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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to my old friend Robin O'Connor for his patience and research. It would have taken so much longer otherwise.

With the Kimberley relief column after the Battle of Speyfontein, 1900, by Frederic Villiers

PROLOGUE

This is a book about the trade, the art, the business of war reporting and some of its greatest practitioners. But as the title might suggest, it is not only about reporting war but the parallel war relentlessly waged against correspondents by those who would prefer, and even demand, that only their own versions of events are published: the military, the establishment and the many and various fighting factions.

From the Crimea and the Somme to Iraq and Afghanistan, war reporters fight on many fronts. It has always been so.

The war reporters I have chosen have no special placing in the league of the Greats. They are simply my favourites, paragons if you like. You probably have your own listing.

I went to my first war, or rather it came to me, when I was only three years old. My family lived in Essex, about three miles from the Thames, which meant we were directly under the Luftwaffe's nightly bombing runs into the London docks. Our nights were spent in an underground Anderson shelter at the bottom of the garden, dank and smelly and lit by a single paraffin lamp when there was paraffin, and by a single candle when there was not. My mother would sing Bing Crosby's 'You Are

My Sunshine' and pause and hold a finger to her lips as we listened to the distant explosions. When we dared, which was not often, we would peek out to see the orange pink of fires over London and the criss-crossing beams of searchlights, like immaculate white marble columns, as they probed the blackness for the invaders. In the park, less than half a mile away, the ack-ack guns, the anti-aircraft batteries, followed their beams, hoping to hit something all those thousands of feet up.

My mornings were spent with the other boys in the street collecting bomb shrapnel and shell splinters and, just the once, a jagged piece of grey-painted aluminium, part of a German bomber that had been hit by our guns. I still have it. One morning, as my mother was hanging out her washing, a Dornier flew over so low I swear I saw the Luftwaffe Iron Crosses on its wings.

In between, we children went to war with our little lead toy soldiers, the British painted khaki, fighting the enemy in grey, the garden our battlefield. Mounds of earth became our mini-fortresses as entire battalions were slaughtered. We Brits always won; that was the rule.

Then, like thousands of other children from the cities of Britain, I was suddenly without a home or a mother. That autumn morning in 1940 she took me to Paddington station, settled me in the carriage of my first train and tied a manila label around my neck with my name and registration number scrawled on it. With my gas mask on my lap and jam sandwiches in my jacket pocket, she left me without a hug or kiss goodbye. I saw only the back of her as she hurried away sprayed by the locomotive's steam; a mother, like so many, returning to an empty Anderson shelter and the lonely nights of fear, sans children, sans husband, sans everything. None of us cried. I seem to remember only laughter. We must have thought we were simply off on holiday.

I was an evacuee on my way to a farm in Somerset, one of the youngest in 'Operation Pied Piper', and it would be three years before I saw my mother again.

Many of us were returned home before the war ended and, for some, it was too soon. The bombing was less frequent but we were not safe, night or day. The air raid sirens were not silenced. In 1944 the Germans sent us something new, the V1 flying bomb; we nicknamed it the 'Doodlebug'. We could hear it coming, a low growl, growing louder until it was overhead. Then, as the last of its rocket fuel was burnt, silence. We held our breath for a minute or more, praying. Would it drop like a stone and hit us or glide to end others' lives? It was a hateful wait.

I remember our 'end of war' street party, the commotion and the banter and the painted banners strung across the lamp-posts. I did not know then what the initials V.E. meant except that they were making everybody happy and drunk. Within a month my father came back but not for long. He was a major in the Royal Engineers and had been one of the first to land in Normandy. Now he was part of what was called the C.C.G., the Control Commission of Germany, and he was in charge of repairing and regenerating a section of the Dortmund–Ems Canal. When he returned to Germany in the winter of 1946 we went with him, the first British family to arrive in Emden, Westphalia.

A nine-year-old English boy was suddenly in the country of the people who only six months before had been the feared and hated enemy. In the years that followed, he saw things that are indelible and remain the most prominent in a grown man's lockerful of memories. Emden, a city the size of Leicester or Canterbury, flattened by Allied bombing from horizon to horizon, so that not one building stood intact. That winter, the survivors lived among the ruins, the more fortunate in their cellars. There were makeshift crosses in the rubble and every so often, along the verges of the country roads, an upturned rifle, the barrel dug into the ground with a German helmet on the butt, which marked a soldier's shallow grave; signposts of the dead.

One day, my father was supervising the exhumation of the British dead who had been hastily buried in a mass grave. I cannot remember

why I was with him; we must have been en route to somewhere else. He forbade me to leave the car but a small boy's curiosity edged me closer to a place to watch. It was the smell that overwhelmed me and I vomited then and for some days afterwards. The doctor said it was mild dysentery but my father knew it was not.

My boarding school, Prince Rupert in Wilhelmshaven for the children of servicemen, had been a training base for U-boat officers. The Royal Air Force had attacked and sunk every submarine in their pens and at lunchtimes we schoolboys, quite nonchalantly, watched Royal Navy divers, in their brass helmets and lead boots, bring up the bodies of those who had been trapped for so long inside their metal coffins.

A few childhood memories of war.

And war has remained with me all my life. Exactly thirty years ago, at the end of that very bloody conflict, I left the Falklands and did not expect ever to return.

I should have known better. How many times in over forty years of a reporting career have I said that about so many places only to be contradicted by events.

Returning to a war zone is the oddest mix of excitement and sadness, and I have been back to many. But nostalgia can be a very assorted package and in the Falklands it is especially so.

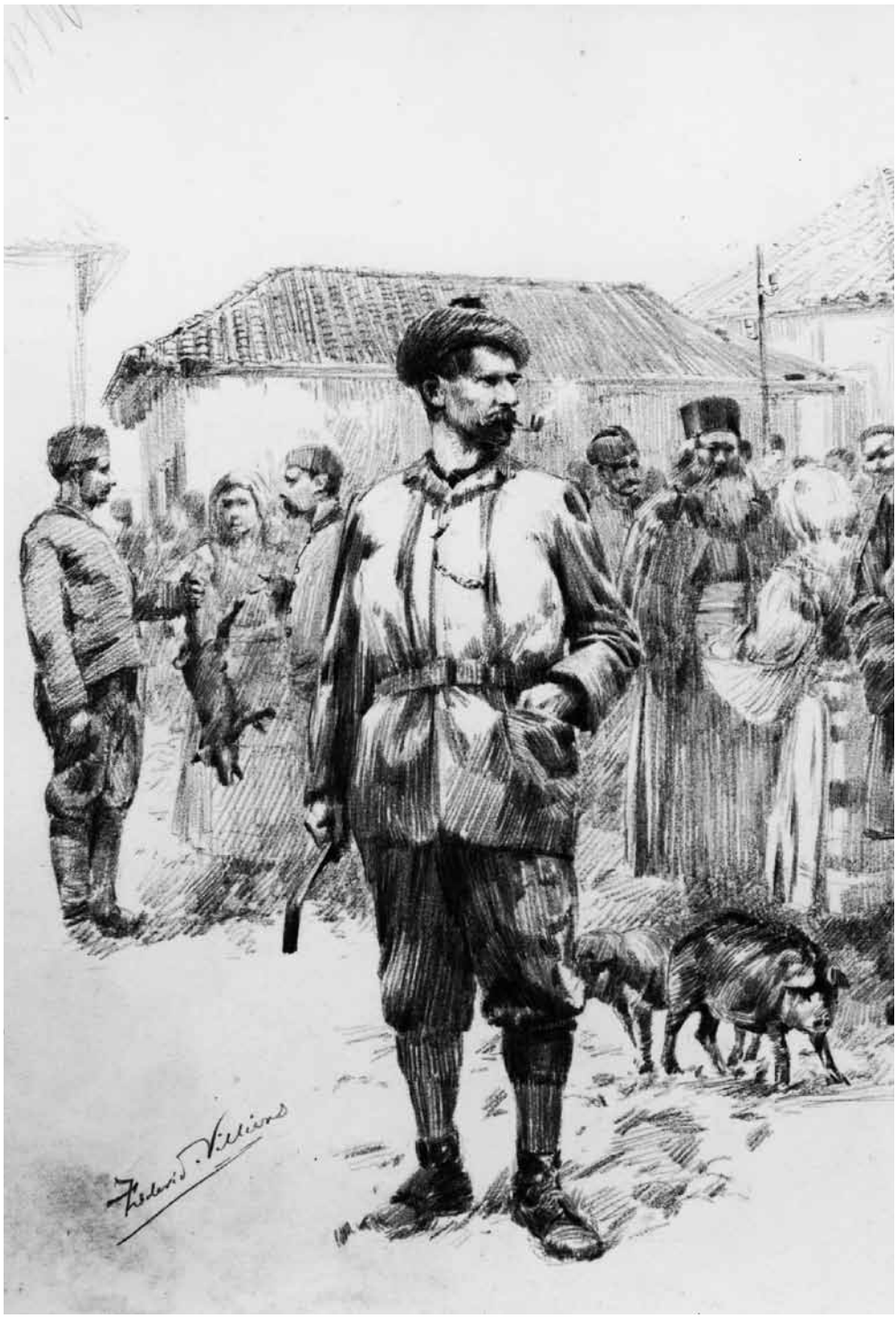
All the other wars I have covered have been wars in foreign places, other people's wars. But in 1982, in those ten weeks of a Falklands spring, I was reporting a war among my own people, British soldiers fighting on behalf of those who were defiantly, obstinately, British.

Last Christmas I went back to the Islands to take part in an ITV documentary to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the war. I

found them in good health and booming and not at all fussed by the distant sound of rattling sabres.

Those of us who witnessed it, and those of us who have been privileged to return, do not doubt that the war had to be fought and we had to win it.

You will understand that a British war for a British correspondent remains a very special war and the Falklands a very special place.



Archibald Forbes, by Frederic Villiers

INTRODUCTION

'The worst moment in a war was my fear I would not be sent to it.'

I wrote that over twenty years ago when I had already gone to nine of them. Now, as I hang up my boots, the final tally is eighteen. The expectation of the sight and sound of war never failed to exhilarate me. Risk spiced my life. But then I had the return ticket, the paper promise to lift me, whenever I chose, away from the killing fields to a safe haven.

There was only one response to that repeated question: why? A self-deprecatory shrug of the shoulders and the simple and generally misunderstood one-liner – it was because I wanted to. I simply could not resist the invitation and it was easily done because, except for the once, it never occurred to me I would not come back. James Cameron, my paragon, once wrote that it was against the rules to have a war without him. I know the feeling well.

War reporters belong to an exclusive club of globetrotters. They are issued a privileged passport to travel this world and witness astonishing happenings. It is usually only when they are together that they talk of their wars and even then warily. Their adventures seem so unlikely in retrospect. Who else would believe them?

Is it machismo or masochism that encourages us so compulsively and repeatedly to risk our lives? Probably both. There is no choice.

Having done it once, you have to do it again and few of us would have the cheek to deny that the chase becomes an end in itself. We are all slave to the same impulse a gambler must feel when his luck is running. To some it is like sex.

One of the greatest television combat cameramen, Tasmanian Neil Davies, was a good friend of mine. He spent more time covering the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia than anyone from any network. He was quite fearless, believing, as many of us did, that he was invincible.

He wrote these lines on the flyleaf of every working diary he kept in all his years in South East Asia:

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim.
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name

It says it all and that message was his daily mantra until the day he was killed by a stray bullet in an attempted coup in Bangkok.

War has glamour. You win no friends admitting it. Walter Cronkite, the doyen of American broadcast journalists, once wrote that there is nothing in the field of journalism more glamorous than being a war correspondent. He said the public stereotype them as handsome derring-do swashbucklers, dashing from one crisis to another in romantic criss-crossings, flamboyant, brave and exhilarated by danger.

Ernest Hemingway reported the Spanish Civil War and Jack London, reading reports of General Gordon's last stand in Khartoum, decided he too would become a war reporter for the thrills. In 1904 he travelled to Japan to cover the Russo-Japanese War with 'gorgeous conceptions'. Disillusioned, he quickly returned home and, like Hemingway, confined himself to novels.

The *New Yorker* once described war reporters as 'congeries of eccentrics and prima donnas, not so much serious as cynical'. Michael Herr wrote in his Vietnam masterpiece *Dispatches:*

> We have been called many names; war-junkies, thrill freaks, wound-seekers, ambulance-chasers, hero-worshippers, dope addicts, closet queens, ghouls, seditionists, traitors, career prostitutes, fiction writers, more nasty things than I can remember.

War is entertainment. Most people only know it courtesy of Hollywood. Actors play soldiers as heroes in simplified, formulaic scripts where the good guys beat the bad guys in the ultimate sacrifice, defending right against wrong, liberty against tyranny.

There is the iconic scene in Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. American helicopters laden with napalm, flown by junkies led by a mad colonel, playing Wagner's 'The Ride of the Valkyries' over loudspeakers, obliterate villages and all who were once alive in them. It crystallises not just the insanity of war but the glorious black romance of being part of such a mighty killing machine. It remains Hollywood's darkest vision yet in its continuing fascination with war and all its attendant horrors.

Correspondents belong to an association of Cassandras. We spend a career in the energetic hope that what we report will do good, that it can somehow change the world for the better. We travel from conflict to conflict, from one human misery to another and, like the cameramen and photographers who are our brave companions, we suffer from an overdose of everything. The world's woes are perverse and self-inflicted and in time we become saturated with them.

Yet we are supremely privileged. We have a seat in the spectator stands of great events, both witness and juror as history is being made. We write the first drafts.

It is an odd occupation, a war profiteer with death and destruction

as the matter-of-fact reason for being there. It is difficult to catalogue the wars we have known and not begin to doubt their recall. The temptation to embellish is always at the shoulder and sometimes difficult to resist.

Who would believe how many wars this world has lived through in one lifetime? Two World Wars are indelibly recorded. We are coming to terms with the bloody aftermath of the Iraqi invasion and the futility of taming Afghanistan. Television's catalogue of events in the so-called Arab Spring is still vivid. But who remembers the others, the little wars?

Can you recall the starving, emaciated face of Biafra? The Palestinian grenade rolling down the aisle of a Pan Am jet? The pits full of rotting corpses on the birthday of Bangladesh? The faceless napalmed babies of Vietnam?

Do you remember Idi Amin's Uganda, the House of Death in the Congo, the cannibals of Cambodia, the decapitated nuns in Rhodesia, the blacks bleeding red in Soweto? Cyprus and war, Israel and war, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Algeria. War on war.

War reporters, then as now, confess to inner conflicts. How do we mark the foggy line between sincerity and technique, the imperative from the glib, a line so fragile that one can tread all over it in those anxious minutes to a tight deadline, or a ringing phone, a nagging producer, a thirst? How do we explain or excuse that final decision on what to report and what not to?

James Cameron wrote that never in his life had he made any claim to be an objective journalist, if objectivity meant the uncritical presentation of wrong or foolish events. To him it was dispassionate reporting, cold-blooded, bystander journalism. His trademark was to show emotion, humanity, disgust, despair, impotence.

It has been called the journalism of the repressive self-righteous. But veterans of war will ask how else can you respond, surrounded by the carnage of a mortar attack on a crowded Sarajevo market place or

walking through hospital wards full of mutilated crying children in Rwanda? Is it possible to be anything but subjective in war?

There are newspaper reporters with long-established reputations, well known for their emotional writing of war and their dedication to a cause. They break the taboos of journalistic impartiality, writing what they see without the least restraint, and they do not spare their readers the horror in the detail: soldiers do not die without bleeding, anti-personnel mines take away their genitals, mortar shrapnel opens up the stomachs of pregnant mothers. Unlike so much television news, their reports are printed unfiltered, unsanitised.

This is one account by Robert Fisk of the massacre by Christian militia of Palestinian refugees at the Chatila camp in Lebanon in 1982:

> They were everywhere, in the road, in laneways, in backyards, beneath crumpled masonry and across the tops of garbage tips. Blood was still wet. When we had seen a hundred bodies, we stopped counting the corpses, women, young men, children, babies and grandparents, lying together in lazy and terrible profusion where they had been knifed or machine-gunned down. A child lay on the roadway like a discarded flower, her white dress stained with mud and dust, the back of her head had been blown off by a bullet fired into her brain.

And this from John Pilger describing the Veterans' March in Washington in 1971, at the height of the Vietnam War:

> Never before in this country have young soldiers marched in protest against a war they themselves have fought and is still going on. They have stopped Mr and Mrs America in the street and told them what they did, about the gore and the atrocities, a battalion of shuffling stick figures.
>
> A former quartermaster, shouting through a loud hailer, described to rush hour shoppers how he helped raze a Vietnamese village.

> 'Listen to this friends ... the whole village was burning but the spotter planes reported people fleeing across open fields, so we switched to fragmentation shells and began to chop them up. Then we began firing phosphorus shells and watched them burn.'

They belong to what is often called 'attachment journalism', what one critic of it eloquently, if cynically, describes as the journalism of 'sanctimonious moral perfectionism motivated by a social conscience that too often overwhelms'. They are accused of being flagrantly partisan, anti all wars, each intent on persuading readers that his or her opinion should be theirs too. They do not deny it. It remains their conviction that absolutely nothing in the tide of human affairs cannot be explained, given time and enough column inches; that war ends in defeat and the sure knowledge that more horror will follow. It is no secret.

In Britain, at the start of nationwide broadcasting in the 1920s, there were no rules governing impartiality. There was no need. BBC radio was funded at the discretion of the government and generally did its bidding. Reporters addressed politicians as 'Sir' and no one ever dared interrupt a minister in full flow however economical he was with the truth.

Only in 1955, with the birth of commercial television, did impartiality become a legal requirement. Impartiality meant balance. Tip the scales and you were in trouble and even the most scrupulous reporters, attempting that balancing act, fell foul.

In August 1965, the BBC's Washington correspondent Charles Wheeler reported the rioting in the Watts district of Los Angeles. It followed the arrest of a black man suspected of drink-driving and provoked some of the worst racial violence in modern American history. It lasted six days, fourteen thousand police and National Guardsmen were involved and martial law was declared.

Wheeler's commentaries in that week were condemned by

sections of both the American and British media. He was accused of bias, of justifying the violence of the black rioters and of allowing his personal opinion to colour his reports.

In fact, all he had done was to remind his viewers of why black Americans felt such hostility to the white man's law and its enforcers and why violence might indeed be their only redress. To his critics, Wheeler had crossed the line and it was unforgivable.

In 1968, during the Nigerian Civil War, Frederick Forsyth was reporting from Biafra for BBC television. Ignoring warnings and complaints from his editorial masters that his commentaries were blatantly biased towards the Biafrans, he was finally ordered back to London and sacked. Months later he returned to Biafra in full military uniform to act as its public relations officer.

Another BBC television veteran, Martin Bell, was publicly accused of slanting his commentaries during the Bosnian War in favour of direct military intervention by America as a way of ending it. He later admitted he had become emotionally involved in the conflict to such an extent that it excused his biased stance and was unrepentant.

ITN's Sandy Gall experienced much the same, reporting the war in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. He too became an emotional casualty. Despite his insistence that he had not deliberately favoured the British-backed mujahideen leader Ahmed Masud in his commentaries and that he had not transgressed the rule of impartiality, he was later on record admitting that Masud was an honourable man and his rival 'a murdering thug'.

Global television and the World Wide Web have merged to undermine the entire principle of impartiality. The recently entitled 'social media' enables anyone with a camera or mobile phone to record a news event as seen from their own perspective and submit it to any news channel around the world. Given competitive demands, most news organisations, including the BBC, invite them to do so.

The Internet has provided us with spectacular methods of collecting and consuming news. Speed is once again more important than integrity and impartiality less of an issue. In newspapers, factual news is losing column inches to the opinion of celebrity columnists. Journalists have become bloggers on their days off. We casually accept information from anonymous contributors whose reputations are unknown, whose reliability is untested and of whose beliefs and allegiances we know nothing. And yet our media barons and their editors rubber-stamp them and ask us to believe them.

The first principle of war reporting is that the public's right to know must always be subordinate to the soldier's right to live. A correspondent should not presume to be an apostle of the absolute, to freely publish what he knows. The military consider that to be an incontrovertible truth. They have a point.

But it is an unsavoury fact that people will accept lies more readily than truth and in war there is an unlimited supply of lies. The manipulated millions are easily aroused or soothed by lies, something Mr Goebbels and his master knew to their advantage.

There is a popular myth that journalism is all about getting it either right or wrong. But as Max Hastings of the *Evening Standard* wrote at the time of the Falklands War:

> You know very well that in fact what you are actually trying to do is have a sort of stab at the truth, in which case if you are getting it right about half the time you are doing rather well. In war that drops to about thirty per cent.

The military's ideal war reporter, and this is true of the military worldwide, is one who writes what he has been told, questions nothing and can be cajoled into writing what he knows not to be true. It is also considered to be the reporter's first duty to support the war effort.

In 1956, at the time of the attempted invasion of the Suez Canal, the Ministry of Defence printed a booklet that was given to each of the accredited war reporters who were to accompany the British invasion forces. Twenty-six years later, that very same booklet, unaltered, was handed to every one of the correspondents who went to the Falklands in 1982. It began:

> The essence of successful warfare is secrecy; the essence of successful journalism is publicity. No official regulation can bridge the gap between the two. A satisfactory liaison calls for complete frankness on the one hand and loyal discretion on the other and mutual cooperation in the task of leading and steadying public opinion in times of national stress or crisis.

Few journalists then or now would consider it a duty or even a priority to lead or steady public opinion in a time of national stress or crisis. Max Hastings, however, swum against the tide. The Falklands was his twelfth war but it was, like many of us there, his first alongside British troops in a British campaign. Because of it, he considered it his patriotic duty, when necessary, to distort the facts to hide the truth.

> In the task of leading and steadying … was I deliberately deceitful, yes! The night the *Atlantic Conveyor* and *Coventry* were sunk, morale on the beachhead was low. But I continued to file stories about how well the build up was going, writing more optimistically than I knew it to be. I wouldn't have wanted to have filed a dispatch that was likely to the give the Argentineans any hope or comfort.

Hastings knew he was ditching all the rules in order to 'aid and abet' the British invasion. He had become, by his own admission, something of a propagandist. Hastings suffered no self-delusions then and has been unrepentant since.

> I sought to convey the impression that it was all going splendidly well. The Argies had taken some pretty severe losses themselves and if they had received a second-hand dispatch from one of us on the beachhead saying we were in real trouble it might have made them feel it was worth another crack. I knowingly distorted the feeling as I knew it to be.

Hastings wore a Territorial Officer's battle tunic once he was ashore and even pinned up a daily copy of his dispatches wherever he could, *pour encourager les autres*. It did boost troop morale and it certainly did him no harm with his military minders.

David Norris of the *Daily Mail* was another who put patriotism above all:

> I can honestly say that I did not write a single word that would have been against the British operation. I felt I had to do that. It was my country at war. I had no choice.

It was contrary to professional ethics but it comforted his editor. From the very moment the British armada sailed for the South Atlantic, jingoism was the unwavering theme of the *Daily Mail*'s Falklands coverage.

We have all, at some time or some place, witnessed bizarre censorship. During the war in South Vietnam, an American military press information officer gave a daily briefing in Saigon to the collected international correspondents. He would recite a list of the communist dead, the kill ratio and American successes. He did not believe them and neither did the press corps. We called them 'The Five o'Clock Follies'. They were entertaining and an outrage to our intelligence.

During the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971, those of us who were holed up during the siege of Dacca, including Don Wise, Clare Hollingworth,

Gavin Young and John Humphrys, were briefed by a Pakistani officer who, with some passion, told us what he would have us believe was happening in the war. He cited victories that had never happened and such sessions were followed by our polite but mischievous enquiries.

> Question: You say you killed five hundred Indians today. How is it you have no dead?
> Answer: In our army we believe no soldier dies in battle. He goes straight to paradise.
> Question: Can he still shoot Indians from paradise?
> Question: The Indians claim they have established a bridgehead at the Ganges. Is this true?
> Answer: There is no bridge there so how can there be a bridgehead?

The elegant Donald Wise immortalised this nonsense with the phrase: 'I feel I am shovelling fog into a bucket.'

In the century and a half since William Russell reported the Crimea War, the contradictory principles of the military and the war reporter have set them apart and they will remain so. Since the Falklands, when correspondents were handed that same unaltered Suez booklet, many attempts have been made to reconcile the irreconcilable. In recent times millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been spent on media training where all three Services can meet the press in congenial seminars sometimes beguilingly entitled 'Let's get to know each other'.

But the military's real focus has been to discover how we work, not how we can work together. From the beginning of the Bosnian War in 1992, the British and American military introduced something new into their media relations, something their political masters had been successfully doing for some time. Spin had become censorship by omission.

British soldiers in Bosnia were discouraged from talking to the press. But they were given a pamphlet instructing them how to handle reporters just in case we caught them by surprise. They were to remember that:

> The media are not necessarily hostile.
> Handled well, they will promote the unit's image.
> Poorly treated the opposite applies.
> Things unsaid are rarely regretted.

If he was in any doubt, an anxious soldier was to make the following statement and he was to learn it by heart: 'We are here to help supplies get through to those in need. We do not support any side. That's not our job.'

Little of any real significance in the relationship between the two opposing sides has changed. Nor, given the intransigence that exists, can there be change in any radical way. Such a compromise has obvious narrow limits.

The least subtle of all the military's manipulation of the international media in recent years is the introduction of the 'embedded' strategy. Unsubtle because it has always been so. It is simply in a new disguise. Under it, reporters, photographers, television crews, all become an integral part of a military unit, be it a platoon, a squadron or a ship. They are kitted out in full military gear and given 'unprecedented' freedom to witness events as they unroll, to see what they want to see unhampered and write what they see uncensored. Such is the theory.

The strategy outlaws the lone maverick reporter who can be dangerously disruptive. Instead the press is herded into one pen. It was developed much more extensively in the Gulf Wars and news organisations, especially the American television networks, were delighted with live coverage of their correspondents seemingly in the line of fire right on the front line.

It was only afterwards that they realised that their men had effectively been held captive. Editorial post mortems revealed it was a reversal of what they had been promised. They had been taken where the military wanted them to go, to see what the military wanted them to see in order that they wrote what the military wanted them to write. Some reporters did try to re-route themselves, to break free but once embedded there was seldom a way out. There was almost total control of movement and information and both the military and the political establishment were very satisfied with themselves.

The sheer numbers that make up the modern press corps and the new technology (mobile phone, BlackBerry, iPod and the lightweight wireless laptop) they carry as their essential hand luggage promise to free the press from the military's stranglehold. The DBS (direct broadcasting satellites) are each capable of carrying twelve television channels enabling multiple live pictures to be transmitted from one side of the globe to the other twenty-four hours a day. High frequency radio transmitters can bypass censorship and receivers can monitor insecure military communications.

All this has given war reporters the ability to transmit directly to their news desks unhindered. That is unless or until governments outlaw it or the military find ways to disrupt it.

Those academics who choose to monitor the course of journalism believe we are witnessing the fast erosion of the kind of war reporting we took for granted even ten years ago, a generation gap marking the end of a tradition.

No one can deny that reportage is now confronted with accelerating commercial and political restraints, the budgets, the insurance premiums, the cost of air travel, the cunning of the spin doctors, the unchanging self-protective military censorship, the public sector PR barrage of misinformation, the Special Interests. Editors can seldom afford to send their correspondents or their television crews to

far-away places as they once did, on a hunch, without hesitation. Except for war or some other major event or catastrophe, they have no option but to accept this state of affairs tamely and too often rely instead on second-hand inputs from second-rate news agencies who may well be in the pay or in fear of their government or the warring factions.

People get to know what war looks like from their television screens. They learn to trust those familiar faces and the well-honed reputations earned after years of covering conflicts. Many of the stars of yesteryear learnt their trade in newspapers or from the disciplines in news agencies like Reuters, Associated Press and UPI. Gone are those long and thorough apprenticeships. Now there are short cuts through broadcast journalism degree courses and what passes as media studies.

Unlike the print journalist, today's television reporters work under the restrictions of a British law that demands they will not offer opinion or the mildest comment on air lest it be interpreted as bias. The compliance lawyers are the latest, severest and best-paid censors and they pretend to be on our side. Too many of the current generation of television reporters see their job in the simplest terms: to report the facts, to report a war as if it was a crime story and to fit words to pictures as economically as possible in their allotted bulletin slot. They do it as well and as honestly as such legal and editorial strictures permit. They struggle with new technology, their reports are measured in seconds and they must succumb to the final tyranny of the round-the-clock news agenda.

They are frequently caricatured as editorial eunuchs playing theatrical bit parts, dressed in helmets and customised Kevlar flak jackets, standing on top of hotel roofs, reciting lines as if they believed them, reporting events they themselves have not witnessed, repeating hearsay, dependent on the technology that promotes them and held hostage by the propaganda of the side they report from. They do their best to fill a vacuum. But television news has an insatiable appetite and it nowadays looks very lean.

There was a time when carrying a press card or having PRESS scrawled across your car would, in most circumstances, be some guarantee of safe conduct. You were, after all, a non-combatant, on nobody's side, a spectator. The shrapnel was not meant for you. You also fondly believed that survival anyway was a fluke, which enabled you to live with colossal and comforting fatalism, like the Marines in Vietnam who boasted that they only worried about the bullet with their name on it. Those with more battle experience would instead warn them to be wary of the one simply inscribed 'To whom it may concern!'

In today's wars the words 'PRESS' or 'PRESS-TV' are more likely to kill you. At St Bride's in the City of London there is a memorial to journalists who have lost their lives in war zones. There is a similar memorial in Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, erected by the Freedom Forum. Cut into its stone are the names of over nine hundred international reporters killed doing their job. More ominous is the large empty space waiting to be filled.

In the last three years alone, over two hundred reporters and cameramen have been killed covering conflicts worldwide. For those who live within a war, those whose homes and families are in war zones, survival can often mean living like an anonymous fugitive. They know well enough that honest reporting can alienate the correspondent on one side in the conflict from the other. They live under constant threat, their entire existence often defined by their home, their newsroom, and travel between the two. The risks are greater, the rewards less. Now they are shooting the messenger.

War reporters fight on many fronts. Top priority is to survive the present one in readiness for the next. Then, when it is all over, to be able to erase from the memory all that should be forgotten and finally draw the curtain tight.

After the day's work: British ambulance cars on their way to Boulogne, 1915, by Frederic Villiers

ONE

THEN AND NOW

Who is the war reporter? Who qualifies? How many wars must he or she have covered before gaining entry to that exclusive club of privileged globetrotters?

Was Herodotus the first? The Greek historian born two and a half thousand years ago, who travelled extensively through Europe and recorded what he saw in *The Histories*, considered one of the seminal works in Western literature? Cicero claimed him as the 'Father of History'. His graphic, often eyewitness, reports of the continuing wars between the Persians and the Greeks may well qualify him as the world's first war correspondent.

He was present at the Battle of Marathon, one of history's most famous military engagements and one of the earliest to be recorded. He reported it thus:

> So when the battle was set in array, the Athenians charged, the distance between the two armies was little short of two furlongs. The Persians saw them coming on at speed, made ready to receive them, although it seemed to them that the Athenians were bereft of their senses and bent upon their own destruction, a mere handful of men without either horsemen or archers. But the Athenians fell upon them and fought in a manner worthy of being reported.

Celebrating the Greek victory, he records that the Greeks lost some

two hundred men, the Persians over six thousand. Being a countryman of the winning side his statistics are understandably questionable.

According to legend, a messenger was sent from the battlefield to carry news of the victory to Athens. His name was Pheidippides and having run the twenty-six miles non-stop in three hours, made the announcement and promptly fell down dead from exhaustion. The present day marathon of that distance continues to celebrate his feat.

Towards the end of his life Herodotus wrote words that have resonated through the ages of war to this day. They are the consummate epitaph for all wars, for those who fight and die in them and for those who suffer their loss.

In peace, sons bury their fathers
In war, fathers bury their sons.

To enter the lion's den, to go where no other reporter has dared go, to have the ingenuity as well as the courage to seek out an interview with a war-crazed general, a ruthless dictator, a political tyrant and survive to tell the story would rate as a scoop in any language of any newsroom today.

The Greek writer Priscus did just that in 448 AD. He sought out and had dinner with Attila the Hun.

Priscus followed the long and arduous path of Attila's armies as they marched and plundered from Constantinople to Scythia, a territory the Huns had just conquered in the lower Danube. Finally he found and entered their fortified compound. He waited anxiously until he was granted the first recorded interview with Attila. He describes seeing him for the first time.

> He came forth with a dignified strut, looking left and right, and stood in front of his house. Many persons came up to be given his judgement and he received ambassadors of barbarous peoples.

> I was invited to a banquet at three o'clock and when the hour arrived I stood in the threshold of the hall in the presence of Attila. The cupbearers gave us cup, according to the custom, so that we might pray before we sat down.
>
> Attila ate nothing but meat on a wooden trencher and his cup was of wood while the guests were given goblets of gold and silver. He showed himself temperate, his dress quite simple, affecting only to be clean. The sword he carried at his side, the ratchets of his shoes, the bridle of his horse were not adorned, like those of the others, with gold or gems or anything costly.
>
> As evening fell, torches were lit and two barbarians came forward in front of Attila and sang songs celebrating his victories and deeds of valour.

Bartholomé de las Casas was among the Spanish Conquistadors who, in the early sixteenth century, invaded and colonised in what we know today as the West Indies. His father had sailed with Columbus and the family had settled in Cuba.

In his mid-thirties, sickened by the barbarity of his fellow countrymen towards the Taino and Arawak Indians, las Casas became a priest. He wrote at length about what he saw and he became the war reporter of his age. His descriptions of the atrocities were relayed back to the Spanish King Charles V.

> The Spaniards entered villages with their horses and spears, sparing neither children nor the women, nor the old. They ripped open their bellies and cut them to pieces as if they were slaughtering lambs. They made bets with each other over who could thrust a sword into a man's middle or who could cut off a head with one stroke. They took the little ones by their heels and crushed their heads against the cliffs.
>
> I saw four native chiefs roasted and broiled upon a makeshift grill.

> They cried pitifully and it troubled the captain so he ordered them to be strangled.
>
> I vouch that some six thousand children have died of exhaustion and starvation working as slaves in the gold mines.
>
> I have all these things seen and others infinite by men who are empty of all pity, enemies of mankind. I saw there so much cruelties that never any man living either have or shall see the like.

In the first ten years of the Spanish occupation of the islands, an estimated ten million Taino and Arawak Indians were slaughtered. By the time Bartholomé's repeated entreaties to the Spanish throne succeeded in bringing in new laws to protect them, it was already too late. They were all but extinct.

The word genocide had not been invented then but how familiar las Casas's description is to those of us who, five hundred years on, witnessed the Hutu genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, or those reporters who entered the Palestinian refugee camps at Chabra and Chatila in the aftermath of the massacre by the Lebanese Christian militia. Or Dachau. Or Pol Pot's Killing Fields, or any of the roll call of atrocities that have been repeated in our own lifetime.

One of the earliest known eyewitness accounts of an historical event in England was an undated pamphlet reporting the Battle of Flodden in 1513. It was signed by one Richard Faques.

Henry Crabb Robinson claimed to be the first British war reporter. He was a well-travelled diarist and his friends included Goethe, Schiller, Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth. On his journeys through Europe as a young man, he had sent occasional articles to the London *Times* and so impressed was the editor that, in 1807, he was sent to report the Napoleonic campaigns along the Elbe. His reports made impressive reading until it became evident that Crabb had not visited any of the battlefields.

In the Peninsular War he witnessed Sir John Moore's victory at

Corunna and again he was complimented on his dispatches. It was later revealed that he had not personally witnessed it but had compiled his reports from hearsay, articles in local newspapers and invention. He returned to London quite expecting to be offered a regular post on the *Times* but by then his deceptions were known by his editor and he was told that 'he did not have the talent or training to be on the staff'. Instead, he became a barrister in the Middle Temple and was a founder member of the Athenaeum Club and University College, London.

The first newspaper correspondent to write his report from the scene of a battle was Charles Guneison for the *Morning Post* during the Spanish Civil War in 1835.

The war reporter came of age with the invention of the telegraph in 1843. Eighteen years later it was used for the first time in a major conflict with the outbreak of the American Civil War. Reporters were able to transmit their stories from the front line to the front page on the same day.

At the outbreak of hostilities between the Union and the Confederates in 1861, the London *Times* sent William Russell to report it. He did not stay long. He 'had no heart for it'. He did not disguise his sympathies for the North and his dispatches did not sit well with the newspaper's pro-Southern editorial line. Professionally he could not or would not adapt to the telegraph. It speeded up communication and therefore shortened deadlines, which did not suit his style of reporting the detailed analysis of military strategy. He returned to London with his reputation tarnished, which delighted the British military establishment, who would never forgive him for his critical reports from the Crimea.

The only other journalist worthy of replacing him was the Irish correspondent Edwin Godkin, who had reported the Crimea War for the London *Daily News*. He had since emigrated to America to publish *The Nation* but he was suffering a long illness and did not fully recover until the war was almost over.

Russell and Godkin had both become journalistic icons as a result of their reporting from the Crimea. That neither were now available at such a critical time created a vacuum.

The American Civil War offered great opportunity for stardom but there were few British reporters talented enough to grab it. Those who did go were voted 'infantile, ignorant, dishonest, inflammatory, inaccurate, unethical and partisan'. Almost to a man, they were consistently hostile to the North, which in turn seriously affected Britain's later relationship with the later reconciled United States. The British reporter, like his editor and proprietor, failed to recognise the historical momentum of what was happening on the far side of the Atlantic and their dismal coverage of it reflected this.

The American public's appetite for news of the war was insatiable and new newspapers opened every day, some consisting only of one side of a page. Upwards of five hundred home-based correspondents covered the war on the Union side. The Confederates were less well served and, as the war progressed and the South retreated, most of their newspapers were destroyed or closed. The *Memphis Appeal*, the *Chattanooga Rebel* and the *Stars and Stripes* followed the army columns with their printing presses in wagons and, as they ran out of newsprint, published on the blank side of wallpaper.

But the new technology did nothing to improve accuracy. In the race to file first, reporters on both sides were notorious for sending stories that were all too often make-believe. This was the New World's first war and like all newcomers to the battlefield they were fired by its excitement and the glamour of seeing one's name splashed across the front page. It was laissez-faire journalism, motivated by ambition, sensationalism and jingoism. They had no problem describing defeat as victory and vice versa, reporting battles that had not taken place, towns invaded by armies that had yet to reach them. There were few independent observers to contradict them. Their stories were eagerly devoured and the telegraph daily brought them congratulations from their editors.

Wilbur Storey, editor of the *Chicago Times*, even famously ordered his reporters at the front to 'telegraph fully all the news you can get and when there is none, send rumours'.

There is the story of one reporter who, trying to interview a mortally wounded soldier, demanded he kept himself alive until the interview was finished. The soldier was told that his dying words would 'be published in the influential and widely-read journal that I represent'.

The advent of the telegraphed dispatch gave rise to two famous newspaper by-lines: *By telegraph*, signalling immediacy, urgency, and *From our own correspondent*, giving the story the appearance of being an exclusive, whether it was or not.

Given the freedom correspondents had to roam the battlefields at will and their ability to write whatever pleased them, even if it might be of some strategic use to the other side, it should not have surprised them that the military would sooner or later try to control them. Or at least contain them.

Out of the antagonism that quickly developed between the two – the reporter whose business it was to fill a newspaper and the generals who job it was to win a war – came censorship. It has ever since been the albatross hanging around the reporter's neck.

General Sherman made no secret of his hatred of the press and did his best to keep them away from his soldiers. He publicly called them 'dirty scribblers who have the impudence of Satan and the day will come when the press must surrender some portion of its freedom or perish in the wreckage with the rest of us'.

He issued a directive that any war reporter who wrote anything that might be of use to the enemy would be treated as a spy and in Sherman's army, spies were summarily shot. One such unfortunate accused of espionage was William Swinton of the *New York Times*. He was saved from the firing squad by the last-minute intervention of General Grant.

The Union government prosecuted newspaper proprietors who printed information that, in its opinion, compromised military security. President Lincoln even ordered the closure of the *Chicago Times* for simply publishing a leader article criticising him. As the war progressed, reporters found themselves ever more confined. Censorship had now become a military priority. All dispatches had first to be read and anything deemed in the least sensitive or contrary to the military's own interpretation of events was erased. Any correspondent who had written unflattering stories, true or not, was banned from the front and any breach of the regulations was considered a criminal act and dealt with accordingly. Even private letters home were scrutinised in case the writer was trying to bypass the censor's red marker.

Given an increasingly hostile press and a readership egged on by the newspaper proprietors, the military finally conceded that there had to be some compromise. Sherman, with his own career in mind, said: 'So greedy are the populace for war news that it is doubtful that any commander can exclude all reporters without bringing down on himself a clamour that may imperil his own safety.'

But it was the politicians who effectively ended the worst journalistic excesses. Lincoln introduced strict new libel laws with crippling penalties for any breach of them. As a consequence, reporters, their editors and the men who owned the newspapers quickly became more circumspect. For self-preservation, self-censorship became the rule of the day.

But it was not to last. When Americans had stopped fighting Americans in 1865, the old rules no longer applied. In 1898, they went to war with a foreign enemy and it was back to a journalistic free-for-all.

The Spanish–American War introduced a new and more sinister way of sensationalising a conflict and another name was added to the media's vocabulary: the 'Yellow Press'. William Randolph Hearst was crowned its father.

He was the multi-millionaire owner of the New York *Morning Journal*, immortalised by Orson Welles in his film *Citizen Kane*. He had ruthlessly bought out or neutralised all but one of the opposition. His only remaining competitor was Joseph Pulitzer, owner of *The World*.

These two press barons, fighting their own circulation war, together plunged America into the conflict against Spain for control of Cuba. Never in the history of war reporting was the adage 'The pen is mightier than the sword' so aptly as with Hearst's *Journal* and Pulitzer's *World*.

Hearst himself accompanied the initial American invasion force and filed sober, accurate reports. But when he returned he decided that simply reporting the facts was not enough to sell newspapers. He reckoned that his readers wanted something extra: for truth to intermingle with untruths, for actuality to be spiced with dramatic fiction. It worked spectacularly and has done so ever since, the world over.

He ordered his staff to write stories that had no basis in truth whatsoever. Headlines splashed imaginary reports of Spanish concentration camps, of American civilians tortured, of cannibalism by Spanish soldiers, atrocities that might well have been copied from the priest Bartholomé's sixteenth-century reports. It is said that it was Hearst who first decreed: 'Never let the facts get in the way of a good story.'

He hired the most talented artists to draw front-page pictures, dramatic depictions of the war and its carnage that were entirely of the illustrator's own imagination. One front page featured a nude surrounded by Spanish soldiers. The caption beneath said that the woman, an American, had been strip-searched by the men. It enraged America as no other front page had ever done before but it later transpired that no American woman had ever been treated that way. It mattered not and Hearst promoted the man who drew the picture.

He sent his chief illustrator to Havana to capture 'dramatic images'. Some days later the man cabled him to say that he could find no war. Hearst replied:

> Remain. You furnish the pictures. I will furnish the war.

The strategy paid off. Within a year, circulation of the *Journal* had quadrupled. So jubilant was Hearst that at the end of that year and with the American forces clearly winning, he published the headline: 'HOW DO YOU LIKE THE JOURNAL'S WAR?'

For good reason, it was known as the journalists' war. Unlike the restrictions imposed in the American Civil War, reporters were pampered by military commanders who had come of age. They knew how important newspapers were in maintaining public support in the winning of the war.

Reporters were allowed freedom of movement and similarly freedom to write how they pleased. If occasionally some were considered too reckless, a local commander might impose his own censorship but in a less obvious way, like re-routing the reporter's dispatches by the longest telegraphic route so that, by the time they reached the news desks, the story was already history.

If there was criticism it came from where it mattered least to the newspaper editors: from academia and the intellectual elite. They accused reporters of feeding on popular myths, of exaggerating minor events as hugely significant and 'seeing an outbreak in every breeze and a bloody encounter in every rustling bough'.

No one was listening, least of all the war correspondents themselves. Their cavalier style of reporting, the drama of their self-congratulatory tales of derring-do at a front line, which was often miles from the actual fighting, made them famous, coast to coast. Impartial objectivity had yet to become a guiding principle. In the eyes

of the readers, the war reporter had become a glamorous adventurer and as much a brave hero as the soldiers he was writing about.

The age of the 'Yellow Press' had arrived and it got its name from a strip cartoon called 'The Yellow Kid' in Joseph Pulitzer's *World*. There is some irony in the fact that he, who like his competitor Hearst had done so much to debase journalism, should later establish the Pulitzer Prize, still awarded annually for journalistic excellence!

The Second Boer War in 1899 was the first 'media war', the first major conflict covered by what is nowadays termed the mass media. The *Morning Post* sent Winston Churchill. There was no indication then or later that he ever had any intention of making journalism a career. What attracted him was the adventure, the excitement that war offered. In 1895, only twenty-one years old and a lieutenant in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, he took leave on the pretext of holidaying in the West Indies. In fact he went to Cuba for a dual purpose, to see combat and observe the tactics of the Spanish army and to report the war for the *Daily Telegraph*. In a letter to his mother from Havana he wrote: 'It's better making the news than taking it ... to be an actor rather than the critic. It is an adventure ... to begin with it's a toy, an amusement. Then it becomes your mistress and finally your tyrant.'

In one of his first dispatches to the *Daily Telegraph* he describes his first experience under fire as the Spanish General Valdez attacked Cuban rebels:

> The General in a white and gold uniform riding a grey horse drew a great deal of fire upon us and I heard enough bullets whistle and hum past to satisfy me for some time to come. We rode right up to within five hundred yards of the enemy and there we waited until the fire of the Spanish infantry drove them from their position. We had great luck in not losing more than we did.

In a second article, sent to the *Saturday Review* in March 1896, he was contemptuous of the rebel army, saying that if they ever came to power:

> They would be corrupt, capricious, unstable. Revolutions would become periodic, property insecure, equity unknown. Their army consists of coloured men, they neither fight bravely nor use their weapons effectively. They cannot win a single battle or hold a single town. They are an undisciplined rabble.

He was fiercely criticised for his failure to report the war impartially. But he was young, it was his first war as well as his first assignment as a war reporter. His youth, inexperience and family background might excuse his naïve explanation at the time that being under fire with the Spanish on his twenty-first birthday and roughing it with people who provided him with food, shelter and safety bred a comradeship that made objective reporting near impossible. He was to apologise later, leaving the most important sentence as a practising journalist to the last:

> I reproach myself for having reported a little uncandidly and perhaps done injustice to the insurgents. I rather tried to make out a case for Spain. It was politic and did not expose me to the charge of being ungrateful to my hosts. What I wrote did not shake thrones or unheave empires but the importance of principles does not depend upon the importance of what involves them.

Just over forty years later, Churchill tried to dissuade his son from going to the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent for the *Daily Mail*. He reminded him of his own experiences and how difficult it would be to write objectively about a war when you were confined to one side of it.

Churchill had by now decided he would leave the army. His earnings from the *Daily Telegraph* were five times what he had been paid for his three years as a lieutenant on fourteen shillings a day. The *Morning Post* had paid him £300 for his dispatches from the Sudan, including his eyewitness account of the Battle of Omdurman and its famous cavalry charge. His occasional unsigned letters to various newspapers sent from India's north-west, where he was attached to the 7th Lancers, earned him three times his daily army pay.

Once back in England, he wrote a weekly article, 'Letter from London', for the American periodical *Pioneer*, who paid him £3 for each of them. Then, with the outbreak of the Second Boer War in 1898, Oliver Borthwick, editor of the *Morning Post*, offered him a contract as senior foreign correspondent, all expenses paid, for £250 a month, the highest of any senior British reporter. Soon after, he joined the *Dunottar Castle* bound for South Africa. He took with him what he considered to be essential for the hazardous assignment ahead, items supplied by his favourite wine merchant, Rudolph Payne and Sons of St James's. The invoice is dated 6 October 1899:

6 bottles Vin d'Ay Sec.
18 bottles St Emilion.
6 bottles light Port.
6 bottles French Vermouth.
18 bottles Scotch Whisky (10 years old).
6 bottles Very Old Eau de Vie.
12 bottles Rose's Cordial Lime Juice.

His first assignment was almost his last. On his arrival in Durban, he boarded an armoured train carrying troops to Ladysmith. But the Boers now controlled the line and just as the train was leaving Chievely it was ambushed. He described it in one of his most graphic war reports:

> A huge white ball of smoke sprang into being only a few feet above my head. It was shrapnel, the first I had ever seen and very nearly the last. The steel sides of the truck tanged with the patter of bullets. Then suddenly there was a tremendous shock and the train travelling at forty miles an hour was thrown off the rails and I could see scores of figures running forward and throwing themselves down on the grass from which came accurate and heavy fire. It was continuous and there mingled with the rifles the bang of field guns and the near explosion of their shells.
>
> Another shrapnel burst nearby and the train driver ran from his cab, his face cut open by shell splinters streaming with blood. He was dazed and it looked as if all hope of escape was cut off as only he knew the machinery. So I told him that no man was hit twice in a day, that a wounded man who continued to do his duty was always rewarded for his distinguished gallantry and that he might never have the chance again. On this he pulled himself together, wiped the blood from his face, climbed back into the cab and thereafter obeyed every order I gave him.

Some hours later, Churchill, surrounded by Boers, surrendered, no doubt encouraged by Napoleon's advice that when one is alone and unarmed a surrender may be pardoned. His dramatic escape from the Boers soon after was reported in the world's newspapers:

> Lieutenant Churchill managed to slip away from his guards at night by scaling the wall. He boarded a train which ran from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay just as it was moving from the platform and concealed himself under coal sacks. A close search was made but he was not discovered. For several days he lived simply on chocolate.

On his return to England he was feted as a national hero but his career as a war reporter was finally at an end.

In 1897 Frederic Villiers, a celebrated British war artist, was the first to take a film camera to war in the brief campaign between Greece and Turkey. The following year he mounted his tripod on one of Lord Kitchener's gunships sailing up the Nile for the relief of Khartoum. As the guns fired the camera went overboard and the film was ruined. But Villiers's attempt to record the war on celluloid heralded a new era of war reporting.

During the Spanish–American War in 1898, the Edison Company claimed to have filmed the funeral procession of the victims of the American ship *Maine* that had been sunk by the Spanish. Its authenticity has since been questioned but there is genuine film stock of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders of Santiago and American troops invading Baiquiri in Cuba. The Vitagraph Company also accompanied Roosevelt to Cuba and filmed the Rough Riders' assault on Juan Hill.

In 1900, William Dickson of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company was sent to cover the Boer War and brought with him the latest film camera called the Bioscope. He confidently expected to record the first dramatic moving images of the fight between the British Redcoats and the Boer commandos. His Bioscope was large, encased in a cumbersome elm box supported by a sturdy oak tripod and so heavy it had to be transported in an ox wagon. He apparently considered himself to be uniquely defined by this brand new medium and in his semi-fictional novel *Ladysmith*, Giles Foden portrays him as someone who deliberately set himself apart from the rest of the media because he was not of them.

> He wished he was elsewhere ... these silver tongued correspondents, they were another breed. Even the way they held their bodies was different. Look at Churchill now ... even when he was not the centre of attention and listening as another of them blathered on, he had a patronising air.

> He wished he had his camera with him, with its armour in front of him, its sturdy wooden box, its glass plate and hood … he felt protected, in control, unassailable.

But Dickson was not prepared for the war he had come to cover. He had been trained to film at a leisurely pace, to rehearse and re-shoot scenes, to light difficult shots. But war is not static and this was not a conventional one. Opposing armies were not facing each other in regimented formation. There was no front line, no pitched battles out in the open. This was a war in the bush and in the veldt with General Botha's commandos, so well camouflaged they were invisible, perfecting what were to become classic guerrilla tactics of sniping, ambush, and hit and run.

At first Dickson had to be content filming armoured troop trains, field headquarters, marching columns, campsites. Then, with so much of his own money and reputation at stake, he simply made it up and the army was keen to oblige on the understanding that they called the shots. Commanders provided him with rehearsed simulated attacks on make-believe Boer outposts and reconstructions of British Redcoats repeating a previous encounter. There is evidence that the military even confided with him their plans of operations so that he could set up his equipment in advance. The footage he sent back to London was, with a few exceptions, illusory. But it fooled the 'newsreel' audiences, fascinated and captivated and convinced that the camera did not lie.

There was one aspect of the Boer War that did suit Dickson's static camera and that was the 'concentration camps'. To deny Botha's men food and intelligence from the civilian population, Lord Kitchener ordered his army to 'sweep the Transvaal and Orange territories clean' of all women, children and the elderly, as well as Africans and young Afrikaners of fighting age. They were herded into these camps and thousands died from malnutrition and disease.

But Dickson did not film them. He must have known about them; their existence was common knowledge to the journalists he so despised. No doubt the military forbade it.

The first of the best newsreel war coverage was in the Mexican Revolution of 1911. But if the camera did not lie, it was used to great effect in helping those who did. For the first time it was used as a powerful weapon of propaganda. Pancho Villa, one of the more famous Mexican leaders, decided he would only fight his battles during daylight hours so that film cameras could record his campaigns. Two years into the war, he offered motion picture rights to any producer who wanted exclusive coverage. The Mutual Film Company promptly signed the contract, paying Pancho Villa $25,000 and 50 per cent of the royalties. He was as good as his word. He delayed his attack on the city of Ojinaga until he was satisfied the camera crews were in place.

Make-believe propaganda techniques were employed by the British government in the First World War. In the absence of actual front-line coverage, much of what was shown to British newsreel audiences of troops in action, 'going over the top', was simply men in training far from the action.

But it was the Chinese–Japanese War in 1930 that provided the most graphic images of war, when combat cameramen were allowed to cover it on both sides. Harrison Forman of *The March of Time* filmed the Japanese bombing of Shanghai. The Hearst cameraman Wong Hai Sheng, known as Newsreel Wong, shot one of the most memorable images of all wars: the solitary baby crying amidst the rubble in the aftermath of the Shanghai attack. Like so many iconic war pictures since, there remains the suspicion that such a thing could only have been staged.

In 1974 the trick was copied again. The crossing of the Suez Canal by Egyptian troops at the start of the War of Yom Kippur was an extraordinary military feat by any standards but it was not filmed by

a single Egyptian cameraman. Perhaps their High Command feared the debacle of defeat and did not want that recorded. But it was a success of such enormous proportions that a year after the war had ended and despite their ultimate defeat, the Egyptians repeated the crossing with the same full commitment of armour and troops and the international media were invited to record it. It was subsequently repeated on Egyptian television as the real thing.

With the outbreak of the First World War and with Lord Kitchener as Minister for War and Munitions, the portents were not good for those hoping to report it. Kitchener had been vehemently hostile to journalists ever since his cantankerous experience of them in the Sudan, where he saw no reason for them to be there. He was then outraged by the slightest criticism of the way he was conducting his war against the Dervishes, the Mahdi's army. 'Get out of my way, you drunken swabs!' he shouted at them on his arrival in Khartoum.

Within months of the declaration of war in 1914, he introduced blanket press censorship, the most severe by any British commander yet. In the first year of the war all press accreditation was refused. The British public, anxious to understand the reason for British involvement in a Continental conflict, had to be satisfied with clumsy propaganda from the government's newly formed Press Bureau, which censored even military communiqués before passing them on for publication. Its mantra could be summed up as: 'Do nothing. Say nothing. Keep off the front pages.'

David Lloyd George, who was soon to become Prime Minister, told C. P. Snow, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, that if people really knew what was going on in the trenches the war would be stopped immediately. At the time, the government even denied trenches existed. As Lloyd George said: 'But of course they don't know. And they shan't know. The correspondents do not write, and the censors would not pass, the truth.'

Kitchener was adamant. There would be no press anywhere near the action. Instead, he appointed Colonel Ernest Swinton as the official war correspondent, later joined by the conscripted journalist Henry Tomlinson. Only military cameramen were allowed near the front. Their filming was amateur, under-exposed, grainy and, as was later proven, often faked.

So British journalists, as well as those from other countries based in London, were obliged to write stories of a war that was less than a hundred miles away across the English Channel, relying on the barely believable and infantile releases from the Press Bureau. It prompted Winston Churchill, then at the Admiralty, to complain about 'The Fog of War', a phrase that has echoed down the corridors of every news organisation everywhere, ever since.

It could not continue. The truth of what was happening on the Western Front was filtering back by other means, much of it from returning wounded troops. The British public, saturated by the daily barrage of government propaganda, became more suspicious, more inquisitive and newspaper editorials more vociferous. In 1915 Theodore Roosevelt wrote to the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, warning him that barring journalists from the front 'was harming Britain's cause in the United States'.

Prime Minister Asquith and Kitchener bent to the President's will. In March that year four journalists were invited, under strict supervision, to visit the British Field Headquarters during the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle, among them Frederic Villiers, both war artist and correspondent. As a result, their dispatches reached London in days rather than weeks, albeit heavily censored. Others, including Henry Nevinson, joined the fleet on its way to the Dardanelles.

Two months later, permanent accreditation was given to five more carefully chosen reporters but on a 'pooled' basis, the five pooling or sharing their information for general distribution to all news outlets in the United Kingdom and abroad.

In another – more sinister – development, kept secret at the time, an official register was kept by the War Office of reporters 'whose patriotism was in no doubt, were on the military's side and could be trusted to comply with regulations and not betray military information to the enemy either by accident or design'.

But the breakthrough came at a cost. Journalists sacrificed much for the privilege of visiting battle areas as censorship was ratcheted up. Correspondents were accompanied at all times by a 'minder', usually a junior officer who despised the press and made it his business to obstruct them at all times. Their dispatches were first examined by a senior staff officer who had the authority of immediate veto before they were relayed to the War Office. There a press officer, usually a minor bureaucrat and suffering no crisis of conscience, moulded the story to suit the official version of the day. These dispatches were then sent by special couriers to the newspapers but with no indication to the editors that what they were about to print bore little resemblance to the stories their reporters had initially written.

Philip Gibbs was sent by the *Daily Telegraph* to France soon after the outbreak of the war and he quickly became critical of the British command and its determination to suppress the truth of what was happening there. He did manage to smuggle some of his reports, uncensored, back to his newspaper and those describing conditions in the trenches appalled his readers. But when Gibbs revealed the bitterness and hostility that existed between officers and other ranks, sometimes bordering on mutiny, Kitchener decided enough was enough. Gibbs was arrested on charges of 'aiding and abetting the enemy and warned he would be put up against the wall and shot'.

Instead he was given a military escort back to England and told he would not be allowed to return to France. But he was not out of favour for long, such was the influence of the newspaper. A month later he was given full military accreditation and returned to the front, where he stayed for the rest of the war. His output

was prodigious but he paid the price, submitting, as most did, to ever sterner censorship. This note to his editor was never published: 'Journalism has been throttled. We are so desperate for information that we will report any scrap of any description, any glimmer of truth, any wild statement, rumour, fairy tale or deliberate lie, if it fills the vacuum.'

He had his revenge when the war was over, publishing his memoirs *The Realities of War*, in which he gave a very caustic portrait of Haig.

There were other honourable exceptions, those who would rather write nothing if all they were allowed to write were government untruths. Some found ingenious ways to avoid the military's control. Henry Hamilton Fyfe of the *Daily Mail*, having angered the generals with a smuggled dispatch home, was threatened with arrest and deportation back to England. Instead he joined the French Red Cross as a stretcher bearer and continued his reporting as before.

Another was Charles à Court Repington. He was a former lieutenant colonel in the Rifle Brigade and had served in Afghanistan, in Burma, in the Sudan under Kitchener and as a staff officer in the Boer War. After an affair with a fellow officer's wife became public, he was forced to resign his commission but was offered the post of military correspondent for Lord Northcliffe's *Times*. With his background, he had privileged access to senior officers and diplomats which enabled him to bypass the restrictions that so frustrated his colleagues. His high-ranking contacts fed him valuable titbits of information, assuming that as an officer and a gentleman they could depend on his discretion and confidentiality. This cosy relationship abruptly ended with his scoop, remembered as the 'Shells Crisis' story.

In May 1915, in conversation with the British Expeditionary Force Commander-in-Chief General Sir John French, Repington was told that the shortage of artillery shells had contributed to the failure of the British attack on German positions at Neuve-Chapelle and Aubers Ridge two months earlier, which had resulted in appalling

British casualties. Repington wrote: 'The want of an unlimited supply of high explosive shells was a fatal bar to our success.'

The story caused a furore which forced Prime Minister Asquith to dissolve his Liberal government and form a coalition. General French was replaced by Haig and newspapers, including *The Times*, demanded the resignation of Lord Kitchener. He kept his seat in Cabinet but was replaced as minister responsible for munitions by Lloyd George.

Kitchener exacted his revenge on Repington by ensuring he was promptly barred from visiting the Western Front, an order not reversed for another year and then only under pressure from the new government.

Repington became a campaigner for a national army, what was later to become known as the Territorials. Towards the end of the war, he resigned from *The Times* after a disagreement with Northcliffe over his style of reporting and promptly joined the *Morning Post*. He was later arrested and charged under the Defence of the Realm Act with disclosing classified military information in one of his articles. After he was found guilty and fined he wryly commented that the military had a long memory and a revengeful, unforgiving nature.

Despite all the humiliation they had to endure, there was little resistance from the editors or proprietors of the national newspapers. Their reporters seemed resigned to a form of journalism that demanded they tamely exchanged their professional integrity for the limited access the military provided. Many defended themselves, arguing that being near the battlefront, whatever the restrictions, was better than sitting at their desk in London turning War Office handouts into readable copy.

But they had become a small, selfish, privileged coterie, joined together in the conspiracy of lies, propaganda and the suppression of truth. Henry Nevinson, who had been a colleague of Churchill in the

Boer War, wrote this: 'We lived chirping together like little birds in a nest, wholly dependent on the military to feed us.'

They had become allies in deceit. Their stories often portrayed the war like a football match, which nauseated the men in the trenches. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, some reports omitted to mention the twenty thousand British dead. They were even willing to lend their names to absurd government propaganda atrocity stories: that the Germans ate Belgian babies, that the Germans were boiling their dead in vast vats to produce glycerine for munitions.

They had conspired to hide the truth of the mass slaughter in Flanders fields, the continuing and shameful shortage of ammunition, the decisions made by Kitchener and General French, and later Haig, that led to the mass slaughter of entire battalions in one day's fighting. Initially, and to their everlasting disgrace, even the Somme was initially reported as a victory. Reporters hid from their readers, whose fathers, sons and brothers were fighting, the sheer scale of the casualties.

After the war some wrote of how deeply ashamed they were at what they had written, a shame compounded when the government offered them knighthoods and many accepted. There were honourable exceptions, including Nevinson and Repington, who saw it as a bribe to keep their silence. Had they the courage to break that silence when it mattered most, how different it might have been.

Wine bottles in place of crosses, 1915, by Frederic Villiers

TWO

THEN AND NOW – II

The Spanish Civil War, which began in July 1936, heralded what is frequently described as the golden age of war reporters. The world's literary elite, over one thousand of them, descended on Spain and became participants, even combatants, on either side in the fight between the Republicans and the fascist Nationalists. They brought with them an altogether new kind of war reporting which hastily abandoned the old-established style of non-attached, objective, fact-and-figures journalism. They had a compulsion to be there, to bear witness, to report in the first person, to dispense with the ethics of professional impartiality, their mantra being: 'I must not just write what I see but write what I feel.'

They came not just to cover this war but to report the ideological battle of the time: Church against State, rich against poor, aristocracy versus the classless, democracy fighting fascism. What was happening in Spain was everybody's fight and they brought their colours with them. Like the leftist Martha Gellhorn: 'I went to Spain and didn't have the slightest idea of doing anything except being there. It was an act of solidarity, it was the only place fighting fascism.'

The French author and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry flew his own aircraft. Kim Philby was already spying for the Kremlin, using his position as reporter for *The Times* as cover. He was almost killed in a Republican ambush and General Franco gave him a medal for bravery!

Harold Cardozo of the *Daily Mail* was a constant travelling companion of the General and was not troubled by accusations of complicity. It was an association that provided his newspaper with many exclusives.

George Orwell, writing for the *New England Weekly*, was shot through the neck but it did not stop him sending his weekly dispatches back to London. In one article, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', he exposed the divide between the various factions of the Republicans, between those fighting against Franco and those fighting for the Soviet Union: 'As for all the newspaper talk about this being a war for democracy ... well that's just plain eyewash.'

Ernest Hemingway, looking every inch the battle-scarred adventurer, posed for the *New Republic* holding a rifle in a mock firing position. He had excellent contacts on both sides, and they kept him well supplied, not only with story lines but with food, brandy, a car and petrol. This did not make him popular with the rest of the international press corps, who had few of these luxuries. He lived in style, insisting he had breakfast brought to his hotel bedroom every day.

It was here that he wooed Martha Gellhorn and where she launched her career as a war reporter with a four-page article for *Collier's Weekly*.

On Wednesday 26 April 1937, reporters were having dinner in Bilbao's Presidencia Hotel when they heard the news of the bombing of the ancient Basque town of Guernica. Reuters filed the story first but it was the South African correspondent George Lowther Steer whose dispatch made the front pages of *The Times* and the *New York Times*, the two most influential newspapers either side of the Atlantic.

Steer had identified the black crosses on the tails of the aircraft and named the types of German bombers. It was proof, long suspected, that the Nazis were actively supporting Franco's fascists. It was the first time in war that civilians had been attacked in such devastating force from the air, the first blitzkrieg and a warning of things to come.

The newspapers headlined his report: 'The Most Appalling Air Raid Ever Known'.

> The most ancient town of the Basques has been completely destroyed by insurgent raiders. For three and a quarter hours, a powerful fleet of German Junkers and Heinkel bombers did not cease unloading their bombs on the town. Fighter planes plunged low from above the centre of the town to machine-gun those who had taken refuge in the fields. The whole town is flaming from end to end, the reflection could be seen in the clouds of smoke above the mountains. This raid is unparalleled in military history. In the centre of the town flames were gathering in a single roar. There were people to be saved they said but nothing could be done. We put our hands in our pockets and wondered why on earth the world was so mad and warfare become so easy.

Knowing that Franco and Hitler would deny all complicity, Steer brought out of the wreckage incontrovertible evidence: three shiny aluminium tubes with the remains of silver white powder inside. They were thermite incendiary bombs stamped with the German Imperial eagle.

One reader of Steer's dispatch would make it immortal: Pablo Picasso. Within a month of it, he began painting a giant canvas, twelve feet by twenty-five, and on 4 June, his *Guernica* was shown for the first time in Paris. The Germans were furious with Steer's revelations and the name 'Steer, G. L.' was put on the Gestapo Special Wanted List of people to be immediately arrested once the Nazis had successfully invaded England.

War correspondents in the Second World War were known throughout the Armed Services as WARCOs. Photographs show them fitted out with uniforms, Sam Browne belts and the insignia

C for Correspondent. They were forbidden to carry arms but could, if captured as prisoners of war, assume the rank of captain.

Some were later to admit, shame-facedly, that they had behaved like the spoilt children of very wealthy parents. They took it for granted that they should be lodged in the best houses or hotels, to have army cars and drivers at their disposal and be served the best food available. In return they were expected to be 'onside' with the military, obey without question their restrictions and not hanker after freedom from the censor. They were blithely considered by military and government alike to be instruments of the war effort, subjected to precisely the same rigid editorial control as the generation of reporters before them. Most had little choice but to console themselves, realising how dependent they were on the military for access and information. The poet Humbert Wolfe wrote these lines to describe them:

You cannot hope to bribe or twist,
Thank God, the British journalist.
But seeing what the man will do
Unbribed, there's no occasion to.

He was clearly not an admirer of the British war reporter and at the outbreak of war, it is not surprising that he was employed by the War Office to compile a list of writers who could serve as propagandists for the British army.

The Germans, who had been quietly gearing up for another war ever since their humiliation at Versailles, had also perfected their media strategy. When war began, their journalists were conscripted into the three Services along with film and radio producers, printers, artists, writers and cameramen. They had been given basic military training, with orders to fight if necessary. They were in effect Hitler's propaganda shock troops. Every army unit had its reporter

and photographer, every squadron and every ship the same. It explains why so much of the archive of the war we have today is of German origin.

The Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, wooed the foreign press with special privileges, like free transport, extra food rations and generous rates of exchange. Yet he ensured that all communication out of Germany was fastidiously monitored and any foreign reporter who filed negative copy might find himself arrested on charges ranging from 'soliciting' to espionage. But in the early stages of the war it was certainly simpler and more profitable to be filing from Berlin than London where British reporters were kept on a tight leash, starved of information, denied access.

The reins were loosened a little when the British Expeditionary Force landed in France on 9 May 1940. Four British war reporters were allowed to accompany them but their 'pooled' reports were so heavily censored that even verbs had been erased and copy that arrived back in London made little sense. The newspaper proprietors complained and the *Daily Express*, in a sarcastic editorial, suggested that the Royal Air Force should drop leaflets over Britain informing people what was happening on the other side of the Channel. The government promptly responded by recalling the newspaper's correspondent O. D. Gallagher, who was condemned to spend the rest of the war reporting domestic stories.

Reporting by 'wireless' came into its own with the outbreak of the war and it loosened the bounds of censorship. Throughout the early 1930s the BBC had been experimenting and developing various methods of outside broadcasting which included the Blattnerphone in 1931. It recorded sound magnetically onto a large steel tape at three feet a second. In 1935, the corporation experimented with a gramophone machine that cut grooves on to a magnetic aluminium disc, ready for immediate playback. It was cumbersome and unreliable but it relieved producers of having always to present every programme live.

BBC technicians were also converting standard saloon cars into mobile recording studios featuring a single turntable called 'the Mighty Midget', capable of four minutes' uninterrupted recording. It was a critical breakthrough because these recordings could be relayed back to Broadcasting House over the telephone line or the less reliable short-wave transmitter. The Corporation also fitted out a large van, nicknamed Belinda, which was capable of multiple recordings and able to transmit lengthy reports on the same day. A brand new way of reporting war was launched with an authenticity no other medium then could possibly match. It was called 'Spoken News'.

From the day war was declared, the BBC began broadcasting dispatches from its many overseas correspondents. Long before D-Day it was airing over a hundred reports a month on its *Combat Diary* for the Allied Expeditionary Forces Network, *Radio Newsreel*, transmitted on its world service, and *War Report* on the Home Service. But it was the prospect of the Second Front, the invasion of Europe, that propelled the BBC news gatherers forward.

In March 1943, a military exercise codenamed 'Spartan' was held across southern England to test new equipment and new battlefield tactics in preparation for D-Day. The BBC was granted the opportunity to use these manoeuvres to develop its reporting of war. Their technicians were attached to the two 'opposing' armies; engineers recorded elaborate sound of the sham fighting, there were eyewitness running commentaries, feature writers dramatised particular events and ongoing news dispatches were flashed to Broadcasting House.

The BBC set up a mock unit where the mass of material was censored before being edited into dummy newsreels and bulletins. Everything was done for real, even to the extent of rushing items through at precisely the scheduled time. It was the first time that all the various news departments at Broadcasting House had been brought together as one team. 'Spoken News' was re-christened 'Sound Photography'.

When the results were played back to the Secretary of State for War and the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces they agreed that, come the day, the BBC would have the 'fullest co-operation of the army ... indeed of all three Services in the forthcoming invasion of Western Europe'.

Selected correspondents, some recruited from newspapers and periodicals, many from within the BBC, were obliged to attend courses on censorship. It was easy for the censor to delete a sentence or change the emphasis in a written dispatch but impossible if those words had been recorded on disc. To introduce them to the dangerous nuances in a hastily written dispatch, they were taken to a 'plausibly German headquarters where a plausibly Nazi Intelligence Officer played some specially-prepared recordings by a British correspondent. The "German" then converted seemingly innocent remarks into more significant military information.'

It was their first lesson in self-censorship. Finally the recruits faced their toughest test. They began months of special training to equip them for the hardships they would face as they accompanied troops at the front. They went on an intense physical training course which earned them the nickname 'BBC Commandos'. They were instructed in gunnery, signals, reconnaissance, aircraft and tank recognition and map reading. They went on assault courses, crossed rivers on ropes and crawled through netting under live fire. Some were attached to regular army units and shared every exercise and route march with them.

Those who survived the ordeal won the respect of the army. Correspondents would no longer be regarded in the field as civilians in khaki fancy dress; they knew army jargon and service discipline. At its most senior level the army came to regard them as an extension of their own public relations machine, which was to have mixed benefits. Correspondents were indeed often taken into the confidence of field commanders but they were also assumed to be onside, a family member, which threatened to compromise editorial integrity.

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, the BBC launched its nightly *War Report*. It followed the nine o'clock news bulletin and continued uninterrupted, from the initial landings to Germany's final surrender. An estimated fifteen million listeners tuned in to hear the familiar, trusted voices of Chester Wilmot, Frank Gillard, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, Godfrey Talbot, Richard Dimbleby and Stanley Maxted.

They communicated directly and intimately to families gathered around their wireless sets, to soldiers at the front, to sailors in the warships, to the merchant seaman in the supply convoys, to the French, Belgian, and Dutch underground resistance and saboteurs listening secretly under the shadow of the Gestapo. When, on 24 March 1945, Joseph Goebbels tuned in to the BBC World Service, as he did every night, he heard Richard Dimbleby aboard a Dakota aircraft describing the British glider landings at the Battle of the Rhine.

> The Rhine lies left and right across our path shining in the sunlight and the whole of this mighty airborne army is filling the sky. A Dakota has just gone down in flames. Above us and below us are the tugs as they take their gliders in. Down there is the smoke of battle. Our skipper is talking to the glider pilot, warning him that we're nearly there, preparing to cast him off. Ahead is a pillar of smoke where another aircraft has gone down ... it's a Stirling, a British Stirling, going down with flames coming out of its belly … parachutes are coming out … one, two, three, four billowing parachutes, out of the Stirling.
>
> 'Stand by and I'll tell you when to jump off.' Our pilot is calling up, telling the glider pilot that in just a moment we shall have to let go. All over the sky ... here comes his voice ... NOW! We've let her go ... we've turned hard away in a tight circle to port ... sorry if I'm shouting but this is a tremendous sight.

In the glider he was describing was Dimbleby's colleague Stanley Maxted:

> Just a few feet off the ground and a wicked snap of Spandau machine-guns, mixed with the bang of 20mm incendiaries. There was an explosion that appeared inside my head, the smell of burnt cordite. I went down on my knees, then something hot and sticky was dripping into my right eye and off my chin. I saw the Bren carrier go out of the nose of the glider and wiping two signallers off the top of it like flies … I saw a man pinned against the wreckage as bullets kept crashing through the fuselage. The ground was a mist of smoke from our artillery bombardment. I saw crashed gliders, burning gliders and the great courage of men going into fight.

Maxted proved his own courage. He was wounded in the landing but carried on to report the battle that sealed Hitler's defeat.

The BBC's War Reporting Unit established the corporation's high reputation as a serious news provider, which has been maintained to this day.

On the Normandy invasion and the subsequent Allied push through Europe, there were 558 accredited WARCOs from Britain and America. American reporters fought British censorship from every angle. Their army saw public relations and news management as a vital part of their overall strategy. General Dwight Eisenhower allocated considerable resources to accommodating and controlling the growing American press corps, concerned that there should be a working balance between the two. It was, he said, 'a matter of policy that accredited correspondents should be accorded the greatest possible latitude in the gathering of legitimate news and be given all reasonable assistance'.

It was, of course, the military's prerogative to define what was 'legitimate news' and dispatches were routinely if lightly censored. But American reporters were allowed easy access to the fighting, field commanders were less suspicious of them and the minders that

accompanied them were often former journalists themselves and more ready to compromise. British reporters looked on with envy.

The British army in the north Africa campaign was more media friendly because, like Eisenhower, its commander there understood the importance of media exposure both for himself and for the war he was fighting. General Bernard Montgomery was a self-confessed master of self-promotion and manipulated the press to his and to his troops' advantage. To him, the press was an essential arm of warfare.

He regarded them as part of his staff. No other British general in any other theatre of the war had his charisma and he exploited it shamelessly. In the north Africa campaign, his 'Desert Rats' loved him and so did the WARCOs who accompanied him. Their stories read like adventurous fiction. His running 'duel' with Rommel, the 'Desert Fox', made him a living legend.

He knew the power of the newsreels and according to those who filmed him, he was wary of them, selective, manipulative, artfully posing. It was said that Monty never rode on a tank unless there was a camera to record it. A WARCO wrote at the time that ' every journalist should sit on a tank if he wants to be loved … really loved!'

He recognised that radio was his best and most immediate weapon for invigorating troop morale as well as galvanising support on the home front. He was not content for his successes to be reported second-hand in the newspapers; he also wanted to be heard. Whenever he had anything to say he would invite the BBC reporter to his caravan to record it. His voice was listened to by his troops of the 21st Battle Group and by their families back home and in that way, he knew he could win the confidence and loyalty on both fronts.

Frank Gillard spent much time with him.

> I enjoyed his strong support. He was always willing to broadcast but there were occasions when I thought it best not to and he accepted

> my decision without quibble. And he always respected the BBC's editorial independence.

Monty sent Gillard an unusual request:

> I got a message from his ADC that the Field Marshal would like a puppy. He thought I might mention it on one my broadcasts. Of course such a mention, supposing it got past my editors, would have produced thousands of puppies with ghastly consequences. So I scoured our narrow beachhead and in a devastated little village I found a tiny Scotch terrier puppy. Monty received it with delight and instantly named him Hitler. But this Hitler too, did not survive the war. He was run over by one of Monty's tanks in the final advance. But during his short life, I know he gave companionship to a man who inwardly was a very solitary person.

With exceptions that can be counted on the fingers of one hand, all British WARCOs were men. In the entire British press corps covering the five years of the war only five were women. American women correspondents and photographers totalled nearly two hundred, among them Margaret Bourke-White and Martha Gellhorn.

Despite their insistence on being treated as equals, British women reporters were barred from active combat zones. Phillip Ashley, head of the 8th Army's Press Division, a junior lieutenant, which is a measure of the importance the military attached to the job, had decided that women reporters should only be given 'special visitor status and only then after full consideration for their safety and well-being'. This at a time when nurses were braving the bombs and saving lives in the wreckage of the Blitz. And others, some barely out of their teens, were ferrying Spitfires and Lancasters to aerodromes around Britain, under constant threat from the Luftwaffe. Amy Johnson, who had flown single handed in a record-breaking flight to Australia in 1930, died doing that job.

In the Korean War, the American General McArthur decided not to impose formal censorship and instead shifted the burden of responsibility onto the reporters themselves, trusting them not to compromise military security. But without clearly defined ground rules the reporters found the lines of transgression were too vague and they floundered. The disclosure of sensitive military information by correspondents became a daily occurrence and when the Chinese army began to turn the tide of the war in their favour in mid-September 1950, there was a very rapid return to the familiar censor's veto and the physical containment of the correspondents.

Ever since their Civil War, the Americans have maintained their military and political manipulation of the media to a greater or lesser degree. This despite the First Amendment to the Constitution, which states: 'Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.' It is a remarkably unambiguous statement and yet successive administrations have delivered their own interpretations of it when at war.

In Vietnam the military command offered unprecedented access to the battlefields yet at the same time relentlessly tried to bamboozle the international media. They boasted of their success in it, and for years concealed the extent of their defeats and the scale of their casualties. Their generals displayed astonishing arrogance in their dealing with reporters, unaware or unconcerned about the effect this would have.

They offered unparalleled freedom of movement and information. If a reporter went to MACV, the American Military Press Liaison Centre in Saigon, and requested a trip to a battle zone, by evening a helicopter would have dropped him there. He could speak to whom he liked and there was no censor's blue pencil to alter his dispatch. A waiting Huey was ready the next day to fly him back to safety. Yet at the same time the Pentagon's media relations gurus actively encouraged a strategy of denial and secrecy to such an extent that from 1968,

in the aftermath of the Tết Offensive, they were dealing with both an American and an international press corps that had become chronically hostile and disbelieving.

This has since become known as the Vietnam Syndrome: that it was the media not the generals who lost the war. It was Marshall McLuhan who said that 'television brought the brutality of the war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America not on the battlefields of Vietnam.' It was a convenient myth, but it has dictated the political and military attitudes to the media in all countries ever since.

When the Israelis invaded Lebanon in 1982 they imposed a total news blackout. Until then, the system of press relations and censorship they operated was a model that worked well for both military and journalists. It had worked, to much acclaim, in the Yom Kippur War nine years earlier. Access then had been everything, the censors' niggling came later. But as their troops crossed their northern border in 1982 they invoked what became known as the 'Battle Fog Policy'. Correspondents were not allowed into Lebanon until six days later by which time Israeli troops were in control and news was already history.

The Americans did the same when they invaded Grenada. Codenamed 'Operation Fury', ten thousand US Marines landed on the beaches to depose the military dictator Hudson Austin. Meanwhile, over four hundred reporters were queuing up at the American Embassy in Barbados demanding accreditation and transport to Grenada. They had to wait another week before the American military allowed the first to fly in. Their containment had been absolute.

In 1982, Sir John Fieldhouse, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces en route to the Falklands, declared that reporters accompanying the fleet were 'bloody inconvenient. If I had my way I wouldn't tell anyone there was a war going on until it was over. Then I would simply tell them who'd won!'

It is fact that even before the tiny British armada had left the English Channel, a coded message was sent from Royal Navy headquarters in Northwood to the flagship HMS *Hermes* which simply read 'DIET'. Decoded it read: 'Starve the press'. The Navy was more than happy to obey.

The British military in the Falklands, as in all its previous wars, blithely considered correspondents to be handy instruments of propaganda and misinformation. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Terence Lewin, later admitted that 'journalists had been very useful with our deception'.

It all changes when a war reporter is among his own people. When I was with the British forces in the Falklands, I made the naïve assumption that I was among a military I could trust and would trust me. I had by then already reported from nine wars but they had all been other people's wars, foreign wars. But the Falklands was my first alongside my own people, men who came from towns and cities I knew, speaking in accents that were fondly familiar to me.

Despite all the lessons I had learnt in those foreign wars, that lies become truths simply in the saying, that nothing and no one is quite what they seem, I ditched my usual caution and cussedness that had stood me in good stead for so long. I wanted to believe what I was told. The absurdity of that confession now embarrasses me.