

# **Media Skills Training**

**To ensure your “shot” downrange hits  
its “target”**

**Capt. Marisol C. Zammit  
Public Affairs Officer**

**“The only good reporter is a dead reporter.”**

**“The media is the enemy!”**

**PURPOSE OF THIS CLASS IS TO  
FAMILIARIZE YOU WITH THE MEDIA AND  
TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND  
YOUR ROLE WHEN YOU COME IN  
CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA**

**"As with our legislative initiatives, our best spokesmen and women are, and will continue to be, individual Marines demonstrating their capabilities and speaking for and about their Corps."**

**General C.C. Krulak, USMC ret.**

# Why should you talk to the media?

- American public opinion directly influences all levels of warfare.
- We have intrinsic value to the Nation and our existence is dependent on the will of the American people.
- If we don't tell our story, no one will.
- The media will tell the story with or without our input...

**REMEMBER, WHAT THE PUBLIC  
THINKS DEPENDS ON WHAT THE  
PUBLIC HEARS**

**TELL THEM YOUR STORY**

**Need for timely, accurate information**

# DOD Policy

- **Information to the public – free of bias, censorship or propaganda.**
- **Will not classify to protect government from embarrassment.**
- **Will not release info:**
  - **Matters of national security**
  - **Harm lives and privacy of the service member.**

# **We tell the Marine Corps story to:**

- **Preserve the nation's faith and trust in the Marine Corps.**
- **Good stewardship of taxpayer's dollars.**
- **To uphold our accountability to the American public.**
- **To comply with DoD policy of, "Maximum disclosure with minimum delay."**

# The “Balancing Act”

**PUBLIC'S  
RIGHT TO  
KNOW**

**PUBLIC'S  
NEED TO  
KNOW**

**Maximum Disclosure, Minimum Delay**

**Security - Accuracy - Propriety - Policy**

# Media Capability

- **Civilian technology permits live coverage 24 hours a day without any dependence on military support.**

# **Influence of Mass Media**

- **Satellite/Digital Revolution**
- **Media is independent on the battlefield**
- **24-hour news cycle**

# Impact of Media

## Gulf War:

- “Perception is reality.”

## Post gulf-war:

- 24-hour news cycle
- “No one wins unless CNN says we win.”

# Understanding the media...

## Limitations

- Short deadlines
- Inexperienced reporters
- “If it bleeds, it leads.”

## What sells:

- Prominence
- Proximity
- Conflict
- Emotion - death
- Oddity
- Sex
- Suspense
- Progress
- Current Trends
- Impact and timeliness

# Should you engage?

- What is the reporter's purpose?
- What is my purpose?
- What is the reporter's background/reputation?
- Consult with your boss & PAO.
- Are you the right person?

# Role of the PAO

- Advise.
- Research.
- Interview preparation/rehearsals.
- Arrange the interview.
- Lay down ground rules.
- Act as liaison.
- Provide after-action, follow-up.
- Play the “bad guy.” (murder board, read-aheads)

# Types of Interviews

- **OPPORTUNITY** (“door stop” or “on the fly”)
- **GENERAL** – arranged.
- **ACCIDENT, INCIDENT, CRISIS or CONTINGENCY.**

# The Bottom Line...

- It's the right thing to do.
- We have to.

**Tell the  
Marine Corps' story**

Remember: What you say or do could  
have an impact on the world

**“You can save the world;  
but if no one hears about it,  
it didn’t happen.”**

**“Share your courage with  
the world.”**

# Remember:

- The media is not the enemy.
- Media will be in theater during any major operation, usually before us.
- In order to ensure that our actions are accurately presented and portrayed in a positive way, we must establish a sound relationship with the media.

# Questions to Expect

- Who's in charge?
- Where are you from?
- What's your job?
- What's your mission?
- What's your unit?
- How long will you stay?
- What do you hope to accomplish?

**Beware, they're not always that easy.**

# IMMEDIATE ACTION!

- Decide if you are the right person to talk to the media. If not, find your SNCO, Commander or PAO.
- Every Marine is a rifleman, but **every Marine is also a Marine Corps spokesperson.**

MajGen. Mattis'  
3 rules for talking to  
the media:

from 1<sup>st</sup> MarDiv brief before OIF

## Rule No. 1:

No wimps in front of the camera.

## Rule No. 2:

Know your job and your mission!  
(But don't spill the beans about ongoing or  
future missions.)

## Rule No. 3:

The media is:  
No better friend, no worse enemy!

# General PA Guidance

- Media coverage is on a non-interference basis
- No media should be unescorted – direct to nearest PA rep
- Don't simply avoid the media – be professional and courteous in directing them to the PAO
- YOU are the Marine Corps when doing an interview
- Be brief and concise; 15-30 second sound bites
- Relax, be yourself and remain composed
- Never let your guard down

**BOWLING:**

*Stay in your lane!!!*

# ALPHABET SOUP:

Avoid acronyms and  
jargon!!!

JAMES DEAN:

Always keep your cool!!!

MUHAMMED ALI:

Lead with a punch!!!

007:

Know what is and isn't  
OPSEC!!!

SEA STORIES:

Tell the truth!!!

PLEAD THE FIFTH:

It's OK to say you don't  
know!!!

WASHINGTON POST:

If you don't want to read  
about it, don't say it!!!

# Keep In Mind

- **Mission, Intent, Endstate**
- **Sound/Video bites**
- **Body language**
- **Nothing is “off the record.”**
- **What’s releasable?**
- **You are in control.**
- **Forget the camera, and talk to the reporter.**

# **Engaging the Media**

# Communication Objective

- **What are your COMMAND MESSAGES?**
- **Create a message geared to the reporter's audience.**
- **Mission, Intent, Endstate.**

# Components of Effective Messages

- **Contains Comm. Objective**
- **Puts your most important messages up front.**
- **Clear, concise and to the point (15-20 second sound bites)**
- **Has a “people perspective”**
- **Avoids color words like “catastrophe, slaughtered, etc...”**
- **Avoids negative words.**
- **Accentuates the positive.**

# “On The Record”

- **“On the Record”**
- **“Off the Record” – printable but not for attribution.**
- **“Background” – facts not attributable to an official source.**
- **“Deep Background” –not for attribution/not printable.**

# DOs and DON'Ts

- Agree to do the interview
- Be friendly, assertive and positive
- Discuss only what you know or have responsibility over – stay in your lane
- Do not discuss political or foreign policy matters
- Do not discuss operational capabilities or future plans
- Don't speculate or render opinions on real or hypothetical situations
- Never say, “no comment.” (hiding something)
- Never lie or stretch the truth
- Don't answer questions with just a “yes” or “no”

## DOs and DON'Ts (cont.)

- If you don't know the answer, say so
- Use laymen's terms; Avoiding jargon and acronyms
- Always look at the interviewer and not the camera
- Avoid embarrassment – discredit to Corps
- Take time to analyze the question and formulate an answer before speaking
- Avoid repeating negative, sensitive or controversial words - scandal, death, dangerous, horrible; media will use them
- If you say something inappropriate, incorrect or sensitive, ask the interviewer to stop and disregard
- Control the interview and convey positive messages, despite negativity, loss of life

# Control the interview – don't be controlled

- **BRIDGING** – focus on main points, and don't allow tangents
- **BUNDLING/PACKAGING** – up front and factual, importance, tie-ins to focus
- **HOOKING** – baits reporter to ask questions about which you want to talk
- **FLAGGING** – Nonverbals to lead to a point

# Springing the traps

- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer—active listening
- DEAD AIR – a pregnant pause which usually follows a tough question – you don't need to fill it. Say what you have to say and stop. Have a command message ready.

# Springing the Traps (cont)

- If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- Assume the mike/camera is always HOT (on).
- Avoid impromptu remarks – don't drop your guard.
  - “For the price of a rental car they could have had a prostitute...”

# Springing the Traps (cont)

- **INTERRUPTIONS –**
- **1<sup>st</sup> Time – ignore**
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Time – Say, “Let me finish...”**
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Time – Say, “Please don’t be rude and let me answer...”**
- **Don’t get angry.**

# Springing the Traps (cont)

- **OFF TOPIC** – stick to objective / ground rules.
- **EDITORIALIZING** – reporter making commentary that supports their bias.
  - Don't become argumentative
  - “What exactly is your question?”
  - Bridge to Command Message.

# Basic On-Air Tips

- **Uniform** – check your appearance.
- **Eyewear** – allow viewers to see your eyes (sunglasses are a “no-no”).
- **Camera angle** – slight angle.
- **Guard your flanks** – never be in the middle of two interviewers.

# Basic On-Air Tips (cont)

- **Don't slouch or rock back and forth.**
- **Microphone – get wired.**
- **Relax and be yourself.**
- **Don't let your guard down – never get too comfortable or friendly.**

# Basic Field Tips

- **Take off your helmet or cover – let the viewers see your eyes.**
- **Check background for sensitive or classified items.**
- **Know your subject.**
- **Check current news – if possible.**
- **Anticipate questions, formulate responses.**

# **\* Command Themes \***

- **Core Values**
- **Stability and Security Operations**
- **Discipline, honor, loyalty**
- **Leadership in the Marine Corps is the strongest its been**
- **Corps has been founded on solid leadership and the notion to take action and succeed**
- **Training to assist the Iraqi forces to rebuild their nation and take control of their own destiny**

# Themes (cont)

- Moral Component important – **values, ethos, attitude and culture.**
- **Iraqi ownership** –what we do now is foundation for future success.

**Leadership sets  
the example**

**QUESTIONS???**