

## Joint Services Warrant Officers' Course

### Chapter 7 – Media and the Military

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# MEDIA AND THE MILITARY

## Media Doctrine

### Publications

The doctrine for *Media Operations* is contained in JWP 3-45. JWP 0-10 *UK Doctrine for Joint and Multinational Operations* (UKOPSDOC) contains a section about Media Ops in Chapter 6, Operational Level Planning Considerations. JWP 3-00 *Joint Operations*, which is the capstone document for the operational level planning and conduct of campaigns, also contains a section on Media Ops. *Information Operations* doctrine can be found in JWP 3-80.

### Definitions

The following definitions are from JWP 0-01.1

- **Information Campaign** – Co-ordinated information output of all Government activity undertaken to influence decision-makers in support of policy objectives, while protecting one's own decision-makers;
- **Information Operations** – Co-ordinated actions undertaken to influence an adversary or potential adversary in support of political and military objectives by undermining his will, cohesion and decision-making ability, including his information, information based processes and systems while protecting one's own decision-makers and decision-making processes;
- **Media Operations** - That line of activity developed to ensure timely, accurate and effective provision of Public Information (P Info) and implementation of Public Relations (PR) policy within the operational environment, whilst maintaining OPSEC.

### Relationship between Media Operations and Information Operations

MOD's contribution to the wider, cross-governmental Information Campaign has two related but distinct elements: Media Operations and Information Operations (Info Ops). In very broad terms, the aim of Media Ops is to inform, whilst the aim of Info Ops is to influence an adversary. The relationship is shown below at Figure 1.

## The MOD Contribution

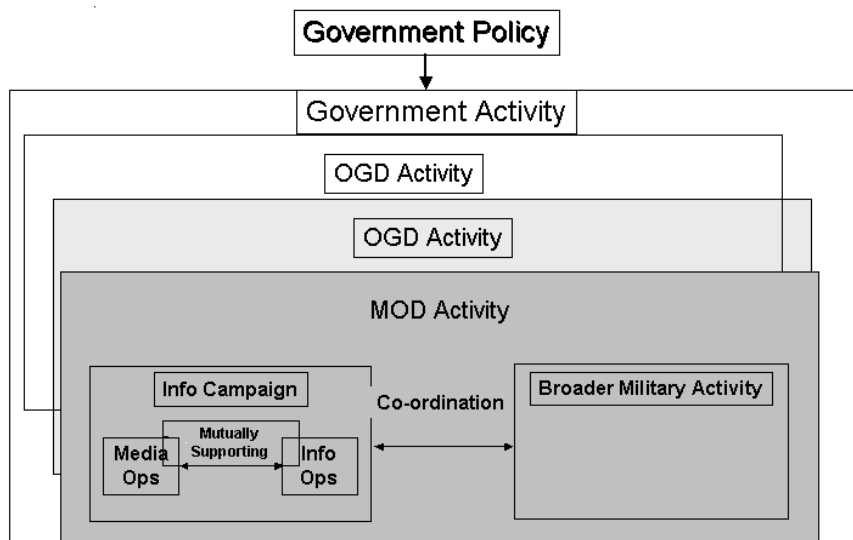


Figure 1: The Cross Government Information Campaign.

## Summary

Only if the military understand the needs and working methods of the media can we manage the power of information to our mutual benefit. By developing understanding, the barriers of mistrust can be broken down, which have often been the cause of discord and animosity in the past. Consider this quote from a lecture by Dr Stephen Badsey to the HCSC:

**'It may help you to regard the media on operations as rather like the weather. Sometimes it is bad, sometimes good, but it is always present and cannot be ignored. It is predictable, but not absolutely. It is not under your control. But a capable commander will know how to use it to his advantage.'**

## Media Interview Techniques

*"My own Press conferences convinced me that television had added an extra dimension to the conduct of modern warfare: commanders in the future will have to be trained to handle it, but also to allow enough time and resources for it to be used to the fullest advantage."..... "For someone like myself, who had deliberately kept a low profile....., it was a strange and unnerving experience to stand in front of the cameras. Yet television is something that the modern commander cannot ignore."*

*General Sir Peter De La Billiere - Storm Command*

*"..lessons in the care and feeding of the media. You do not have to answer every question put to you. They pick the questions; you get to pick the answers. And I learnt the hard way .. to aim beyond the audience of one who is asking the question. Shape your answer, instead, to the audience of millions who will be watching you."*

*Colin Powell - A Soldier's Way*

## Introduction

However skilled, without a clear understanding of why the military need to provide the media with information and the rules governing this process, an officer cannot become an effective spokesman for the operation, his Commander or the Armed Services. It is only when he comes from a position of knowledge that an officer can decide when and when not to give interviews, background briefings or to hold a press conference.

It is often the implication of what is said, rather than the actual words, that leads to misunderstanding. Clear directives are required which include 'News and Media Briefs'. Operational planning and good staff work provide the foundation from which any spokesman can work.

Most officers are unfamiliar with appearing in front of television cameras, talking on the radio, giving statements to newspaper or magazine journalists, hosting press visits, giving interviews to the press en masse, providing background briefings, setting up or chairing press conferences and providing senior commanders with the advice, support and detailed background information they require when facing a potentially hostile media pack. Training is therefore highly desirable.

Every interview should be seen as an opportunity to put over our position to a wide audience; one that we could not reach by any other means. Some basics:

- Credibility. You should project this above anything else. As a spokesman you are in the truth business; you do not have to offer gratuitous information or give away operational information but do not lie or bluff.
- Level of Spokesman. Commanders may wish to delegate the level at which any statement is made, either through a spokesman or to an officer or soldier who has personal experience of the incident involved. This decision as to who should speak can be critical to the credibility with which any statement is accepted.

- Clearance. Care has to be taken to ensure that a common line is taken throughout the chain of command at both military and political levels. Clearance to speak to the media has to be obtained prior to any interview; this may be implicit in the operation or your appointment. Rules are laid down by each service and in Queens Regulations; however, every officer should regard himself and his service personnel as potential spokespersons. In these circumstances the basic rule is that:

“ Officers may speak about matters of fact, concerning their own area of responsibility”

A media interview, when conducted properly, can be an excellent opportunity to tell the Services' story and counter propaganda. Although each interview will vary depending upon factors such as format, audience and location, basic techniques for more effective media interviews can be learned.

An effective interview depends on your ability to achieve confidence, control and credibility, all of which come from preparation and practice. To give a successful interview, you need a clear, concise process to get yourself ready. This guide will provide you with a basis for getting yourself properly prepared to give interviews. While it is by no means all encompassing, this advice and your own preparation should help you give successful media interviews.

### **Pre-Plan and Prepare**

Confidence comes through knowledge, both of the subject matter and of the context of the interview. You should be the subject expert; if you are not, perhaps someone else should be the spokesman.

Without the back up of a Media Operations Directive and 'News Briefs' etc. you will not know what you can say or what you want to say, so get the operational planning and staff work right first.

Prepare yourself thoroughly for the interview by:

- Working through the information you need to handle the interview. You may know the subject well, the topic may even be your job, but don't assume every question you're asked will be easy to answer.
- If it involves an incident, get answers to the `who, what, when, where, why and how` from those involved.
- Finding out the context of the programme. Establish the duration of the interview and how much of it is likely to be used in the programme. Who will interview you, what is their background? How do they normally interpret/present information? What type of programme are you appearing on (live, taped, edited, unedited, remote, etc.)? How will the interview be conducted (live/taped/outdoor/studio/down the telephone, etc.)?
- Identifying the audience and what you wish to say to them. This should be in the form of a Key Message, expressed in a succinct form, which positively promotes the essence of what you are doing. This allows you to focus on the core message. Long 'lines to take' and 'Q & A briefs' can have the effect of sometimes obscuring the main issues and encouraging defensiveness in the way in which you present yourself. The Key Message may have a limited number of key points to support it.

Decide what opportunities this interview offers you to make positive points about the situation. If you conclude there are no potential benefits, then respectfully decline the interview but remember that interviews do offer an opportunity to tell your side of the story to large audiences and good relationship with media will increase the chances of fair treatment during times of attack or controversy. However, there will be times when it becomes necessary to issue a straightforward factual statement rather than hold you as a hostage to fortune by giving an interview.

Rehearse, because, although you will never foresee all the angles, you will at least have practised what you want to say.

## **Define the Purpose**

Granting an interview for the sake of answering a media request may be unproductive. It could just meet the reporter's demands and concerns but may do nothing for you or your unit. Therefore, you should enter into every media interview with a clearly defined objective and agenda.

Giving yourself a Mission and carefully analysing it will give you an agenda and lead to the key messages you will want to put over. Make sure your messages are short, memorable and positive. Think of them as sound bites or rather, as headlines. Use crisp, high-impact words or phrases in statements that emphasise the positive. Be aware that positive messages can come out of negative events. If you're getting to the bottom of an issue, or resolving a problem - these are positive.

## **Analyse the Issues**

Your strategy isn't complete without anticipating the reporter's questions and controversies that could arise in the interview. The public wants answers to the hard questions, so it's the reporter's job to ask them. You therefore need to anticipate the hard questions and plan your answers.

You need to know what other media outlets have already published and what angles are being taken on the story as you may need to correct misconceptions. You should also check what other interviews have been given on this topic and what has been said.

Keep up-to-date as the story unfolds. If possible, get access to the wire services so you keep as current as the journalists.

## **Establish a Rapport**

Remember that the interviewer wants the most professional product he can get and may value the access you provide to an essential part of his story. It should therefore be possible to strike up some rapport with the journalist as you talk through the subject before the formal interview. Get it right and the interview will be off to a good start. You have the information; you potentially have the means to control the interview.

An interview with the news media can be polite and conversational if you follow a few basic guidelines. Agree on ground rules before the interview. If you can't talk about an issue because it's truly classified, tell the reporter. You may still be asked about the issue, but at least the reporter is not trying to base an entire interview on something you cannot discuss. It is your interview as well as the reporter's; therefore, you should establish the time, location, setting, etc.

Often the journalist carrying out a quick interview for news will have little prior knowledge of the incident before he rushes to your location. To help you get your point across as quickly and coherently as possible before he rushes away to edit his footage or file his story, find out what the type of programme is, how long do they want - 5 minutes or a short sound bite for the news, and what do they want to start off by asking you (i.e. what is the first question); they may even be open to suggestions!

If possible, ask to use a location that supports your key message, remembering that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Ensure that the interviewer is aware of your level of competence to discuss the matter in hand. He is unlikely to be conversant with the military chain of command. Be aware of the difficulties in discussing matters:

- With security or operational implications?
- Involving Boards of Inquiry, Courts Martial or where civil action is pending?
- Involving casualties or a serviceman's family?

While both the journalist and the interviewee need to co-operate to produce a good final product, something both will be keen to achieve, at your level there is no such thing as "Off the Record". The

best practice is to consider everything you say to a reporter as “On the Record”. Do not say anything you would not want to see or read in the news.

## **Image**

The first 10-15 seconds are vital. First impressions matter. Consciously or sub-consciously, viewers and listeners very quickly decide whether or not they like someone, and whether they believe them. Think of ‘image’ in two ways:

- Always appear in uniform but wear what is appropriate for the circumstances of the interview.
- Consider what ‘image’ you are trying to portray. i.e. “Tough, capable force” or, (perhaps) “Caring employer”. It will affect the way you carry out the interview.

Look your interviewer in the eye rather more than you would in a normal conversation, in particular if you are being challenged. The audience will gauge your personality and the value of your comments from the expression of your eyes and face. A person who is relaxed, animated and interested will appeal to the viewer much more than one who is ill at ease and poker-faced.

Remember that television particularly, is a very personal medium. You are a stranger ‘allowed into the home’, and your audience views you in that way. Your personality, not your official appointment, will convince the viewer and so a friendly conversational approach is best. You will project yourself better if you speak up a little, it automatically gives more ‘light and shade’ to your voice and makes it more interesting.

## **Conducting the Interview**

Keep what you say:

- Short and to the point.
- Succinct - do not over-explain or over-qualify what you say.
- Positive and upbeat - talk about the solutions rather than the problems
- Simple. Avoid service acronyms, jargon and technical terms - use analogies to explain technical information in a way that anybody can understand.

Do not over-react or get angry - if the reporter starts arguing with you during the interview, keep your composure. You’ll appear defensive if you argue. Instead, state your point again and bridge to one of your messages. There are times, however, when you need to step up to a situation and maintain control of the interview. If the interviewer becomes more hostile, remain firm and composed. Above all, do not allow yourself to become rattled or angry; this merely plays into his hands and you will lose control of the interview.

Try to use personal experience with which the reporter can’t argue. Not only does it bring your story alive but it reinforces you as the expert.

Always answer honestly. If you don’t know the answer to a question, if the answer is classified, or would invade someone’s privacy, say so. Then bridge to your message. Never say, “No comment”. To the public, this immediately conveys the impression that you are hiding something.

## **Answering the Questions**

Write down your key messages. This will help imprint your responses into your mind and will provide you with notes for use during telephone and face-to-face interviews.

The most common mistake committed in interviews is to become so fixated by the question that you lose sight of your key message points and become purely reactive. Don’t feel obliged to answer every question specifically. The most effective spokespeople listen to the bigger issue behind each

question, and address that issue as they choose. A useful technique is to “Answer, Bridge (and then) Communicate”, this gives you control. It’s a way of downplaying the question, then saying what you really want to say - your messages.

An alternative is to “block” a question completely; only do this where there is a good reason to do so. You should aim to address the question briefly and then use it as a springboard to smoothly bridge to your chosen point. If you must block a question, don’t simply say “no comment”, or “I can’t answer that”. Instead, explain why you can’t answer it and bridge to a topic or message point that is important to you. The guideline is: “Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution”.

Unlike a typical conversation that builds to a conclusion based on supporting statements, you should try to state your conclusion (your key point) first, then follow up with more details if time allows. Such “headlining” is critical to ensure that your most important points are made during interviews. Look at newspaper stories. The main points are all laid out in the first paragraph, which can usually stand on its own.

Do not let anything go by default. If the interviewer makes a wild or inaccurate assertion, correct his statement or turn it by a remark such as ‘We must put this matter into perspective’. Interviewers have to rely upon researchers to give them facts to which you probably have normal access. If an interviewer makes a mistake of fact and you put him right, you gain an advantage, but do not be smug about it. However, should you fail to correct him, you will leave the audience believing that what was said is true.

### **Review Your Performance**

Once you’ve completed the interview, review the finished product. Did you get your message across? Were your views presented fairly? What could you have done differently?

History has a habit of repeating itself. Chances are you will do another interview on the same topic or with the same reporter again. What you learn from one interview can be applied to subsequent interviews.

### **Conclusion**

Whatever ability you have to interest, persuade, inform or entertain, comes from within yourself. Training helps to bring out and develop your skills and to free you from the uncertainty and self-consciousness induced by unfamiliarity with the medium. It often helps to watch and analyse programmes, in order to judge other people’s effectiveness and to learn from them. However, there is no substitute for thorough preparation and as much practice as possible.

Finally:

**“Concentrate on what you want to say - don’t become mesmerised by what you might be asked”**