

Peter Arnett
Cable News Network

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I had the great pleasure of meeting John Knight. I met him in the 1960s and the '70s when I was with the Associated Press. I would come back from Vietnam and visit newspaper meetings around the country, and the A.P. Board meetings. He was an inspiration to me then, and I'm delighted to be with you tonight in his name and to give my views on journalism and to give my praise to the Fellows who have been assembled here for this Fellowship in the past year.

Two fine journalists, David Broder and Taylor Branch, preceding me, discussed the responsibilities of covering the American political and national scenes. My career has taken me to the international arena. My appetite was whetted in 1960 when, as a stringer correspondent for the Associated Press in Laos, I swam the Mekong River with a story in my teeth about a *coup d'etat*. I needed to get into Thailand to file it. I got my first ever stateside byline, and it happened to be in the San Francisco Examiner. So I do have a professional connection to this part of the world and this part of the United States.

I thought that after a physical ordeal such as that, it would get easy. It hasn't. It seems to be that unlike political and national reporting, we international correspondents — and I say “international” rather than “foreign” correspondents, because our boss, our owner, our minder, Ted Turner, prefers “international.” He does not like the connotations of the term “foreign.” I don't argue with Ted, but I particularly don't mind that particular role, and I think it's probably another step towards Ted's idea of the global village. It's a role I can live with — we who cover wars, particularly American wars, have not resolved the basic public's right to know, the struggle that has been resolved, I think, in national and political correspondence. I think the Pentagon Papers, the legal battle in the early 1970s, the Progressive magazine's victory later in the '70s over publishing a story of H-bomb secrets, they seem to have reaffirmed the first amendment assertion that Congress should make no law abridging the freedom of the press — certainly at home. But in war, no such clear message of freedom has been spelled out yet, as has been further shown in the Gulf War.

In a sense, it's all been a rocky road for me professionally. I cut my war correspondent's teeth in the paddy fields of South Vietnam in the early 1960s. The government censors there were easily as clumsy as those in Baghdad today, but when American troops entered the war in force in 1965, we were rarely constrained as to what we wrote or where we traveled. Military historians have since concluded that the Vietnam press corps was relatively accurate in its coverage of the complexities of that war — relative, that is, compared to official military estimates of the situation — and even the Pentagon concedes that correspondents rarely broke security in Vietnam. In comparison, covering Desert Storm was a return of the journalistic dark ages, but more on that later.

Many have asked me the question, “Why did you stay in Baghdad?” To answer that, I'll need to give you a capsule history of Cable News Network, the organization I've worked for for a decade. Ted Turner had an idea late in the

1970s that Americans would support a 24-hour news television operation. But the going was not easy. Being called “a minor league video ticker tape” in those early days was almost a compliment. The most popular put-down we encountered was “CNN — Chicken Noodle News.”

CNN’s growth in the 1980s has coincided with an evolution in war coverage. Since Vietnam, which we covered almost exclusively from the side of the Allies, there has evolved a practice to cover both sides of the front. So in

Nicaragua and El Salvador, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the mini and major confrontations of the past 20 years, American journalists were swarming all over the place. So as the Gulf Crisis escalated towards a major war, so did CNN implement its own build-up — the journalistic equivalent of Desert Shield. What we were looking for was the first wall-to-wall coverage of a war with live coverage, on-scene presence, and coverage from both sides of the front, including the enemy camp, Baghdad. This required technical ingenuity and lots of people — as one observer wrote, “the poorly paid, mostly anonymous legions of Ted Turner’s network,” one of whom was me.

I volunteered to cover the Baghdad story when the January 15th deadline ticked by for two reasons. The first was that for CNN to realize its promise to become the communicator of the future, as the voice of the emerging global

village, it would need to be in Baghdad. Most of the world had decided that Saddam Hussein should be forcibly removed from Kuwait. I felt that we had the responsibility to cover the implementation of that resolve as widely as possible and that included watching the bombs falling in Baghdad and telling where they hit. The reason I stayed was that I was convinced that the press billet in Baghdad, the Al Rashid Hotel, would not be targeted by the Allied side. I had no promises from the Pentagon to that affect; I just wanted to believe it.

I was reporting alone from Baghdad for ten days. Late each afternoon, I would assemble a suitcase-sized satellite phone that could easily be beamed to a distance receiver station. While an Iraqi official hovered over me, I would read my prepared dispatch sometimes accompanied by the wail of an air raid alert, a siren, or an “all clear.” This was at \$40 a minute. I was sometimes on the air for 40 minutes at a time.

Some observations about the censorship that I could not make fully clear during my daily broadcasting from Baghdad. When I arrived at the Iraqi capital from Jerusalem, just a few days before the war began, I discovered not a finely honed Iraqi information organization that controlled our professional lives, but a group of conscripts from the Information Ministry in the Baghdad Observer English-language newspaper assigned to handle the international press. Some had graduated from Western universities, in Scotland, Germany and elsewhere. They were generally in their late thirties and early forties. Most, I discovered were not in Saddam Hussein’s socialist Baath Party, and eventually revealed healthy reservations about the regime.

The bombing campaign revealed the increasing impotency of the government, some of whom were diplomats expelled from Washington or Paris. They were generally amiable, some quite sophisticated. They all lived at the Al Rashid Hotel with us, without their families, most of whom had been sent to safe places out of town. They spent every night in the hotel bomb shelters.

We were totally barred from reporting anything military, and to just give you an example of this, I have a dispatch here that is pretty typical. It's one that I typed out on February 6. It's just a page and a half that I had the minder go over, and he did indeed exercise one paragraph. What I had written was a story about civilian damage I'd seen in Baghdad that particular day and the environs of Baghdad. I'd seen a block of small businesses that had been demolished. The sentence censored out read, "The area was at the approaches to the Allah Ha Bridge over the Tigris River near the Ministry of Provincial Centers in the Court of Appeals." When he crossed it out, I wrote in its place, "We were not permitted to reveal the location of the bombing." That was also censored out. So I just didn't continue. In that report we could talk, however, about the capital returning to relative normalcy and the fact that we could see people in the streets and a few things such as that. Beyond censoring anything to do with locations, targets, and military traffic we saw on our trips, our minders were reasonably accommodating with us.

I had no deep problem with censoring military information. I'd been in Jerusalem covering Israel's preparations for the Gulf War right up to early January. I'd been along the Jordan border in Israel where they had moved in tanks and anti-aircraft weapons which we were not permitted to talk about. We were not permitted to photograph them or report on them. So I felt it was fair enough that if I was in Baghdad invited by the government that I would also not report on anti-aircraft locations, some of which were near our hotel, or that Scud missiles were going by through the city on their way to the north and the south for use against Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Our minders were amenable to discussions about coverage and this is something that I brought up very early. I insisted from the time that I arrived in Baghdad that I had to appear credible to CNN's audience. Otherwise I'd face the danger, not only the physical danger of being in the city as many bombs were dropping, but professionally, it would be damaging to my career, and it wouldn't be worthwhile staying and I threatened on several occasions that I would just leave the country if they were not at least meeting me halfway in terms of what I could talk about that was happening in the city and the country.

Each night when I was at the hotel, I would descend to the hotel bunkers for a ritual of sort — of conversation and partying with the minders. We'd pass around a bottle of Scotch or cognac as the building shuddered overhead and the missiles and bombs were flying by. The minders would talk of foreign travel and of future hopes and I was asked, sometimes on the air and often since I returned home, whether I was subject to any sort of incriminating bonding with the minders. This may have been detrimental to balanced coverage, some were suggesting. I admit that I did grow to like them, and we shared the dangers of the bombs and the indignities of the hotel which had no running water or power. The elevators did not work, and there was no heat, and it was in the middle of winter there. But I think that the Iraqi government had more reason to be concerned about the loyalty of their minders than my viewers had worrying about where my loyalty stood.

We were an affluent, international press. We had satellite telephones. We had rooms filled with cookies and water and food supplies that had been brought in from Jordan and continued to be brought in during the war. We were abundant with flashlights and batteries in a society where, from the first hours of the war, there was no electric lights. We had expensive taxis waiting in the hotel to take us to the border and home if we wished, and in addition, it became increasingly clear that we were on the winning side as far as the air war was going.

I think a coverage break through came early in my Baghdad days when my Iraqi minder agreed to allow me to answer questions from our anchor — the one who had been talking to me each day in the United States — sometimes Washington, sometimes Atlanta. I explained to the minders that credibility was the major factor in my dispatches from Baghdad and that our viewers had to be convinced that I had a degree of independence. Having covered Cuba and interviewed Fidel Castro in the '70s and reported from Hanoi during the last days of the Vietnam War, and interviewed captured American pilots in Hanoi, I well knew the firestorm of criticism that could erupt from my work in Baghdad and was, in fact, erupting from my work there.

The Iraqis did not like the daily Q&A and when CNN President Tom Johnson insisted that we continue this practice when a portable live transmitter came into town — that we sent into town — the pressure of opposition became very hard. Often as I delivered my on-air reports, the minder would begin objecting. He'd wring his hands; he'd be cutting his throat, my throat; he didn't like the phrases being used. A couple of times, the minder would actually wrestle with me on air. He became an instant star fighting on camera with me.

What would a typical question be that upset them? Bob Cain, one of our anchors, might ask, "Peter, on the road to Basra, was there much military traffic?" Knowing that I wasn't permitted to talk about these things, my answer would be, "There was much traffic on that road, Bob, and very little of it was civilian." Or the question, "Peter, are the Iraqis moving tanks and anti-aircraft emplacements into civilian areas for cover?" This was a point that the Pentagon used to justify some bombing of some civilian targets. My answer to that question, if the Iraqis were moving tanks and anti-aircraft emplacements into civilian areas, "Bob, if I was to answer you what I know about that subject, I'd be pulled off the air." Why did the Iraqis allow me to continue? Basically because while I bent the rules, I did not go too far in revealing the kind of information that would have had Iraqi security looking for my throat.

We were aware that Iraqi military and political leaders were watching CNN and sometimes they would come by and mention to the minders that they were probably being too democratic with us. Anyway, what did my Q&A sessions finally add up to if anything at all? I'd like to think that I was able to chart the deterioration of Iraqi society during the bombing. The frustrations of the average man in the street. Eventually, the negative comments of the minders themselves about the situation we were getting on the air.

I remember well my last scene in Baghdad. CNN was suddenly ordered out of the country with the rest of the press corps after rebellions erupted in cities in the north and south of Iraq. I was waiting to report live from the garden of the Al Rashid Hotel on this occurrence. It was about 11 o'clock at night; about 3:00 in the afternoon on the East Coast. As Frank Sesno summed up news developments, I turned to my minder who had materialized from the dark and was putting a return audio ear piece in his ear so he could hear both the questions and the answers. I told him, "Look, I'm going to be very frank tonight. This is probably my last broadcast here." He grinned a little. I knew that he was an Iraqi Christian and he was concerned about the future of his minority in the aftermath of war and so I went ahead. I was very frank with Frank Sesno. I talked about bloodshed rumored in the capital, about politics and frank things about Saddam Hussein — 35 minutes of it. Finally, it was over, and I went to shake hands

with my minder and he half smiled and strode into the darkness. There were no lasting repercussions of that candid report. A CNN team has been back in Baghdad for the past week reporting on developments, I'm happy to report.

I'd like to talk quickly about two stories I did that the critics and the Pentagon were concerned about. The first was the powdered milk factory, a location I visited about five days into the war. We were taken by the Iraqi officials to this small plant in the outskirts of Baghdad on the highway to Jordan. It had been totally demolished by a series of bombs. It was a large one-story structure, about an acre in size and the bombs had twisted the supports, had twisted the whole framework of the structure, the iron structure. The mechanisms inside were burned. There were huge steel containers ripped open, and as I walked around it, I was up to my knees in a sort of powder. They told me it was baby milk powder. And I went back to the hotel and reported that this had been targeted by the U.S. military. It was a baby milk factory. It had been built, I was told, a year earlier, and it struck me that it seemed logical to hit it, because the electrical power generating stations had been hit, the post office had been hit, the telecommunications center had been hit. I presumed that this was just another part of the infrastructure of the country that was being destroyed. The Pentagon reacted very negatively to that report. They said that I was duped. It was actually a biological testing center for biological weapons, and that Saddam Hussein had simply made it a front and had called it a baby milk factory and that the intelligence had located this on the outskirts of Baghdad and they destroyed it and they used that to hammer my reporting on CNN, and I believe they are still doing it today.

Well, after the Pentagon report came out, the Iraqis grew very excited about the baby milk factory plant. And they started taking everyone there. There were 80 members of the Gulf Peace Team — Americans, Australians, and New Zealanders. So they took them to the baby milk factory and then as other journalists came in later in the war within a couple of weeks, they took them. I went back twice. I didn't want to go, but I was taken back. While I was there the second time, I got a sample of the baby milk. This was actually an infant formula that I found in several big plastic containers with wheels that they used when they made it and pack up the plastic containers and just wheel it off to whatever location they were presumably using and distributing it. Anyway, I brought this back and I've been offering it to a couple of groups that I've met — that if you believe my story, that I'm convinced that the baby milk factory is indeed a baby milk factory, you'll join me and we'll have coffee later and use this as a creamer. So you'll figure that I'll figure that it's a baby milk factory.

The other story that got some degree of criticism was the interview with Saddam Hussein. It has been suggested that by allowing this leader of an enemy country to actually appear on international television, he was getting a message across that could be detrimental. He shouldn't be given the opportunity to talk to the world. I mean, the world had decided to dump on him so why let him have his say? And the CNN view was that anything from this man could be important. I mean, just to talk to him might persuade him to possibly alter his policy. At the time I did interview him, it was about two weeks into the war. It had been an air war. There was real concern about the ground war. We didn't realize that Allied intelligence about the Iraqi capabilities were probably as bad as it was about the baby milk factory. For that I'm grateful. I'm delighted that they weren't able to put up a very good fight by the way. I was pushing to interview Saddam Hussein and about two weeks into the war, I got the word and

at 4 o'clock in the afternoon the chief Iraqi official dealing with us called me and he said, "You have an important interview later." And I said, "Who is it with? The Information Minister, maybe?" And he said, "Yes."

I dressed in a suit and tie and I went downstairs and immediately was approached by four young men with crewcut hair and suits. They took me back upstairs. They ordered me to undress. They checked my bodily parts. They checked my clothes and removed my notebooks, my watch, my wallet, put them in a bag and told me to dress. They then took me into the bathroom and I had a large jar of a disinfectant — a green disinfectant — poured over my hands and said, "Don't speak to anyone and don't touch anyone." And I was thinking at the time, there is only one other man in the world who you would have to be disinfected to see and that was Howard Hughes, and I thought he was dead. By the way, Larry King is a buddy of mine. I was on the Larry King Show and I made that remark and I said that Howard Hughes was dead. And Larry says, "Maybe."

I was put in a black BMW in the back seat. A driver was in the front. We drove an hour around Baghdad. There was bombing at the time; there was very little traffic. I thought they were trying to confuse me so to not allow me to see where I was going, but he was more concerned to see if we were being followed. And we weren't. We arrived at the location, a small bungalow in the northeastern part of town, a very ordinary looking home. I went in and the living room was being made up to look like the Presidential Palace. There were brocaded chairs and there was gilt on the walls and all of it looked very fresh to me as though it had been set up for this particular interview. There were three television cameras from Iraqi television already set up with bright lights. And a group of men who said that they were members of Saddam Hussein's family and they were his closest aides. The President of Iraq eventually came in. He was dressed impeccably in a dark suit and a Parisian floral tie, and he was absolutely amiable and he shook my hand. The first hand I'd shaken actually since I'd been disinfected.

He spoke Arabic and I didn't. There was a translator. He asked me if I had a long list of questions to give to him, and I said, "No." I said I'd ask him only the questions the world wanted answers to — sort of melodramatic. But he said, "Let's go." So we walked to these seats in front of these lights and in front of the television cameras, and I had an interview for 90 minutes. Now I went there knowing it was the most important interview of my whole life and maybe very significant for the outcome of the war and I vowed not to be intimidated. So I locked onto his eyes when I sat down, and my eyes never left his for 90 minutes. And he was looking away and he was looking concerned, but I kept looking at him. Later I was to read that psychiatrists had examined the videotape and they were saying that — well, the fact that his eyes were blinking so much indicated that he was a very troubled man. Actually, he was troubled by my unblinking glaze on him, I'm sure.

I won't go into the interview, but I did the interview. We had to struggle over getting the videotape because I think his officials with him wanted to look at it first to maybe check it out, censor it, alter it. Senator Alan Simpson says that when he talked with President Saddam Hussein in the summer of last year, the transcript was altered, and the American Ambassador said the transcript was altered, and I thought maybe all of my transcript too. And I arranged to get the videotape with me. Interestingly enough, about two hours later, I got this little piece of paper with my name on it and this candle wax over it. I mean, in Baghdad at that point, there was no electricity. People were using candles. And with this candle wax on it and I looked at it and opened it and inside were several

pictures, and they had been taken of me by a photographer — black and white and were sent over to the hotel an hour later. This is a tradition of Saddam Hussein that he sends photos of the interview. But I thought — an hour later? In a city that was at war with no electricity! So he's a man of great routine at least. About two weeks later, I got the really official portfolio which was a red leather binder embossed with my name with lots of color photos in it. So he was sticking to tradition.

As for my coverage in Baghdad at the time, one observer compared it to William L. Shirer's coverage of Berlin during World War II. That was the early days of Hitler's war against Europe and the United Kingdom before the U.S. got involved. His reports were censored daily by the Germans and he'd rush back to report by radio to audiences in the United States. And I thought that was an interesting enough comparison. Ed Morrow who had been mentioned as an example of covering the wars. But I don't think that was quite it. He was on the British side. He could wax enthusiastic about the bravery of the British and it was inspiring material that he did broadcast. I've heard many of his broadcasts since that time. There was no way in Baghdad even if I believed it could I talk about the bravery of the Iraqis. I knew there were real restrictions on the kind of words that I could use. Even though I can tell you now, I think there were a lot of Iraqis who were very brave in Baghdad. And we know that many Iraqis have since risen in rebellion against Saddam Hussein bravely and many have died.

In terms of the Saudi Arabian end of the story, I'd like to make a few comments. That's where Operation Desert Storm was launched. The Pentagon basically doesn't want anyone to see the first brutal elements of war. I covered the war in Vietnam and there was a lot of criticism of what we did. The government would not censor us in Vietnam because LBJ, the President, didn't want to attract attention to the war. He talked about having guns and butter, he wasn't prepared to mobilize America to fight that war, he didn't want to introduce censorship because then editors and everybody would say, "Well, if it's a censored war, what do we have then?" We weren't even calling it a war for most of the Vietnam War. And so when the Vietnam War was over there were a lot of negative vibrations, as we all know, about the war. The soldiers came home without any trumpets and drums and welcome, and let me tell you, the press came home too similarly tainted by the war. The lessons that the Pentagon had picked up from Vietnam was basically as I said, the first brutal elements of war, just try to contain them. Delay them so the public doesn't initially see them. And when I covered the war of the brief invasion of Grenada in the mid-'80s, the Pentagon just kept us off the island for days. And then in the Panama invasion, there was a similar successful attempt — successful actions in keeping press away. I don't think we've ever seen any pictures of American dead of either Grenada or Panama. Even though in Panama, I think 27 Americans were killed and nearly 100 wounded.

In Desert Storm, for example, there were few if any pictures transmitted during the fighting of either dead or wounded GIs and few of the thousands of dead Iraqis. It's not easy to find a picture of any of those. Accounts of the relatively few combat engagements fought by the Allied side on the ground were delayed by elaborate censorship

schemes. And these were determined months earlier by the Pentagon. Other accounts were simply held up for hours and days by local commanders, even though they had passed censorship. The local commanders just took it on themselves to not pass material on. These were the best newspapers in the country. Several observers suggested that the military censorship in the Gulf prevented the kind of accurate, timely and dramatic reporting common during World War II. There has been a pattern of increasing Pentagon control that I've been seeing over the years, a reaction to the Vietnam War coverage. The Pentagon seems convinced that only a system of total control can adequately allow military authorities to get news to the home front. I mean, control over what gets reported and when it's reported.

That should be unacceptable to the news media as a creeping control mechanism modeled on the example of the British government's blanketing of information on the Falklands War. On that occasion, Mrs. Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, kept the British press away from the Falklands. Information was totally controlled. There were major events, major actions which were very delayed in their reporting. Reports were censored. I'm just thinking, should there have been a British correspondent reporting every day from the Falklands during that war, would Maggie Thatcher allow him to continue broadcasting? Probably not, and thank goodness, the debate over the Al Rashid Hotel remained that — just a debate.

I've told you how and why we did the reporting — giving you some sense of how and why we did the reporting from Baghdad. What do others think? Now we have a comment from Mr. Reed Irvine, from an organization called Accuracy in Media. This man has been trying to really destroy my career for about 20 years. He's followed me all over the country. He didn't like my Vietnam reporting. He put out this flyer in Washington. Actually his organization picketed CNN in the East Coast and when I addressed the National Press Club a couple of weeks ago, he had a group at the National Press Club and he put out these flyers. He faxed them all over the country, maybe all over the world. It says, "Welcome back, Baghdad Pete. During the Gulf War, CNN correspondent Peter Arnett acted as the voice of Baghdad for Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's propaganda war against the United States. His heavily censored reports sought to undermine support for Operation Desert Storm and demoralize our troops. Now Arnett is back in the United States and he expects to be showered with praise and awards. Let's show him how we really feel about him — demonstrate. No blood for ratings." That's at the National Press Club, 14th and F Streets, N.W., but you've missed it because it was two weeks ago, so don't go there. But you can demonstrate here.

In North Carolina, a newspaper columnist, his name is Lawrence Madree, said my coverage reminded his readers of a modern day Tokyo Rose or Lord Haw Haw. Actually this was picked up by the British and the British government talked about Lord Haw Haw. He was the British aristocrat who went to Berlin and broadcast for Hitler during the war — strict propaganda stuff. Now this columnist, Lawrence Madree, said some regarded me as something more — an incarnation of evil and as dangerous as Count Dracula and Rosemary's baby. He quoted a man called Thadeus Wermer who is Director of the Extrasensory Broadcasting Institute of Paducah, Kentucky. This is a nationally syndicated column by the way. It may have been in the San Francisco Examiner, but I'm sure you

would have remembered it because he says that I was observed by viewers to be sprouting little green horns during one broadcast and a pipefitter in Skokie, Illinois, took a Polaroid picture of me on the air one night and my image had completely disappeared when it was developed, said this Mr. Wermer.

That makes Senator Alan Simpson's broadcasts pretty small potatoes, I would think. But beyond what the Senator inferred about my family, suggesting that my ex-Vietnamese wife's relatives were working with the Viet Cong and suggesting that my political motives were that I was a sympathizer for both the Communist and Vietnam and the Fascists in Iraq — how's that for a political spectrum? — he did apologize and I accepted his apology and I apologize for bringing it up tonight in fact. But Senator Simpson does raise issues which I'm afraid could detrimentally diminish our coverage of future conflicts. He insists that it is his firm belief that if Western reporters had not been in Baghdad behind enemy lines, then Saddam Hussein might not have been attempted to indulge himself in what he calls the photo opportunities which he presented to the world. Meaning the interview that I had with him and other video, I presume, of Saddam Hussein meeting people at the front and other things. The senator asserts that I naively overlooked the Iraqi president's motives. Whereas I know when Senator Alan Simpson appears before the camera, it's his pure motive to advance his own political future unlike Saddam Hussein maybe.

But in that vein, the Desert Storm Commander, General Norman Schwarzkoff, has severely criticized CNN's decision to let me report from Baghdad. In an interview with David Frost recently, the General asserted that CNN's airing of the Iraqi video of the captured Allied pilots showed that we were siding with and aiding and abetting an enemy that was violating the Geneva Conventions. I'm not unacquainted with Stormin' Norman. In fact, I covered him in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1966 when he was a captain of infantry in the U.S. Army and specifically in a Special Forces Camp ... which was under the North Vietnamese and the General has said that the picture he uses for his promotion material on the Vietnam War was taken by me at that time.

I like him, but he obviously didn't like me for what we did in Baghdad. In fact, at one point, he ordered his command staff in Saudi Arabia to turn CNN off. In the David Frost interview, the General did concede that "I'm not in the news business and there's first amendment rights, and there is the public's right to know." But he added, with what New York Times writer John O'Connor said was more than an unsettling whiff of demagoguery, "In the future, when people justify their actions based on the public's right to know, they better check the American public first." General Schwarzkoff said he had received hundreds of thousands of letters supporting his stand.

Now I have no desire to quarrel with General Schwarzkoff. I've known him for 25 years. I had dinner with him 12 months ago, before I went to Israel. He was complaining that he was very bored because his command had nothing to do. Now that the Gulf War is over, I think he did one helluva job as the commander of the U.S. Forces. But there is an unsettling inference about what he has said. Other military men have said it before him. It's like an unsettling inference that first amendment interpretations should be determined by opinion polls. Well, Stormin' Norman may have hundreds of thousands of letters, but I have a few too.

And as far as the American public is concerned, I'll tell you what a joy it is for me to come back home. In Washington, D. C. and the streets of New York City and in Atlanta, Georgia and here in Palo Alto walking along main street this morning, people have been most kind and most supportive. They say that they're glad I stayed in Baghdad. They're grateful for CNN's coverage of the whole war. My feeling is that the American public wanted lots of information about this war because half a million of their young men were fighting in it. They wanted information. They wanted it fast, and they found they could handle the truth even in time of war and from an enemy capital.

John Knight, who fought for the public's right to know all his life, would be proud of the American people that I've met in the streets of the cities. CNN and myself are most grateful for this response to our work in the Gulf, our attempt to update war recording techniques, techniques that began with the first brave correspondent in the Crimean War a century and a half ago. We refined those techniques in the Gulf as they've been refined since that first war.

I have one of the letters I picked up in Atlanta yesterday on the way through, and this wind-faded flag was inside it. I'd just like to put it here a moment, and you'll see why in a second. It came with an accompanying letter, and I want to read that letter to you. I know politicians do this sort of thing, but I think this is a great letter. It was written on March 22, 1991.

Dear Mr. Arnett:

This flag was found in an abandoned storage unit where I once worked. Since I've had it, it has flown on appropriate holidays and in honor and memory of my husband's fellow firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The last time we put it out was as you, John Holliman, and Bernard Shaw came on the air live to describe the first bombing of Baghdad. It remained flying 24 hours a day until replaced with a new flag on March 21.

Like so many others, it flew in support of the U.S. military troops involved in Desert Storm. But it also flew in honor and support of you and your fellow journalists including your crews — especially CNN — who had and continue to have the best coverage of the crisis of the Gulf.

We send it to you in honor as a representative of CNN and all journalists who covered the war at home and abroad. In many ways, journalists such as yourself, represent and portray the freedom the flag symbolizes even more than the military people who fight to preserve it.

Hope to see you and hear you on the air again soon after a well deserved rest, that is.

Sincerely,

Alice Zimmerman

Oakhurst, California

I want to thank you, Alice Zimmerman from Oakhurst, California. In a long career of covering conflicts, this is the most touching sentiment ever offered me. I'll cherish this flag and the sentiment it reflects for the rest of my life. And thank you, audience, for bearing with me this evening.

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JIM RISSER: Thank you so much, Peter. Peter has agreed to take a few questions. This is a big crowd. Let me suggest that I try to recognize people who would like to ask a question and because there are so many people, if you'd keep the questions short and to the point and maybe avoid delivering speeches, then we can get in as many questions as possible for the next 20 minutes or so. So who would like to ask Peter Arnett a question?

Q: (Inaudible)

A: He asked where was the jacket I had with \$100,000 sewn in the lining. I mentioned that at the National Press Club. Well, that was part of what CNN had in country to pay our bills. The hotel alone was half a million dollars for about three months, and our local fees for just using our television picture transmitter and telephone were about \$3,000 a day. Automobiles were very expensive. I had that money sewn in the jacket simply because there were no hotel safes that I would trust and there was nowhere else to put it. I wore it on the air almost every day and nowhere to put the jacket. That's why I looked so scruffy. I'll tell you what I told the accountants, "It's all been spent — sorry."

Q: (Inaudible)

A: She asked if the language barriers were an impediment. Of course, it's an impediment. It's a terrible impediment. I go to probably five to seven countries a year — Africa and Asia — and I don't speak that many foreign languages. Like in Israel, the Hebrew and Arabic, which one do you learn? And if you know both, you've got to be careful which one you use in the place you're in. What happens is — of course, it's an impediment, and we were restricted to using translators and you can't guarantee the person you're interviewing is being adequately translated.

On the other hand, we found that American and other journalists who were fluent in Arabic weren't really invited in to stay because the Iraqis seemed to feel that having the language could allow a journalist an extra advantage. This is not only in Iraq, it's happened in China, the Soviet Union — quite a few places at different times. Language in that sense can be an impediment, but if I had the choice, I wished I spoke every language of every country I visited.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I think the line is very clear. In Vietnam, we drew it, and if we had information about an upcoming operation, if we were participating, we would participate in almost everything that happened in Vietnam. So if we were invited to go with the Marines in an amphibious assault 150 miles south of Da Nang, of course, we wouldn't

even consider reporting that. And while on that military operation, we would report nothing about it until we'd had first contact with the enemies. If you had a firefight third day in, then you'd sort of get out and report it. And in Vietnam of all the hundreds of reporters, two lost their credentials, for one month each, for what seemed to be security violations. So we sort of know how to play the game and in Desert Storm, we also understood the — well, it wasn't a factor in Desert Storm, because everything was censored anyway. But, you know, we have no desire in the press to endanger any lives of Americans or anyone. I didn't have any desire to endanger the lives of even the belligerents in Iraq. I mean, it wasn't up to me to target Iraqi troops for the U.S. government. They didn't need me to do it. I think we have to be careful about security and we are. And I think the record would show that.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I think it comes with the territory. Now we aren't going to prevent it per se. I think the Pentagon remembered Vietnam and having reporters all over the place reporting essentially what they liked. I'm not talking about security violations in Vietnam. I'm talking about a war that went on so long that it became convenient in the end to complain about the press reporting in Vietnam. Actually contemporary historians in their analysis of Vietnam won't even talk about the press reporting as being a factor. It was Lyndon Johnson; it was military strategy; it was political factors. That first impact of raw information, I mean, the Pentagon and the government wants to control it. The main reason there was an objection to me being in Baghdad at the time was that raw information was coming to the world, to the American public from Baghdad of what bombs were doing. I don't hear the Pentagon complaining about the CNN reporters who were in Baghdad now or complaining about our people who were with the Kurds and elsewhere. And they weren't complaining before the war happened, but just that narrow focus of time, that five or six weeks when the war was on, suddenly the clamps come on. And basically, it's the political considerations. What do we do about it in the future? We go to the government as we did this time and as we did before Panama and after Grenada, and we try to come up with an understanding that we will be able to report what is necessary and what the American public needs without endangering security, but it's going to be a hard battle. I think a very hard battle. And in this case, I think, the Gulf War did spark a degree of patriotism that hadn't been seen in this country for a long time, and the press was a convenient target as Stormin' Norman has been aiming at. He also aimed at the President, but the President aimed back, but we can't touch him. We aren't that tough.

Q: (Where will future world conflicts occur?)

A: If I tell you that, ABC will be there ahead of us. No, I hate to suggest that news coverage, war coverage, is like a sporting game, but it becomes increasingly like sports when you cover both sides, and you keep score. But

Ted Turner, who runs Turner Broadcasting and runs CNN would probably say that it's a good thing to be on both sides because if we can talk to the belligerents of both sides, maybe we can do it short of having to go to war. In terms of other problems that erupt, I think the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the Soviet empire is a definite danger spot. There's 25,000 nuclear missiles in and around the Soviet Union, and I'd hate to think that a leader of a dissident republic decided to attack Moscow with nuclear weapons, that he stole them from a local Russian military

(base). Anything can happen. I think we have to be vigilant. We in CNN are trying to get to as many places we can to report on them. Maybe that will help, but it's a very unstable world, and we have to be prepared for conflicts in lots of places despite the end of the Cold War which I think is a great pity.

Q: She's suggesting that you just ignore censorship and break the rules —

A: Well, the rules were broken in Saudi Arabia because you had a situation where correspondents were with pools and they weren't with pools. I think the basic issue is that if you go to Saudi Arabia, you're allowed in, you get

a visa, and you check in with the U.S. military and they say, "These are the rules." You've sort of got to play by the rules. If you don't, you'll get thrown out on your face and I think if you accept — I think I would question whether the rules should be drawn in that particular — let us fight the rules, so we won't go around them too much.

. . .

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I don't ask myself that question too much, but to tell you the truth, it's a matter of weighing the risk against the journalistic opportunity. During the Gulf Crisis, there were two dramatic stories unfolding. One in Somalia where the capital of Mogadishu was involved in a terrible civil war where there were bodies stacked up on street corners. Also in Liberia, in the capital of Monrovia. Another terrible civil war where many people died. Well, I didn't volunteer to go to either place and CNN really didn't cover either place because there just didn't seem to be enough interest in that story, and the dangers involved were not really worth it in terms of what was happening on the impact of its neighbors. Now in Baghdad and when I was there, it was getting very dangerous, I knew that in the eyes of everyone in the whole world was looking at the Gulf. Everyone wanted to know what the hell was happening there, and they wanted to get information, details on the extent of the war and Baghdad seemed to be as good a place as any to talk about it, so while I was nervous and fearful at times, the fact that I was broadcasting and my crew was helping to broadcast to the whole world, made it easier to get through it. So again, you balance your own fears against the journalistic good you can do in such a situation.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Okay, the first one. The pictures of the POWs. It's always a tough call. ABC did not publish the pictures of the POWs. They had the pictures, but they didn't run the audio where these pilots were confessing to the most ridiculous deeds and criticizing American policy. You knew very well that they certainly did not go into combat thinking that the policy was so rotten and bad as it was suggested. In CNN's case, I mean, I took the video. I was given the pictures in Baghdad and we shipped them to Amman and my recommendation was to use it because it was better to actually see these men and to know that they were alive and to at least hear their words to evaluate their health and also it was a signal. I mean, why was Saddam Hussein giving the pictures? He was putting the pilots up as some kind of — were they going to be hostages or pawns? If he wanted to play a public game, I'm all for playing it rather than burying those pictures. Maybe we'd bury the pilots by burying the pictures. I thought and my company felt that it was really necessary to let that kind of picture go on the air. It was part of the high stakes game that was being played, and I would do it again. I was in Hanoi in 1972 with an anti-war group. I was an

Associated Press Reporter covering it, and they actually released three American prisoners to us and we brought them home, and they came home to their families.

In terms of covering the war from sort of a narrow U.S. interest. Sure we did it. I agree. I mean, there's half a million soldiers in the Gulf. CNN is an American company basically, and we've got huge audiences here.

We

covered Americans; we covered the war where we haven't covered other nations as well. But on the other hand, I think the whole world had a stake in knowing what the American troops were doing because the fate of that whole operation depended very much on what Stormin' Norman and the rest of the people were doing and how they conducted themselves. So I think in this case, covering America's role was of interest to the whole world.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Two perfectly good questions. The reason that we had the transmitter and the other networks didn't is that we had the foresight, our producers and others who were there before me, to set up well in advance. We spent the

money. We had the people involved in preparing for it. We were just ahead of the game from the beginning.

There's a satellite dish about this wide that you open up like an umbrella. You just open it up and it faces the sky, and customs was not permitting such equipment through. And when he had to open his luggage, they asked, "what is that?" And he says, "Well, an umbrella. It's just broken. It just bends the wrong way." Probably get our people thrown out of Iraq for saying that, however, after a few days we told them we had it. We got the phone in. The other networks didn't. And we out-organized them. Some say it indicates the decline of the networks and the rise of the little guy on the block, CNN. Maybe that's true.

The other part of the question was pressure on the phone. That became an issue earlier on in the war. A group of journalists came in after two weeks. They stayed a week. They left and they complained bitterly about me. They said that the phone was being used by Iraqi officials and that I wasn't letting the reporters use it. Well, they were partly right on both counts. The Iraqi officials were using our phone, but that was to call the Iraqi Embassy in Amman to get permission and give visas for those same reporters who came into Baghdad. And this happened on two or three occasions and that was the only occasion they did use that telephone. The aspect of me allowing other journalists to use it, I did limit the use of the phone to others. We smuggled the phone in; we had it going. And to tell you the truth, it was a competitive situation. Another factor was that we did not want to seem to be the new communications system for Iraq. The Allies had spent a lot of money and time on destroying the whole communications system in Iraq. We had the potential to start it all up again. No one in Saudi Arabia military command would have liked that. But we did have a final arbitrator in this whole debate which lasted about three weeks. The NSA — the National Security Agency — was monitoring everything, every word that was transmitted over the Gulf over Iraq, and I'm sure they have a voluminous file of our conversations. They have my proposal to Kimberly over the telephone. They've got the calls to the Amman Embassy and I'm sure they reviewed their files, and they don't have anything on those phones that would have constituted what some said would be strategic or military information used by the Iraqis.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Trust between the government and the press? That's a tough one. When we get trust between local government and the press, the city council and the local newspaper — I think as the Constitution frame is figured, the checks and balances, I don't think we'll be really welcome anywhere in government unless we join it and become press officers or something. No, I don't think we're going to get the trust that you would be hoping for, and in World War II, it was a just war, it was a popular war. The press were actually in the military then. They had military rank, they had uniforms, they rode in military traffic, and military transport. They were part of the Army and they were accepted. In this war, it didn't get to that point. So I don't think you can expect it in the near future. I don't think we really need that degree of trust. We just need to be able to work together and have a reasonable approach to information.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: The Israelis made that decision. They didn't let us report on where the Scuds hit. So that was part of the censorship in Israel. So if initially there were a couple of targets reported, then the reporters were told to not do it or they would be expelled. That is part of the system. You don't report specifically where the Scud hit. You don't report in Baghdad where a particular bomb hit. That is taken care of by all these censors who were handling that information so it doesn't really come up. It's not our decision; it's done already by the military people in each of these belligerent countries.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I dare not speak for the other television networks. I guess the other networks have learned to do it better, I don't know. See, I can make jokes like that because they've been laughing about us for a whole decade. Chicken Noodle News. What has CNN learned? It has learned that if it puts up a reasonably decent job that you get a lot of positive public response. CNN has learned that viewers all around the world who are anxious to learn about crisis such as this and that my feeling and CNN's feeling is that most people have been positive to our most controversial decision to actually build up in Baghdad and support me and have others come into Baghdad to cover it. So it's reassuring to know that there's a greater degree of sophistication amongst the American public that maybe the government realizes or wants to feel. What have we learned? That we want to grow and expand our coverage and I hope we can in the future.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I'd fire him if Ted Turner was on the line. In that regard, I'd have to say that half the time I'd come up out of the blue. They weren't really sure if I'd make it or not on the air. In the early hours of the morning, how many people had he interviewed that night on the Gulf. I mean, have 20 been by and yet he's talking to people all over the world. When I come up, and he's thinking, "What can I ask in Baghdad? I mean, what's happening there? Is there anything?" And the way I felt is that even the most stupid question could be used to some advantage to get information — anything could be used. Reid Collins at one point says, "Well, Peter, I don't know what to say. What's the weather like there?" And I said, "It's over cast and there's been no bombing today." "Oh, thank you."

Q: (Inaudible)

A: That was one of the toughest questions of my coverage. What was the bomb shelter used for? I don't know if it was used for military purposes, but there were 340 civilians in there and there's no doubt about it. We saw their bodies being taken out and we saw them in the morgue. So that's all I know. It is said by the Pentagon and others that it was a communications center, that maybe Saddam Hussein himself spent nights there, or members of the government did, but it seems clear that that bomb shelter had been used during the course of the war by civilians and it was being used that night. And I guess the question had to be asked by whoever targeted it in the Pentagon — "Is killing 300 civilians worth the price of getting a particular individual?" And it's up to them to answer it. I wouldn't want to answer that one.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Good point. It's made in headquarters in Atlanta by our executive news director. You know, we are limited in resources. We'd like to get to the point, I think, when we could be as widespread as say the Associated Press or AFP is, where we could have people in these countries. In fact, we do have arrangements with the television companies in both those countries plus other countries for them to contribute information as much as they can to us. We'll take three or four or five minutes every week if they could present it and just put it on the air to tell us what's happening in their countries. That's a start at least. Most countries in the world send information to CNN either from government television or from local television stations. We put it on. It's called World Report. Ted Turner figures — hey, we want everyone to have a say on CNN. We don't have the financing or the people available to be able to go to very hot spot in the world or even places where there's not a war, but it's worth covering. We don't cover India very well or Pakistan or parts of Asia, but one would hope that as this decade moves on, we'll be over there more often and get interesting information from those places.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: What did I ask to get the interview? I think each day I spoke most forcefully to the senior Iraqi information people that we had to have a comment from a senior official on the war, because no one was saying anything. You had the local newspaper, you had Baghdad radio and none of those including the Information Minister would say anything. I ran into the Information Minister one day who was an aide to Saddam and was close to Saddam, and I said, "You know, why don't you give us an interview?" He says, "Only the President can speak on this war." And I said, "Well? Well?" And two days later, my goodness, it happens. I'm going back to Baghdad again in a few weeks. Maybe lightning will strike twice. Except that Information Minister has since been fired. I hope it wasn't for giving me the interview.

I can only take one more question. My "minder" here is pushing me. It was just like this in Baghdad every night — I was told to get off the air.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: I think there was such great attention of what was going on in the war. The impact was flooding the country and the world with information, and I think that more was known about this war in a shorter time than any previous war in history despite, as I mentioned, my reservations about how the Pentagon handled the press coverage

in Saudi Arabia. The war didn't really go on long enough to have any serious impact on news flow. So I think that this was the best reported war in history. More was known about it and let's hope we can do it again next time — if there has to be a next time which I surely do not want.

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be with you.

Peter Arnett

A native of New Zealand where he graduated from Waitaki College, Peter Arnett worked for newspapers in New Zealand, Australia and Thailand before joining the Associated Press in 1962. He went to Vietnam to cover the war for the AP and continued to cover the Vietnam story through the fall of Saigon in 1975. In 1966, he won the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting for his Vietnam coverage. Arnett was described in an Esquire magazine article as “the reporter who probably covered more of the Vietnam War than anyone else.”

In addition to the Pulitzer, his Vietnam coverage brought him two awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, plus the Overseas Press Club award and the George Polk Memorial Award.

After covering Vietnam for so long, many journalists would have turned to tamer subjects. But not Arnett.

In the years following Vietnam, he covered for the AP such stories as the Iranian hostage crisis, the Jonestown massacre in Guyana and the child murder cases in Atlanta.

In 1981 he switched from print to broadcast, joining the upstart news network, CNN. Again, he took on the tough stories — political and military crises in El Salvador, famine in Ethiopia and a return to Vietnam to assess conditions there 10 years after the end of the war.

From 1986 to 1988, Arnett served as CNN's bureau chief in Moscow, reporting on the rapid changes in the Soviet Union. Then he went to Washington, where he focused on domestic and international policy, and on national security and the intelligence community.

Early in 1990, he transferred to CNN's bureau in Jerusalem. He observed, studied and learned about the Mideast in depth, and was in the right place at the right time when the Gulf War began. He remained in Baghdad when other journalists left, and thus became the only western journalist to report from Iraq during the entire course of the war, and conducted the only interview with Saddam Hussein during the conflict.

His work on the war won huge amounts of praise — and some smaller amounts of criticism, based primarily on the fact that he had to submit his reports to Iraqi censorship. But Arnett stretched the limits of that censorship system, and managed to provide vivid and insightful reports that helped give a clearer picture of the war. Many critics eventually realized this and his chief antagonist, Sen. Alan Simpson (who at one point accused Arnett of serving as a Hussein sympathizer), ended up apologizing to him.