

APPENDIX D

UNIT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

RESPONSIBILITIES

Every commander, regardless of the size or type of his unit, has public affairs responsibilities. He must ensure that he meets the information needs of his soldiers, their families, and other critical home station audiences and that his unit is prepared to support the media representatives who will be gathering and reporting information to the world. To operate successfully in the environment described in FM 100-5, every commander needs to understand some basic public affairs principles. These are discussed below.

Identifying, understanding, and fulfilling information needs is critical to success. Meeting the information needs of internal audiences enhances morale, confidence, unit discipline, and effectiveness. It builds team cohesion and unit esprit, eases concerns and distractions so that soldiers can concentrate on performing their mission, and reduces the boredom, fear, isolation, uncertainty, rumor, and misinformation which cause soldiers stress and misconduct. Facilitating the efforts of media representatives fosters the support of American and allied publics and deters enemies and potential adversaries by communicating capability, readiness, and resolve.

Every soldier is a spokesperson. The commander is the unit's official spokesperson. Junior soldiers, however, are often perceived as more honest, accurate, forthright, insightful, and believable. Media representatives, therefore, will want to be "with the troops" to interview them and get their thoughts about issues, events, or situations. Good commanders recognize the benefits of soldier-media interaction and find opportunities to "make it happen."

News media representatives are not the enemy. They are an important information channel to the American public; most media representatives strive to publish accurate, truthful, and balanced stories. Commanders need to understand that the media's goal is not to undermine, interfere, or misrepresent, although some stories will be negative and misunderstanding, errors, and criticism will occur. By proactively assisting news media representatives in obtaining information and access to soldiers, units, and operations, commanders help them to understand the Army and produce stories which educate the public and foster support for our soldiers, our organization, and our contribution to the nation. Regarding the news media as a hostile force and being close-mouthed or uncooperative leads to antagonistic, counterproductive practices and results in incomplete, inaccurate, and imbalanced stories.

Foster maximum disclosure with minimum delay. Because the Army is an agency of the US government, the public has a right to know about its operations; but, more importantly, the Army has an obligation to keep the public informed. Therefore, information will be made readily available, within the bounds of OPSEC. Open and independent reporting will be the norm, and journalists should be granted access to all units. Information should not be withheld solely to protect the Army from criticism or embarrassment. When speaking with a media representative, be honest, accurate, and candid.

MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR LEADERS AND SOLDIERS

As a leader or soldier, you have responsibilities when dealing with the media. The following paragraphs give some pointers in this area.

Know to whom you are talking. When a reporter comes to your unit, verify that he has been accredited by public affairs personnel. If the media representative is properly accredited,

assist him in gathering information for his story. If the media representative is not accredited, inform him that he must be accredited through military channels and assist him in getting accredited. If he is uncooperative, do not detain him, threaten him, try to apprehend him, or harm him. Report him and the incident through your chain of command.

Know your rights. It is your choice whether or not to speak to reporters. If you decide to speak with a media representative, you may talk without fear of repercussion or punishment. Keep your answers brief, simple, and to the point. Avoid rambling explanations full of acronyms and jargon. Always be professional and courteous. If necessary, ask the reporter to repeat, clarify, or rephrase his questions. Remember that you may refuse to answer any question you feel is inappropriate, and you can end the interview or conversation any time you desire.

Know your limits. Stick to subjects within your own area of responsibility and personal knowledge. If you do not know something, say so. Do not speculate! Do not repeat rumors! Be OPSEC aware. Be honest, accurate, and candid.

View media visits as opportunities. Provide escorts and support to accredited media representatives whenever possible. Emphasize the positive aspects of your unit and mission. Introduce the reporters to your soldiers. Show them your equipment and training. Let them understand your motivation, pride, and morale. Their inside look at your unit can result in favorable coverage for your people, their accomplishments, the operation, and the Army.

Do not violate OPSEC or aid adversaries. Actual and potential adversaries have access to the information published by news media representatives. The most effective way to protect classified or sensitive information which might jeopardize your soldiers, unit, or mission or be used as propaganda against our nation and forces is to practice security at the source. If information is inadvertently provided, remain professional, seek the news media representative's assistance and cooperation, or obtain assistance through the chain of command. Do not attempt to forcefully confiscate the reporter's film, notes, or equipment, or detain, threaten, or apprehend the reporter.

Do not lose your professionalism or composure. When interacting with media representatives, you must always maintain a professional attitude. Never lose your composure or temper or give sarcastic responses to questions you feel are inappropriate. Never try to mislead, equivocate, or rationalize. Never threaten or attempt to physically interfere with, detain, or apprehend a reporter. Never try to confiscate a reporter's equipment.

Do not try to answer questions above your level or out of your area of expertise. Do not speculate, repeat rumors, respond to hypothetical questions, comment on remarks or statements you have not seen or heard, or discuss situations, issues, or subject matter which are outside the expertise of your command. If you cannot or do not want to answer a question, explain why.

Do not stage events or activities for the media. The media should be passive onlookers to normal activities. The presence of media representatives should not result in "dog and pony shows" or special events designed solely to gain favorable coverage or cover up an unfavorable situation. Before meeting with media representatives, soldiers should be given public affairs guidance, informed of Army themes and messages, and briefed to ensure their information is accurate and up to date. They should not be told what they can and cannot say.