have been once again thrown into question.

If DND/CF was in fact deliberately sanitizing the truth in the Balkans, it was able to do so because it had control of the means of information. With very few Canadian journalists on the ground, particularly television crews and with no amateur video footage (at least not anything compared to the damning Airborne videos shot in Somalia), there were no other means of communication available in Croatia or Bosnia to prove otherwise and gain the public's attention.

However, Canadians did stand up and take notice in December 1993 when *The New York Times* broke a story about how a group of Serb soldiers had taken 11 Canadian peacekeepers hostage and subjected them to a mock execution.⁴¹ The public became even more alarmed in May 1995 when they saw footage of a Canadian soldier handcuffed to a telephone pole on their television sets. Captain Patrick Rechner and several other UN peacekeepers had been captured by Bosnian Serbs and were being used as "human shields" against the impending threat of NATO air strikes. The Serbs filmed amateur video footage of the hostages, then sent it to CNN for broadcast around the world. While Rechner was not injured in the incident, the event outraged many Canadians and sparked a parliamentary debate over the dangers of peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia.⁴² When technology, particularly the video camera image, becomes a part of the story, there

are fewer opportunities for governments or militaries to “protect” their people from the truth.

DND/CF's reluctance to publicize the “whole story” in the Balkans may explain why it took nearly three years for the public to learn about one of the biggest battles Canada's military had fought in since the Korean War. In the so-called Battle of the Medak Pocket, in September 1993, soldiers from 2 PPCLI Battalion Group who were protecting the local Serb population came under heavy fire from Croat forces. Contrary to the rules of engagement for UN peacekeeping missions, the Canadians fired back. After four days, the tally stood at four Canadians injured, 30 Croats dead and a withdrawal of the belligerent forces from the area – a stunning success in crude tactical terms. On a significantly smaller scale, Medak Pocket was a chapter in Canadian military history comparable to Vimy Ridge or Ortona. However, instead of publicizing the event at the time, DND/CF did not publicly acknowledge Medak Pocket until 1996 when a number of journalists began doing stories on it.⁴³ CTV parliamentary reporter Roger Smith was one of them producing a seven-minute exclusive on the battle for the network's national newscast. He has a hard time understanding why DND/CF refused to make the story public.

“The military always tells how we (the media) don't ever tell good news stories about them,” says Smith. “Well, Medak was a good story. But, the military, they don't like Canadians to know that their soldiers are actually shooting and killing people and actually in danger. They want to keep up the ‘peacekeeping,

boy scout' image. That's not the reality. Medak was a story of heroes in the face of danger and it should have been told sooner than it was.”⁴⁴

“No medical evidence:” The toxic soil controversy

Since it took DND/CF three years to reluctantly acknowledge a story about a Canadian military success, then that further explains why more than five years went by before an even darker and hazardous chapter in the Balkans reached the public eye. The so-called toxic soil controversy, which became public in 1998, became one of the most serious tests of DND/CF's commitment to openness and transparency with the media.

The controversy, ironically, involved many of the same troops which fought at the Medak Pocket. Shortly after that battle in September 1993, members of 2 PPCLI Battalion Group were assigned to help construct a new headquarters near a bombed-out bauxite plant. The area, known as Sector South, was a destructive mess with downed power lines everywhere, oily black material leaking from transformers and a reddish, dust-like material covering everything, including the soldiers' hands and faces. Many veterans believe the oily material was likely PCBs and the dust contained bauxite and other toxic or radioactive chemicals. The dust was used to fill sandbags to fortify bunkers where many peacekeepers lived for up to week before going off to battle. The chemicals could have affected up nearly 1,200 Canadian soldiers, including not only the Medak Pocket veterans, but also members of a United Nations clean up crew.

The unit's senior medical officer, Lieutenant (Navy) Eric Smith, shared their concern, so he contacted NDHQ requesting an expert appraisal of the soil and the local environment. No one responded. So, when he returned to Canada in early 1995, he began preparing a memorandum warning of the potential exposure to toxic chemicals. It read:

This member has been exposed to Bauxite and PCBs for 6 months while in Croatia... the affected area was littered with many destroyed and damaged transformers, all potential PCB exposures risks. Neither Canada nor the UN provided environment specialist support.⁴⁵

Smith then ordered his staff to distribute the memo so that it could be placed in the medical files of every soldier who was in Sector South. Most of troops were based in Calgary. He believed some soldiers would begin developing medical problems in the near future and the memo would help when they went to claim disability pensions. His prediction proved to be true.

However, when senior officers got a hold of the letter, they warned Smith that his memo was too "alarmist," and should be replaced with a toned-down version. He was specifically instructed to remove any reference to specific chemicals and replace it with a phrase stating how the soldiers "may have been exposed to environmental hazards." Reluctantly, Smith compromised to the pressure and ordered his staff to remove the first memo and replace with the second. He was also given a stern warning not to continue pursuing the matter. His calls for clarity, therefore, led to reprisals.

The fact is I felt personal fear of reprisal for raising this issue of hazardous exposure in the first place. I wanted to do the right thing. But, I was also worried about speaking up.⁴⁶

As Smith had predicted, dozens of soldiers began suffering from unexplained illnesses after returning from Croatia. However, when they went searching for their medical files, neither of Smith's memos could be found. Retired warrant officer Matt Stopford says he only learned about the possible contamination in September 1996, when someone slipped leaked copies of the memos under his door. Stopford, a 22-year-veteran who displayed exemplary courage and leadership at Medak, was discharged from the military in November 1998, after his health began to deteriorate. He now takes close to 20 pills a day to treat stomach cramps and swelling and is now nearly blind in his right eye. Military doctors dismissed his complaints that exposure to toxic soil was to blame, pointing to post-traumatic stress disorder as the likely cause.⁴⁷

Stopford was not the only Medak veteran to receive that diagnosis. Undoubtedly, stress had a major impact on both the mental and physical health of most of the soldiers in Sector South, not to mention the rest of the Balkans. They endured frequent shelling and small arms fire, lived in constant fear of landmines and undertook the horrific task of recovering bodies of victims of ethnic cleansing. Most of the contingent went for weeks living and operating in these gruelling circumstances, often without a break and a chance to bathe. Without facilities to ensure personal hygiene, many soldiers believe they may have become ill by coming into contact with either toxic chemicals from the soil or disease from handling dead bodies.

Despite an growing number of reported cases of illnesses, the Canadian Forces medical system and Veterans Affairs stonewalled many soldiers looking for

help. Stopford, like most of his colleagues, was turned down for a disability pension mainly because doctors could not identify the cause of his illness. Since neither of Smith's memos were attached to their files, doctors could not determine that their condition was related to their service in Croatia. Stopford and other soldiers were at the end of their ropes. Some, still in the service, chose not to come forward fearing not only reprisals, but risking release from the Canadian Forces under the "Universality of Service" rule, which requires every member to be fit for deployment.

However, Stopford chose to speak out as soon as he was out of the Forces. His story first gained attention with the release of the book, *Tested Mettle: Canada's Peacekeepers at War*. Written by *Esprit de Corps'* Scott Taylor and writer Brian Nolan in November 1998, it documents some of the under-reported events of the Balkans conflict, including the battle of Medak Pocket. Later in July 1999, fed up with the lack of action, Stopford held a news conference in Ottawa to draw national attention to his case – the fact that DND/CF knew about the problem, failed to do something about it and, in the process, lost the medical files backing up claims of toxic exposure. All of these factors had a familiar ring to them. Journalists who followed the tribulations of the Somalia Affair sensed *déjà vu* all over again.

"For all of the lessons the military says it learned through four grueling years of the Somalia affair, history now seems on the verge of repeating itself," reported CBC Radio's investigative reporter Michael McAuliffe.⁴⁸

Similar to Somalia, the toxic soil controversy involved soldiers on a peacekeeping mission, missing files and bungling by the brass. However, instead of covering up a murder, DND/CF found itself trying to explain why a number of its soldiers serving their country were sick, why the institution was not caring for them and why their medical files had gone missing. DND/CF's promises of doing business differently were suddenly thrown into question.

For his part, the Chief of the Defence responded quickly by announcing the formation of a board of inquiry to examine whether Canadian soldiers were exposed to environmental toxins and why files went missing. Maurice Baril promised that the investigation would be "the most transparent and open inquiry the Canadian Forces has ever undertaken."

However, DND/CF once again stumbled in the limelight even before the board of inquiry had a chance to begin its work. At a news conference on July 29, 1999, questions arose over the appointment of the board's chair, Colonel Howie Marsh, the army's inspector general. By his own admission, Marsh was a player in the developing scandal having learned more than a year before from the former Canadian commander in Croatia, Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Calvin, of the possible toxic exposure. When pressed on the issue by reporters, Marsh had difficulty explaining why he failed to take action.

At the time, when I arrived in Ottawa in my job, I checked with the medical staff to see what was happening. I discovered at that time, that the medical staff had been posted back into operation and were not handling the issue. The reality was there were other more pressing investigations at the time affecting other soldiers. I don't necessarily do investigations of every investigation going on in the Canadian Forces. There's only myself and two other people. We're not like the American Inspector General who has a

staff of up to about 3,000. You're absolutely right, there was a delay factor... but the Department of National Defence has downsized by 50 per cent in the last five years.⁴⁹

Although he initially praised Marsh's integrity and competence, Baril relented after several weeks of media criticism and appointed another chair, Colonel Joe Sharpe. However, Baril took the opportunity to lash out at the media. "Military bashing has become a national sport," he angrily told the editorial board of *The Toronto Star*.⁵⁰ One of the journalists supposedly doing the "bashing" says the general and DND/CF continue to aim its guns at the wrong target.

"It's not the media who took the documents out of the files," says Julie Van Dusen, a parliamentary reporter for CBC Television, "and it's not the media who are complaining about what's going on in the military. Soldiers are the ones who are complaining about it at great risk."⁵¹

Once it began its work, the Croatia Board of Inquiry for the most part lived up to Baril's commitment of transparency. The board posted weekly summaries of its activities and progress on the D-Net Internet site. Representatives from the RCMP and the DND/CF Ombudsman Andre Marin, were involved in the hearings. The board analyzed war diaries, commissioned studies on what affects the physical and mental health of soldiers on peacekeeping missions and interviewed 90 witnesses, the transcripts of which were included in the final report released on January 22, 2000.⁵²

In the end, the board of inquiry was unable to conclude with certainty that exposure to the red soil or the other suspected toxic chemicals caused the illnesses. While they did rule out the possibility that a water-borne, air-borne or transient

contamination may have played a role, the board said it was doubtful the cause would ever be identified for certain. Part of that reason came from the fact the board did not actually visit the site where the alleged contamination took place – the Croatian government refused them entry. The board did acknowledge what most soldiers already knew – that they had endured very levels of chronic stress. However, it also condemned the way DND/CF and other agencies had treated injured soldiers.

The fact remains, however, that many Canadian soldiers went to Croatia healthy and came back sick or became sick after they returned. In our view, they are sick as a result of their services and regardless of the nature of specific causes of their illnesses, Canada has an obligation to provide for their support and care. The treatment received by many of the injured... has been, at best, arbitrary and certainly inadequate. This situation is a disgrace and cannot be allowed to continue.⁵³

As far as the missing files are concerned, DND/CF says it believes an administrative error was to blame for their disappearance. A clerk is believed to have mistakenly disposed of Smith's first memo from the files but never replaced them with copies of the toned-down version as ordered – though there has never been a definitive answer given.

Accountability versus military bashing

Even for an officer so publicly committed to openness and transparency, General Baril's "military bashing" comments about the media during the toxic soil controversy are very telling. It shows that a high degree of frustration and defensiveness still exists amongst the highest levels of leadership in the Canadian Forces towards media scrutiny. Many others in the institution share that angst. In

a letter to the *Ottawa Sun*, Major Ken Hynes complained that the media's treatment of the toxic soil story was irresponsible because it tarred him and his colleagues with the same brush and left them open to "unwarranted attacks" by journalists.

Our news media . . . clearly enjoy hammering away at those of us in uniform. Our journalists appear so eager to attack the Canadian Forces leadership that they seldom let the facts get in the way of a good (read, bad news) story. This soldier is tired of having his reputation and those with whom he serves, impugned in poorly researched editorial articles. The time has come to stop this unjust crusade and to start rebutting innuendo and slurs with the truth.⁵⁴

What Hynes and other members of the military community fail to realize is that journalists are not necessarily eager to attack the Canadian military per se. In the "slings and arrows" environment of Ottawa, *anyone* in a position of power and profile is open season to the national media. Take, for example, the controversy during the spring of 2000 involving Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart and the so-called "Shovelgate" scandal.⁵⁵ Both the media and the opposition parties in the House of Commons hammered away at Stewart and her department for months for allegedly mismanaging close to a billion dollars of taxpayers money intended for job creation programs. Accountability invites scrutiny. This is fundamental in a democracy.

The Armed Forces are far more visible and arguably, far more important now than at any time since the Second World War. In an ironic way, the military should view the intense media attention it now garners as a badge of honour. Media scrutiny should not be seen as a personal attack on an individual's credibility, but rather as Larry Gordon put it, a challenge for the entire institution.

“There’s no question that the media is very aggressive,” says Gordon. “I can understand the general’s concern about how that might distort what Canadians are getting. What it might do to morale for the men and women of the Canadian Forces. On the other hand, in my own opinion, there is a very legitimate question that media and some other Canadians are asking, did the Canadian Forces learn anything from Somalia. So, it’s not surprising that there would be a lot of scrutiny.”⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Gordon says despite adverse publicity, the Canadian Forces continues to enjoy wide public support. Two public opinion polls tell the tale. In August 1996, in the midst of the Somalia Inquiry, 26 per cent of Canadians felt they trusted the military while 31 per cent indicated distrust. In a Pollara poll conducted in late 1998, support was on the rebound with 75 per cent saying they trusted the military and only six per cent saying they had no confidence.⁵⁷

Gordon goes so far to suggest that the military in Canada has far more public support than those who are trying to hold the institution accountable – the media. Former ABC-TV correspondent and Canadian-born journalist Barrie Dunsmore draws a parallel with the gulf in popular support between the military and the media in the United States.

“I don’t think there’s any question,” says Dunsmore. “If you were take a straw poll anywhere . . . you’ll find there is enormous respect and sympathy for the U.S. military. People’s perceptions of the media are a great deal worse [than the military]. Being a journalist in this country is not one of the most highly respected

jobs you can get. It's somewhere down there with used car salesmen and Congressmen."⁵⁸

DND/CF may be making a sweeping assumption if it believes public opinion is always on its side. Certainly, as more Canadians become aware of the problems facing the rank-and-file, they gain a great deal more respect, sympathy and support, including from critical journalists.

"Nobody dislikes the rank-and-file," says *Maclean's* Jane O'Hara. "I honked my horn when they were in Toronto during the [1999] snowstorm. People support the troops. We don't have it in for them. What we do have it in for is this incredible bureaucracy. The public is sick of the injustices and the excuses."⁵⁹

Buck passing, delaying, document tampering, blaming budget cuts. These are the kinds of excuses the military promised Canadians they would never again hear again after Somalia. But, they did happen again. Critics say so long as DND/CF continues to investigate itself – as it did in response to the *Maclean's* articles on sexual abuse or the toxic exposure controversy – or to impose reprisals on whistle blowers, the military will continue to run into conflict. Eric Smith says the institution still has not learned how to accept criticism, especially from within.

The military itself needs to change, so that officers who raise an alarm do not live in fear of reprisal. Their approach is to single out scapegoats, not to take responsibility. Whether it is the threat of a potential health risk of when someone raises a problem, it must be dealt with overtly. It could be dealt with easily if they conducted an open-minded approach.⁶⁰

Smith identifies an important issue that DND/CF has failed to clarify in the new openness policy. There are still no guarantees for protection for individual soldiers who wish to speak out to the public or the media and, thus a strong sense

that people will be punished or face reprisals for doing so. The Fraser Report also recognized the absence of a member's right to freedom of expression and urged DND/CF to address it forthwith.

However, some journalists are skeptical of the military's ability to tolerant open dissent within its ranks.

"It seems the military will always have that kind of culture," says CBC's Julie Van Dusen, "because you have to have the discipline to go into battle. Someone has to give orders and someone has to take them. Sure, things change, technology advances and people are aware of things going on all over the place, so it's not as insular. But, on the other hand, it's not like working for a corporation. When you're preparing to go into battle, there's got to be leaders and followers. So, I don't imagine that will change."⁶¹

Even still, the Canadian military really has not choice on the issue – it *must* become more open and accountable to the public it serves. The Canadian public has become more aware of its military in the last decade and arguably has become more concerned about the welfare of the troops and more critical of the generals and bureaucracy who lead them. This is partly the legacy of Somalia and partly the increased exposure of Canada's military activities via the media. There have been only a few instances in which technology – the Airborne hazing videos, for instance – has directly influenced government and military decision making during the last decade. However, the pervasiveness of the Canadian media, especially at the political level, assures that DND/CF can and will garner national attention

especially when matters go awry. With Somalia still fresh in the minds of many journalists, the likelihood of other scandals, real or perceived, is inevitable.

In certain respects, DND/CF has followed through on its promise to become more open and transparent. It has certainly become more media savvy – whether it is a news conference room with flashy audio-visual equipment or an attractive Internet site. The institution has been willing to be proactive about certain issues even ones that could attract adverse publicity up to a point. As in the case of aging equipment or certain types of criminal activity, DND/CF is willing to admit and even promote the fact that there are problems within the department. It has only done so as long as there is either a political objective to be gained or a few “bad apples” to condemn.

However, DND/CF has been all too willing to revert to old ways of doing business and adopting a reactive approach when it comes to other forms of potential bad publicity. The toxic soil controversy is just the most recent example of how the institution is still not open enough to admit to its mistakes or to tolerate dissent from its soldiers.

Some military analysts agree that reform in the Canadian Forces is coming about slowly. However, freelance journalist and commentator Gwynne Dyer argues that with a few more years and a generational turnover in the military’s leadership, fundamental institutional change may soon be a reality. However, until that happens, Dyer admits episodes such as complaints about sexual harassment or the toxic soil controversy are inevitable and will continue before matters improve.

"Little bombs are going to explode around them for ages yet," says Dyer. "Because this is a supertanker. Turning it around is five or 10-year operation. But, I think the fundamental corner has been turned because the people who are now in charge are committed to running a professional Armed Forces."⁶²

Dyer's comparison to "turning around a supertanker" is appropriate. The new openness policy is a step in the right direction. However, for an institution entrenched with a tradition of hierarchy and secrecy, fundamental change will come gradually for the Canadian Forces. It will take several more years to determine the real success of the new public affairs policy. Until that time, however, the new strategy will continue to be viewed by many, both inside and outside the military, as simple window dressing.

Endnotes for Chapter 4

¹ CBC. "Information flow in a time of conflict," General Maurice Baril speaking with Jason Moscovitz, on CBC Radio's *The House*, May 8, 1999.

² CBC. "Canadians freeze out media." Neil McDonald reporting. CBC-TV's *The National*, April 18, 1999.

³ CBC. "Canadians freeze out media." April 18, 1999.

⁴ CBC. "All in a day's work for CF-18 pilots," Paul Workman reporting. CBC-TV's *The National*. May 7, 1999.

⁵ CBC. "Information flow in a time of conflict," May 8, 1999.

⁶ Sallot, Jeff. "New military chief pledges openness," *Globe & Mail*, September 17, 1997, A14.

⁷ DND. *The Final Report of the Minister's Monitoring Committee on Change*. February 9, 2000. (http://www.dnd.ca/menu/press/Reports/monitor_com_final/eng/chap2_e.htm): 3-4.

⁸ John Fraser, comments from a news conference at the National Press Theatre, Ottawa, February 9, 2000.

⁹ DND. February 9, 2000: 4-5.

¹⁰ DND, February 9, 2000: 6.

¹¹ DND. *The Maple Leaf*. Vol 1, no. 1. January 1998: 1-2; Vol. 2, no. 1. January 1999.

¹² Brigadier-General Patricia Samson, personal interview, July 26, 1998.

¹³ "Reserve officers face jail time over porn show," by Tim Naumetz, *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 11, 1999: A7.

¹⁴ O'Hara, "Fighting Mad", *Maclean's*, April 13, 1998: 18.

¹⁵ Scott Taylor, personal interview, January 27, 1999.

¹⁶ O'Hara, "Fighting Mad", *Maclean's*, April 13, 1998: 14.

¹⁷ DND, *Defence 2000 Bulletin*, February 1998: 4.

¹⁸ Major-General (Retired) Lewis Mackenzie, telephone interview, January 5, 1999.

- ¹⁹ Jane O'Hara, telephone interview, February 10, 1999.
- ²⁰ O'Hara, "Rape in the Military," *Maclean's*, May 25, 1998: 19.
- ²¹ O'Hara, "Breaking Ranks," *Maclean's*, May 25, 1998: 24.
- ²² Ibid., 24.
- ²³ O'Hara, "Abuse of Power," *Maclean's*, July 13, 1998: 16.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Geddes, *Maclean's*, June 8, 1998: 29.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Blanchfield, Mike. "Just more abuse' from military." *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 19, 1998: A5.
- ²⁸ O'Hara, "Speaking out," *Maclean's*, June 1, 1998: 14.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 20.
- ³⁰ Mackenzie, telephone interview, January 5, 1999.
- ³¹ Thompson, "Mending the military," *Toronto Star*, June 19, 1998: A22.
- ³² O'Hara, telephone interview, February 10, 1999.
- ³³ Poulin, Bruce. "Conviction versus Protection," *Esprit de Corps*, December 1998: 3.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 5.
- ³⁵ Dunne, telephone interview, November 12, 1998.
- ³⁶ CBC. "Pilot injured by laser beam," *The CBC Morning News*, April 8, 1997.
- ³⁷ CBC. "Pilot speaks out," *CBC-TV's the fifth estate*, November 17, 1998.
- ³⁸ Dunne, telephone interview, November 12, 1998.
- ³⁹ Taylor, *Tested Mettle*, 1998: 61-2.
- ⁴⁰ Gunter as cited in Cain, "In the line of fire," *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Summer 1996: 54, 57.
- ⁴¹ Cain, 1996: 54.
- ⁴² CBC. "In captivity," *Prime Time News*, CBC-TV News, May 23, 1995.
- ⁴³ David Pugliese interviewed Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Calvin, about Medak Pocket in May 1996. Roger Smith of CTV News also produced a special feature for its national newscast.
- ⁴⁴ Roger Smith, telephone interview, January 23, 1999.
- ⁴⁵ DND. Memo dated January 23, 1995, written by Lt(N) Eric Smith as cited in Mike Blanchfield's article, "Canadian troops exposed to toxins," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 5, 1998: A3.
- ⁴⁶ Eric Smith, "A dysfunctional family called our military," op.ed. *The Globe and Mail*, July 29, 1999. A15.
- ⁴⁷ Mike Blanchfield, "Canadian troops exposed to toxins," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 5, 1998: A3.
- ⁴⁸ Michael McAuliffe on the appointment of the Croatia Board of Inquiry, CBC Radio's *The House*, July 31, 1999.
- ⁴⁹ CBC. "History repeating itself in toxic soil controversy," CBC Radio's *The House*, July 31, 1999.
- ⁵⁰ "General accuses media of military bashing," *Toronto Star*, July 25, 1999: A1.
- ⁵¹ Julie Van Dusen, personal interview, August 31, 1999.
- ⁵² DND. Board of Inquiry - Croatia: Final Report. January 22, 2000. (http://www.dnd.ca/boi/english/engraph/summary_e.asp)
- ⁵³ DND. Board of Inquiry - Croatia: Final Report: 2.
- ⁵⁴ Hynes, letter to the editor, *Ottawa Sun*, August 15, 1999: 3
- ⁵⁵ "Shovelgate" is a moniker created by Southam columnist Lawrence Martin.
- ⁵⁶ Gordon, personal interview, August 17, 1999.
- ⁵⁷ Gordon, *Openness*, January 20, 1999.
- ⁵⁸ Barrie Dunsmore, telephone interview, August 15, 1999.
- ⁵⁹ Jane O'Hara, telephone interview, February 10, 1999.
- ⁶⁰ Smith, Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Van Dusen, personal interview, August 31, 1999.
- ⁶² Dyer, personal interview, July 24, 1998.

CONCLUSION

Governments will find further justification for managing the media in wartime. In fact, I predict that control of war correspondents – both open and covert – will be even tighter, and that this will be accepted by most media groups because in wartime they consider their best commercial and political interests lies in supporting the government of the day.¹

In an updated edition of his authoritative book on war reporting, *The First Casualty*, Phillip Knightly laments the passage of the traditional war correspondent. Far from the days when they were seen as heroes for reporting the truth in Vietnam, he argues that journalists covering wars today have a simple choice – they either become part of the propaganda machine, or they quit. A rather bleak situation, indeed.

However, Knightly says militaries have learned so much since the days of Vietnam – about the need to avoid the “credibility gap” by providing the media with so little information and limited access to a theatre of operation – that it is nearly impossible to cover a war without depending entirely on official sources. In his view, NATO’s war in Kosovo was the final death knell. At first glance, the conflict should have been a feast for information junkies, a triumph over the fog of war. The international media were treated to a multitude of news conferences and briefings from the likes of Jamie Shea, NATO’s chief spin doctor in Brussels, and his counterparts at the Pentagon and White House in Washington, at the Ministry of Defence in London, not to mention at NDHQ in Ottawa. Some 2,700 media people were on the ground with the troops as they entered the Serbian province. If this was not enough, all the latest technological wonders were also available for use – everything from the satellite phone to the Internet.

Nevertheless, Kosovo was, in the words of British war historian Alistair Horne, “the most secret campaign in living memory.”² The public was served up a feast of meaningless, deceitful words and images about the state of the operation. It was only revealed months later that the Kosovo Liberation Army had, in fact, been trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, had provoked the Serbs into committing atrocities, and had not been disarmed by NATO troops, despite assurances to the contrary. Pilots had, in fact, targeted civilians. And a handful of bodies were discovered in mass graves, nowhere near the 500,000 ethnic Albanians that were supposedly murdered by the Serbs. Knightly says the nature of war allowed the military to maintain a stranglehold over the information, or misinformation, that the public was receiving. Since the battles were waged from the air by high-altitude bombing runs, only civilians on the ground really knew the truth. Knightly explains the evolution of the military “openness.”

What had changed between Vietnam and Kosovo? Basically the military has won its 150-year battle with war correspondents: journalists want to tell the public everything; the military’s attitude is “Tell them nothing till the war’s over, then tell them who won.” Defeated by the military, governments and spin doctors, war correspondents now face an agonizing choice. If they can no longer be heroes, do they want to continue as propagandists, subservient to those who wage the wars?³

In a very real sense, media-military relations in war have gone full circle. In spite of the evolution of CNN and the drive for openness, the media has ended back where it was before the Crimea – barred from the battlefield and almost entirely dependent on official sources to report on wars. Knightly predicts the situation will only get worse in the future. William H. Russell would be ashamed.

Of course, Knightly makes this assessment in the context of war. How, then, does this apply to media-military relations in peacetime and in Canada? Certainly, any journalist who was in the business of war reporting 50 years ago would feel somewhat out of place today. In the Second World War heyday of the war correspondent, reporters such as Charles Lynch and, senior military officers such as Richard Malone, worked and shared in the dangers and discomforts of war and, as a result, developed a special bond that continued long after the war had ended. Some of these people came to consider one another friends making for positive working and social relations, but not necessarily leading to unbiased journalism. Tough questions are hard to ask a fishing buddy.

However, those bonds gradually deteriorated between the 1950s and the 1980s, when the Canadian military was only a blip on the media's radar screen. The Forces spent most of their time performing its Cold War duties in West Germany and participating in relatively low-profile UN peacekeeping missions well out of view from the Canadian public. Distance, limited resources and a lack of interest in defence activities discouraged many news organizations from sending journalists to cover the military's active work.

Without the presence or interest of correspondents, and the communication technology that go with them, the Canadian military operations lacked the checks and balances to make its leaders wary of public scrutiny of their performance and it became much more likely for questionable activity to go undetected. The 1968 beating death of a policeman in Cyprus by a drunken Canadian peacekeeper was one such example. The soldier may have been punished for his behavior, but the incident

itself was never made public. With virtually no media presence in Nicosia, certainly no CNN, the incident has become a footnote in history.

Nearly 30 years later, in Belet Huen, Somalia, history almost repeated itself. The shooting death of Ahmed Aruush on March 4, 1993, and the murder of Shidane Arone two weeks later were also on their way to disappearing into the ether. DND/CF, led by then-deputy minister of national defence, Robert Fowler, went to great lengths to keep the issue in the shadows, far from the view of the Canadian people. However, the coincidental presence of a journalist in Belut Huen and, later, the courage of such whistle blowers as Major Barry Armstrong, ensured that the events in Somalia did become public.

It was only inevitable that the Canadian military would be thrust into the limelight when it was called upon to take on more responsibility and more high-profile missions after the end of the Cold War. Beginning with the Oka standoff and the Gulf war, then the volatile peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia, DND/CF attempted to cope with the ever-present media spotlight. However, when the murder in Somalia occurred, DND/CF found itself in a situation not unlike Dieppe – unprepared, outgunned and unaccustomed for the degree of scrutiny that lie ahead.

However, wise generals learn from their tactical errors. They develop new strategies and come up with new methods to avoid making the same mistake twice. The United States certainly learned from the trauma of Vietnam by now devoting as much time developing strategies on how to handle the media as they do on actual combat. Canada's military has learned to be students of today's media culture as well.

Public affairs officers learn the tools of the trade on specialized courses at Fort Mead, Maryland, and Cornwall, Ontario. The media liaison office at NDHQ has a wall of television sets where an officer sits and carefully monitors major networks – CNN, CBC Newsworld, CTV Newsnet – along with radio broadcasters and daily newspapers for any news related to the military. That is not unlike most organizations today, government or private. Media relations are an integral part of the planning process at the highest levels in DND/CF where public image ranks high on the priority list.

It is not surprising, then, that the Canadian military has adopted these principles from their American cousins at the Pentagon, and British allies in the Ministry of Defence, on how to manage the media:

- a. to appear transparent and eager to be open;
- b. to avoid summary repression or direct control of the media;
- c. to nullify rather than conceal undesirable news;
- d. to control emphasis rather than fact;
- e. to balance bad news with good, and
- f. to lie directly only when certain the lie will not be found out – at least during the course of the war.

This last statement implies that while the military can mislead the public in the short term, the truth will eventually come out. CNN, the Internet and all the other technologies ensure that. So, that is why these principles do not encourage covering-up mistakes – they encourage controlling mistakes until the time is right to admit to them or, until the media catches on. That is why public affairs policies are more

accurately described as media *strategies*. DND/CF's public affairs policy, introduced in 1998, fits the bill.

By making openness and transparency the new watchwords DND/CF appears to be moving in the right direction. As Larry Gordon argues, the policy is quite unique among other federal government departments in that it allows individual members the privilege of speaking directly to the media about what they do – at least in theory. It gives the perception that the military has nothing to hide and that no one is being repressed from speaking out.

For the most, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Maurice Baril, has displayed many of these principles in his actions. Under situations of great stress, he has demonstrated frankness and humility in the public eye. It's a welcome sign for many Canadians who recall the days of General Jean Boyle and his damning testimony at the Somalia Inquiry.

Even some Ottawa-based journalists admit there have been modest improvements in the way DND/CF communicates with them. John Ward says the policy allows journalists to establish a personal contact within the organization, something that can benefit both sides in the future. He says it makes it a great deal easier if a reporter can pick up a phone or have lunch with a source to find out what's really going on or to confirm whether a rumour is true not.

Regular media briefings are now held at NDHQ on a regular basis in order to bring reporters up to speed on the status of CF operations around the world and to provide updates on investigations, if any, that are ongoing. This has allowed journalists a chance to ask questions face-to-face with the senior DND/CF officer or

official responsible. Sometimes these briefings have seen hostility between journalists and generals. However, this kind of get-together allows reporters and officers to establish a regular conduit of information and it reduces the impression that the only time the military speaks to the media is in reaction to something. Other innovations such as DND/CF's media liaison hotline and the revamped D-Net Internet site act as useful sources for journalists and the public at large.

Like other militaries, though, DND/CF is using the principles of openness and transparency to advance a deeper political objective. Soldiers are encouraged to speak out against their living conditions only if it will attract money to the defence budget, not simply for the sake of airing dirty laundry. However, some members have gone ahead and done exactly that under the new policy. Others remain reluctant to speak out about anything that puts the military in a bad light, such as how the military system continues to punish dissenters by threatening reprisals.

Meanwhile, some journalists say DND/CF has not yet established a mutual trust with the media. Veteran journalists such as Jane O'Hara say the military is being hypocritical when it talks of transparency while public affairs officials continue to violate the *Privacy Act* by tracking reporters who file Access to Information requests with the department.

The promise of making the Canadian Forces a more open and transparent institution has, in many ways, come about in more esoteric, rather than fundamental ways. The notions have not yet become engrained in the military ethos. Knightly doubts it ever will. It is difficult to envision a military organization that would agree to conducting all of its activities entirely in the open for the public to see. The

concept runs contrary to the military's traditional belief in secrecy. However, what must be kept in mind is that there is a legitimate line to be drawn between secrecy for the sake of operational security and secrecy for secrecy's sake in order to avoid bad publicity.

In a society that demands maximum visibility, public institutions must rise to the challenge and be responsive and proactive to the media. An organization that refuses does so at its peril. Therefore, the Canadian Forces must continue to apply the openness and transparency motto more aggressively. They must be proactive about going to the media with as many of its activities as possible, even the embarrassing ones. With a media and public that has grown accustomed to hearing or reading about problems within DND/CF, the military is likely to have more success if it avoids giving the impression of a cover-up and takes the first step by going public.

The key is having an informed media. Journalists must continue to follow DND/CF's activities closely on a daily basis, by attending news conferences and briefings, and by filing Access to Information requests on every related subject. No doubt this already keeps the Public Affairs machine humming at NDHQ in Ottawa. However, the media has to take extra steps to avoid becoming cogs in that machine.

The first step is to educate journalists on the art of military reporting. This can be achieved by holding seminars organized by media outlets or professional journalism associations, such as the Canadian Association of Journalists. The topics would range from military organization and culture, such as rank structure and terminology, to a history of war reporting, and a discussion with DND/CF public affairs officers and other defence journalists. These sessions should be a requirement

for any journalist assigned to the defence and military beat, and be sponsored by a media organization or an external institution – not by DND/CF – thus avoiding any ethical or conflict of interest issues.

The next step is to demand access to DND/CF establishments and activities. This would be more challenging to achieve. The department could establish an accreditation system, similar to the Parliamentary Press Gallery, where journalists are recognized for the work they do and given access to certain facilities. This could work at NDHQ in Ottawa along with certain bases and training establishments. Understandably, this would raise safety and security concerns, so public affairs officers should escort media people around. But, staff should only be used as a resource, not as the filter through which the public will be allowed to see the military's activities. Any journalist given accreditation should be required to have some experience and training, such as a course or seminar, before being approved.

And finally, as part of this process, the military must also be part of the solution. While officers and members get some training in public affairs, in particular, what to do and what not to do when approached by a reporter, they rarely see first hand how and why the media play a role in covering and, sometimes, criticizing DND/CF's activities. Every effort should be made to arrange for an exchange program where officers, say, at the captain level are required to visit and observe the workings of a newsroom as part of their professional development requirements. Journalists and reporters should be encouraged to meet informally to learn more about their respective trades, not to become fishing buddies, but to help foster a better work relationship on behalf of the Canadian public.

In that vein, author Miles Hudson offers this analysis in the context of present-day war coverage in Britain in his book, *War and the Media: A Modern Searchlight*.

Military commanders must learn to see the media as potential allies rather than as enemies. Often the journalist will find themselves alongside the soldiers, sailors and airmen, sharing the dangers and discomforts of war; this will draw them closer together as people. But, they can never regard each other as 'friends' in the conventional sense as their different duties may suddenly diverge dramatically. With modern technology, journalists cannot be excluded any longer. Public relations will be an essential, perhaps the most essential, element of any future conflict. The media will influence events. Surely it must be best to try to use, not antagonize, it.⁴

Hudson argues here that with the development of rapid and instantaneous communications today, it is impossible for militaries to avoid media scrutiny of their operations. It does no good for militaries to function in a vacuum and carry out their activities completely ignorant of the public's, especially the media's, interest in them.

Certainly, the new public affairs policy attempts to address that issue. But, it will take much more than a new policy written on paper or passing references to it by generals to make it work. Although senior military officers say they are committed to making the new strategy a success, a generational turnover may be necessary throughout all levels of the military's leadership in order to make it so. In 20 years time, senior officers will have spent their entire careers working under this ethos and lived their entire lives in the television and Internet culture. Two things can happen – they will either be practicing a truly open and transparent relationship with the media, built on mutual trust and cooperation, or they will still be trying to manage and manipulate the media and, continue to foster a climate of distrust and acrimony, as Knightly predicts.

To achieve the former and avoid the latter requires a serious commitment to change. USA Today's Johanna Neuman argues that any reform must be guided by strong and effective leadership:

Technological powers and media savvy are no substitute for character. No matter what technology defines their era, leaders who value words and exhibit backbone will find that the public and history judge them kindly.⁵

Regardless of how a message can be crafted and presented to the public, people respect leaders with credibility. No matter how credible those leaders may be, they need a vigorous and unhampered media challenging their decisions and motivations.

In the context of war and in spite of technological advances, according to Phillip Knightly, the war correspondent has become nothing more than a cog in the propaganda machine. If that is the case, then leaders will go on fighting wars, manipulating the truth and misleading their populations. While Knightly has resigned himself to this fact, it does not have to be this way, especially in peacetime and in Canada. The media must continue to resist manipulation from the military – and the military must stop trying to control the agenda. Instead, those who cover Canada's military must continue to work actively, independently and responsibly to keep the public informed of its activities. Those who lead Canada's dedicated Armed Forces must be more accountable to the public they serve and be willing to work the media to expose the truth – warts and all – in war or in peace.

Endnotes for Conclusion

¹ Knightly, 2000: 23.

² Horne as cited in Knightly, 2000: 23.

³ Knightly, 2000: 23.

⁴ Hudson, 1998: 321.

⁵ Neuman, 1996: 265.

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