



SPECIAL REPORT

Media Research Center ■ 325 South Patrick Street ■ Alexandria, VA 22314 ■ www.mrc.org

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Grading TV's War News

Fox News Channel and Embedded Reporters Excelled, While Peter Jennings and Peter Arnett Flunked

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While it only lasted about three weeks, the second Gulf War was an unqualified success. But what about TV coverage of the war? While the media covered many aspects of the war fairly well — reports from embedded journalists were refreshingly factual and were mostly devoid of commentary — television's war news was plagued by the same problems detected during previous conflicts: too little skepticism of enemy propaganda, too much mindless negativism about America's military prospects, and a reluctance on the part of most networks to challenge the premises of the anti-war movement or expose its radical agenda.

Media Research Center analysts watched the war on ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, CNN and the Fox News Channel. Here are their grades for each network's performance, followed by ratings for the best and worst network anchors, Baghdad reporters and embedded correspondents:

- **Grading the Networks:** Fox News Channel (B) and CBS News (B-) received the best grades for war coverage that correctly portrayed the U.S. military effort as successful. FNC aided viewers by rejecting the standard liberal idea that objective war news requires an indifference to whether America succeeds or fails. Day after day, CBS's Pentagon reporter David Martin gave the most accurate overview of the war's progress, although others at CBS, such as Lesley Stahl, exhibited a tendency for unwarranted second-guessing. FNC's final grade suffered after Geraldo Rivera disclosed the location and mission of the 101st Airborne with whom he'd been traveling.

In contrast, ABC received a near-failing grade (D-) for knee-jerk negativism that played up Iraqi claims of civilian suffering, hyped American military difficulties and indulged anti-war protesters with free air time. One ABC reporter (Chris Cuomo) even promoted anti-war leftists as “prescient indicators of the national mood,” even though polls showed most Americans supported the war.

Many of the same correspondents appeared on both NBC and MSNBC, so the networks were graded as a team (C+). Both generally offered solid, factual coverage, especially from their strong embedded reporters, but their anchors weren’t as strong as those on FNC and CBS, and both were marred by their use of Peter Arnett as a Baghdad reporter. Like ABC, CNN’s coverage (C+) was tainted by unwarranted negativity and inordinate amount of coverage of anti-war groups, although these weaknesses were offset by a stronger pool of embedded reporters and more skeptical coverage of the Iraqi regime.

- **Grading the Anchors:** All of the network anchors received high grades except for the highly tendentious Peter Jennings, who played up any defeatist angle he could find. Five days before Baghdad fell, Pentagon reporter John McWethy warned, “This could be, Peter, a long war.” Jennings felt vindication: “As many people had anticipated.”

Dan Rather’s impressions of a successful U.S. drive to Baghdad were more accurate than Jennings’s pessimism, while NBC’s Tom Brokaw, ever the steady hand, usually struck a middle ground between the two. On cable, CNN’s daytime anchor Wolf Blitzer was solid and fair; nighttime anchor Aaron Brown was more equivocal and self-conscious. On the war’s third day, MSNBC’s Brian Williams unfortunately compared our precision bombing with the citywide destruction wrought by the Allied bombing of Dresden in World War II, but he rejected the same analogy in a later report. Fox’s Brit Hume provided an excellent one-hour summary of the war each night, while Shepard Smith kept the spotlight on the battlefield and Fox’s embedded correspondents.

- **Embedded Reporters:** These reporters excelled when they acted as the viewers’ eyes and ears in Iraq. NBC’s David Bloom, in his innovative Bloommobile, was the star of

War Report Card

Networks:

Fox News Channel	B
CBS	B-
NBC/MSNBC	C+
CNN	C+
ABC	D-

Anchors

Brit Hume	A
Wolf Blitzer	B+
Dan Rather	B+
Shepard Smith	B+
Tom Brokaw	B
Aaron Brown	B-
Brian Williams	B-
Peter Jennings	F

Embedded Reporters

Best:

1. NBC’s David Bloom
2. CNN’s Walter Rodgers
3. FNC’s Greg Kelly

Worst:

ABC’s Ted Koppel

Baghdad Reporters

Best:

John Burns for CBS

Worst:

1. Peter Arnett for NBC and MSNBC
2. Richard Engel for ABC

the group, offering hours of riveting live coverage of the Third Infantry's historic drive toward Baghdad, including a powerful sandstorm that turned day into night. CNN's Walter Rodgers narrated hour upon hour of armored troop movements, often under enemy fire, without straying from his "just the facts" style, while FNC's Greg Kelly provided gripping footage of the U.S. Army's devastating first thrust into Baghdad.

On the other hand, ABC's Ted Koppel spent his time pontificating as if he — not the vast military force that surrounded him — was the real star. "Forget the easy victories of the last twenty years; this war is more like the ones we knew before," he announced at the end of *Nightline* on March 24. "Telling you if and when things are going badly for U.S. troops, enabling you to bear witness to the high cost of war, is the hard part of our job," he promised viewers, "We'll do our very best to give you the truth in the hope and the belief that you can handle it."

- **Baghdad Reporters:** Until the Iraqi dictatorship ran away April 9, Baghdad-based reporters were controlled by the Ministry of Information. Given the impediments to accurate reporting, networks should have used such reporters sparingly. Instead, ABC gave a great deal of time to the uncorroborated stories of civilian suffering which freelancer Richard Engel reported. While he was still under the watchful eye of Iraqi minders, on the April 2 *World News Tonight*, Engel highlighted the claim that the U.S. had bombed a "maternity hospital."

National Geographic Explorer's Peter Arnett, who was heavily used by MSNBC and NBC before he was fired, was the most outrageously biased Baghdad reporter. On March 26, days before he went on Iraqi TV to bolster Saddam's spin, Arnett twice told those watching NBC's *Today* of Iraqi claims that the U.S. had used "cluster bombs" to kill dozens at a Baghdad marketplace, a claim later rebutted by NBC's Pentagon reporter Jim Miklaszewski. Arnett's servile approach to the Iraqis was in stark contrast to the *New York Times's* John Burns, who phoned in several reports to CBS. Burns did his best to expose the Iraqi propaganda.

Grading TV's War News

Fox News Channel and Embedded Reporters Excelled, While Peter Jennings and Peter Arnett Flunked

BY BRENT BAKER AND RICH NOYES

While it only lasted about three weeks, the second Gulf War was an unqualified success. Jubilant Iraqis danced in the streets as U.S. military forces rolled into the center of Baghdad, while the dictator Saddam Hussein and his evil cohorts were, as General Tommy Franks put it on April 11, either dead or “running like hell.”

So what about TV coverage of the war? While the media covered many aspects of the war fairly well – reports from embedded journalists were refreshingly factual and were mostly devoid of commentary – television's war coverage was plagued by the same problems detected during previous conflicts: too little skepticism of enemy propaganda, too much mindless negativism about America's military prospects, and a reluctance on the part of most networks to challenge the premises of the anti-war movement or expose its radical agenda.

Media Research Center analysts Geoff Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Brad Wilmoth, Ken Shepherd and Patrick Gregory, along with MRC's Director of Media Analysis Tim Graham, watched the war as it unfolded on ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, CNN and the Fox News Channel. The following report contains highlights of that coverage, along with grades for each network and anchor's overall performance.

ABC News

Led by the highly tendentious Peter Jennings, ABC's reporters presented the most adversarial and negative coverage of the American war effort. Their reporter in Baghdad, Richard Engel, did the most to play up Iraqi claims of civilian suffering at the hands of Americans (see the section on Baghdad reporters), while Jennings – more than any other anchor – zeroed in on purported weaknesses and failings in the U.S. effort to win support among liberated Iraqis. At the same time, ABC's Ted Koppel used his position as an embedded reporter to issue lectures about U.S. policy (see the section on embedded reporters). The war's swift and victorious conclusion showed that the self-described truth-tellers at ABC weren't just sanctimonious – they were wrong.

Less than 48 hours after the war began, ABC reporters were scoffing at the suggestion that Iraqi citizens would welcome American troops, and Jennings suggested that early scenes of welcome were staged. On the March 22 *World News Tonight*, Jennings pooh-poohed the pro-American celebrations all of the networks had shown the day before: "Yesterday we saw images of a jubilant reception in the southern Iraqi town of Safwan where soldiers stood by as people tore down a picture of Saddam Hussein and jumped in the streets, at least for the cameras. ABC's John Donovan today went unescorted to Safwan and got a far different welcome."

Safely back in Kuwait, Donovan recounted his trip for Jennings: "Well, this whole thing about Iraqis dancing in the streets as the coalition forces moved through, in the town of Safwan, I just did not see that, I didn't see anything like that. What I saw was a lot of hostility towards the coalition forces, towards the United States, towards George Bush – and wasn't particularly friendly towards us journalists....We started conversations with people on the street there that were relatively calm, but the more they talked the more angry they got, and they began to ask questions like, 'Why are you here in this country?', 'Are you trying to take over our country?', 'Are you going to take our country forever?', 'Are the Israelis coming next?', 'Are you here to steal our oil?', 'When are you going to get out?'"

Donovan's pessimism was echoed by ABC's Mike von Fremd on the March 26 *World News Tonight*. From Safwan, von Fremd relayed: "While these Iraqis are desperate for this humanitarian aid, they also have a very strong message for the world. 'You brought us chaos,' this mother said. 'People are sick and hungry.' 'Women and children have been killed,' this man says. 'It is all because of U.S. greed for Iraqi oil.'"

<u>ABC War Coverage</u>	
Overall Grade:	D-
Peter Jennings	F

Finally, and without ever mentioning ABC's earlier, distorted coverage, reporter John Quiñones explained on the March 28 *World News Tonight* that the anti-American complaints may have been staged for the benefit of Saddam's spies. From Umm Qasr, a town near Safwan, Quiñones related: "Those pro-Saddam chants of a few days ago were nowhere to be heard today....Najib, a school teacher in this town, says that's because a few days ago, so many of Saddam's Ba'ath party loyalists were still here watching, listening." Quiñones then played a sound bite from Najib: "I, myself, said it, but we were forced to say it. We were, we were obliged to do. If we didn't do, if we don't do it, we're killed or arrested or destroyed."

According to ABC, America wasn't just failing to win hearts and minds, but perhaps failing in the main military mission as well. On March 25, *Good Morning America* co-host Charles Gibson challenged General Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, about whether or not the military had properly prepared for the war. All of Gibson's questions were premised on the notion that the war was not going as well as the U.S. had planned: "It is very obvious from what we've seen so far that you have some very good soldiers over there, but the question is, do we have enough of them?" Gibson demanded.

After General Myers said the plan was adequate, Gibson persisted: "I want to come back to this question of do we have enough soldiers over there. Given the resistance that we have faced now in smaller cities like Umm Qasr and Nasiriyah, do we have enough to handle an all-out fight in this city, which is really about the size of Los Angeles, and still keep an eye on those smaller cities and maintain supply lines as well?"

Gibson continued to pound away: "But this is gonna be, from all indications, a tough fight as we get close to Baghdad and around Baghdad itself. You just talked about more forces flowing up toward that area. Is there going to be a pause, a day, a couple of days, three days, four days, number one while we wait out the sandstorm, number two while more troops flow up to that area, and number three while we carry out air attacks against entrenched Iraqi forces?"

Later that morning, Gibson's co-host, Diane Sawyer, returned to the idea that the Iraqis were rejecting American efforts at their liberation. Previewing an upcoming segment, she insisted: "A lot of Americans did believe that American troops would be treated as liberators in the streets, at least in the south. What happened to the flowers expected to be tossed the way of the Americans? Was it a terrible miscalculation?"

Jennings himself was among the very last to acknowledge that, once Iraqis were totally out from under the thumb of Saddam's thugs, they were appreciative of the U.S. intervention. On the April 1 *World News Tonight*, he used thin evidence to argue that Americans were entering more hostile territory as they neared Baghdad. Over a map showing the progress of U.S. forces, Jennings intoned, "Countryside is changing here now, passing from desert into farmland, and one embedded reporter with the U.S. forces, beginning we think now to move forward, said earlier today: 'When we came out of the desert where they waved at us, notice they don't wave at us any more.'"

On April 9, the day U.S. Marines helped Iraqi civilians topple a huge statue of Saddam, Jennings anchored ABC's live coverage. As the statue collapsed to the sound of Iraqi cheers, the ABC anchor oddly remarked about the willingness of Saddam to pose so often — as if the dictator was making some sort of sacrifice — and wistfully reflected on how the sculptors who made such monuments to tyranny will have nothing to do now that freedom has arrived in Iraq: "Saddam Hussein may have been, or may be, a vain man, but he has allowed himself to be sculpted heavy and thin, overweight and in shape, in every imaginable costume — both national, in historic terms, in Iraqi historic terms — in contemporary, in every imaginable uniform, on every noble horse. The sculpting of Saddam Hussein, which has been a growth industry for 20 years, may well be a dying art. A man named Natick al-Alusi [sp?] was one of the principal sculptors, and he was doing a new sculpture for the Ministry of Electricity even as this war was beginning."

Apart from his general negativity about the war's accomplishments, Jennings was the most indulgent of the anti-war movement, offering uncritical coverage. At one point during live coverage on March 20, the first full day of war, he complained to Senator Joseph Biden that the Democratic Party was abandoning its anti-war constituents. "There are still a large number of people in the country who are opposed to this," Jennings asserted before pleading to Biden:

Anti-war activists “look to members of the Democratic Party, particularly, to sort of be their port in a storm, their place to manifest their dissatisfaction. What happens to them at the moment?”

During live coverage the next night, March 21, Jennings seemed intent on publicizing the anti-war message. Jennings ruded to *U.S. News & World Report*'s David Gergen that the Bush administration has a “tendency” to “pretend” anti-war protests are not happening. Gergen agreed and then worried that since “Iraq is putting up so little resistance,” the U.S. will appear to “have been a bully.”

With American audiences anxious to learn about the progress of U.S. forces, Jennings that night spent most of ABC's 10pm ET hour promoting anti-war activists. In that hour, ABC featured three taped pieces on dissent, with one on a Jordanian man who wishes to attack America, and multiple interview segments, including about eight minutes devoted to two organizers of far-left anti-war protest groups, neither of which Jennings labeled. Instead he largely tossed them softballs, such as: “Why do you feel so strongly about this war?” And Jennings saw an inadequate level of college activism: “The college campus appears rather quiescent to some – quiet.”

The next morning, ABC's Chris Cuomo offered another gift to the radical left. During a special five-hour Saturday edition of *Good Morning America*, Cuomo (the son of the liberal former governor of New York), acknowledged that only a small minority of the public was anti-war, but he still used ABC's airwaves to promote the worthiness of their cause: “So while protesters like today are a statistical minority, in American history protests like this have been prescient indicators of the national mood. So the government may do well to listen to what's said today.”

Despite all of the favorable coverage ABC bestowed on anti-war protests both before and during the war (including a February 26 “virtual march” where no one marched at all, but rather sent e-mails to Washington), *World News Tonight* was the only newscast to completely ignore a support-the-troops rally with 15,000 participants held in New York City on April 10. CNN, FNC and MSNBC all covered some of the April 10 event live in the noon hour and later included it in their periodic summaries of the day's events. CNBC's *The News with Brian Williams*, anchored by Forrest Sawyer, also highlighted it, as did the *CBS Evening News* and *NBC Nightly News*.

But Peter Jennings' *World News Tonight*, for all its coddling of anti-war groups, couldn't even find fifteen seconds in its newscast to note this gathering of citizens supporting the sacrifice of American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

CBS's lowest point came before the war, when anchor Dan Rather traveled to Baghdad for a softball interview with Saddam, asking the man who had killed thousands of his own people, "What are the chances this is the last time you and I will see each other?" But CBS's war coverage was far superior to ABC, with much less gloomy speculation and a greater emphasis on factually reporting battlefield developments; day after day CBS's Pentagon reporter David Martin gave the most accurate overview of the war's progress.

Contrast the way Rather and Jennings began their newscasts on March 24, the fourth day of the war. Opening his *Evening News*, Rather was upbeat: "Barreling toward Baghdad. Fast moving U.S. ground forces fight their way to within miles of the capital. Up above, air raids try to cut up and cut off Iraqi divisions. Iraq insists Saddam is alive, well and in control."

Jennings seemed to be talking about a different war: "On *World News Tonight*, the U.S. attacks all over Iraq, the drive on Baghdad is cautious. There is opposition and there is weather. The Iraqi leader is alive and on television. Who knows how well he is. The U.S. believes he is still in control. Two more Americans are captured, their helicopter shot down. So many others are coming back full of bullet holes. And the pictures of the POWs. So public now, such pain for the families." As events unfolded, it became obvious that Rather's impressions of a successful U.S. drive to Baghdad were more accurate than Jennings's pessimism.

Also on March 24, CBS reported a positive story about how the U.S. was aiding Iraqi civilians. Phil Ittner, embedded with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, showed a U.S. soldier cradling a little girl as his colleagues provided medical aid to her family: "A family of Iraqi civilians, wounded in the conflict, again brought these soldiers streaming out to give what aid they could. This young boy suffered burns and wounds to the face and back. These soldiers say they're here to take down the leadership in Baghdad which they see as a threat to their families back home. But despite the politics, as they comforted a young Iraqi girl whose family found itself victim of the fighting, nearly all of them said the same thing: that they wish they didn't have to do it."

The discrepancies between ABC and CBS continued the next night, March 25, as ABC argued that the U.S. invasion precipitated a water emergency in southern Iraq. In Basra, ABC's John Donovan dated the loss of water in Basra to "five days" ago, meaning the war caused it, and he outlined the potentially disastrous results: "Day and night, the fighting in Basra has been too intense for aid workers to enter the city. A million people live in Basra, hundreds of thousands of them have been without clean water for five days, the city's electricity went out last week. The possible consequence: cholera for a start, also diarrhea, which in Iraq often kills young children."

But over on CBS, Scott Pelley discovered that the water had been "turned off" days before the war started. In Umm Qasr, south of Basra, Pelley asked U.S. Army Major James Thorpe

<u>CBS War Coverage</u>	
Overall Grade:	B-
Dan Rather	B+

"Major, why do these people not have water?" Thorpe explained: "Basra, it's a city just north of us, is normally the location where drinking water comes from for these folks here in Umm Qasr. As it turns out, just before the war started, approximately four or five days before it did, the water that normally flows down here via truck was turned off."

Pelley asked: "By who?" Thorpe replied: "Well, basically by the ruling party, the Ba'athist party, and I guess, Saddam Hussein."

CBS did show some of the same second-guessing that tainted ABC's coverage. On the March 25 *48 Hours*, Lesley Stahl challenged the military's war plan after only five days of fighting. She asked a Vietnam vet: "You fought in Vietnam. Are you getting any feelings of *deja vu*?" Then, in an interview with a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Stahl ventured far beyond the limits of her military acumen. (See box.)

Stahl's glum prognosis notwithstanding, positive developments were generally presented as good news on CBS. On the April 2 *CBS Evening News*, for example, Rather exulted: "There is major progress and a stunning battlefield victory to report. The U.S. military says two key Republican Guard divisions protecting Baghdad have been beaten so badly they are, quote, 'no longer credible forces.' They were pummeled by U.S. forces now closing in on the capital from two sides. To the east, advancing U.S. Marines are now within 30 miles or less of the outskirts of Baghdad. To the west, lead elements of the Army's third infantry are within 20 miles or less."

On April 4, after CBS showed videotape of a purported Saddam Hussein walking tour of a Baghdad neighborhood, Pentagon reporter David Martin observed, "Saddam may look confident and in charge, but his military situation is disastrous. Enemy troops at his airport and in his suburbs and his best divisions being chewed up by a ceaseless rain of bombs and artillery shells....With Marines already pressing the attack against another Republican Guard division, there's every reason to believe it's only a matter of time before all of Saddam's divisions are gone."

General Stahl's Bleak Critique

Lesley Stahl: "The Powell Doctrine in military terms is that you throw a massive force, if you're going to go to war, make it huge. There are now criticisms, we're beginning to hear, that this force isn't massive enough."

Colin Powell: "It's nonsense....The United States armed forces, with our coalition partners – the British, principally, and the Australians – have gone 300 miles deep into Iraq in a period of five days. That is a heck of an achievement."

Stahl: "Yeah, but our, the rear is exposed."

Powell: "It's not. Exposed to what?"

Stahl: "Exposed to Fedayeen, exposed-"

Powell: "Fine. So? We'll get them in due course...."

Stahl: "Are you saying you're not worried or concerned about guerilla warfare?"

Powell: "Of course we are and that, and we're trained to handle this....They're not threatening the advance."

Stahl: "But you can't get your supplies, you can't-"

Powell: "Who says?"

Stahl: "-can't get the humanitarian-"

Powell: "Who says?"

Stahl: "-can't get the humanitarian aid in there."

Powell: "Only because the minefields haven't been cleared at the port of Umm Qasr....The situation will change rapidly."

– Exchange on CBS's *48 Hours*, March 25, the fifth day of actual fighting.

Yet that same night on ABC's *World News Tonight*, Pentagon reporter John McWethy emphasized a more negative scenario: "As the U.S. begins to really squeeze Baghdad, U.S. intelligence sources are saying that some of Saddam Hussein's toughest security forces are now apparently digging in, apparently willing to defend their city block by block. This could be, Peter, a long war." Peter Jennings felt vindicated: "As many people had anticipated."

NBC/MSNBC

Many of the same war correspondents were featured on both NBC and MSNBC during the course of the war, so their reporting will be analyzed together. Generally, NBC and MSNBC offered solid, factual coverage, especially from their strong team of embedded reporters. (See the embedded reporters section.) MSNBC emphasized its patriotism with devices such as "America's Wall" – a billboard of photographs of military personnel fighting in the war, sent to the network by their friends and families. Both networks' grades were marred by their use of *National Geographic Explorer's* Peter Arnett as a Baghdad reporter, which will be discussed in the "Baghdad reporters" section of this report.

MSNBC got off to a rocky start, as anchor Brian Williams – who sometimes generated long-winded and convoluted interview questions – erroneously likened the pinpoint bombing of individual government buildings in Baghdad with the massive indiscriminate bombing that virtually destroyed Dresden, Germany in 1945. At about 1:12pm ET on Friday, March 21, as MSNBC showed live video of explosions in Baghdad, Williams asserted: "That vista on the lower-left looks like Dresden, it looks like some of the firebombing of Japanese cities during World War II. There's another one. Still going on. You hear them overhead. Either jet aircraft or cruise missiles, but yet another explosion."

NBC/MSNBC War Coverage

Overall Grade:	C+
Tom Brokaw	B
Brian Williams	B-

It took nearly two weeks for Williams to redeem himself, on the April 2 *NBC Nightly News*, as he rejected the same analogy he had forwarded during the first days of the war: "Civilians used to be intentional military targets. The fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo in World War II were meant to kill civilians and then terrorize survivors. Here we've seen the opposite happen. U.S. forces have more than once been the targets of civilian attacks and could be forced into killing coerced human shields despite all attempts to avoid it."

MSNBC's coverage of the public's reaction to the war showcased more than just the small minority who opposed using force. On the first Saturday of the war, for example, MSNBC placed Ashleigh Banfield near the Army base at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where at about 6:20am ET she highlighted the "wives and families, very concerned about their 101st Airborne Division husbands overseas." Banfield added that she had "attended a candlelight vigil where we saw a chaplain, a stand-in chaplain taking over for the four chaplains who've been

deployed, praying not only for the safety of those husbands, but also for their success in the mission."

On March 26, just as ABC was emphasizing angry Iraqis condemning the United States, NBC's Don Teague, in a story which ran on MSNBC as well as the *NBC Nightly News*, pointed out that the pro-Saddam speeches from Iraqi citizens were pure theater. Teague observed: "U.S. soldiers escorted this convoy into Iraq, but publicly, few here were singing their praises." He showed an Iraqi man in the crowd: "Saddam good. Saddam gives eat and water and clothes."

But then Teague suggested: "Wherever there are cameras, Saddam Hussein is still the hero. Iraqis, not yet convinced he's lost control, worry they'll pay with their lives for speaking against him." A U.S. Army Sergeant, Johnny Monds, validated Teague's observations: "They do it for the cameras because they're scared." ABC eventually made the same point for viewers, but not until the March 28 *World News Tonight*. (For more, see the section on ABC News.)

NBC anchor Tom Brokaw usually struck a middle ground between Rather's optimism and Jennings' pessimism. On April 2, for example, Brokaw summarized: "The war against Iraq began two weeks ago tonight with a strike at a Baghdad residence where Saddam Hussein and his sons were believed to have been staying. Now, 14 days later, after an unexpectedly difficult ground war on the way to Baghdad, American and coalition forces are within 19 miles of the Iraqi capital....A lot of progress for the United States and the allies in the last 24 hours, but now the very difficult assignment: taking on Baghdad, with the Saddam Hussein regime showing no signs of folding anytime soon."

MSNBC offered an eclectic mix of U.S.-based anchors. Lester Holt was neutral and straightforward, and never seemed to tire as he stayed on the air for hours at a time. New 8pm ET anchor Keith Olbermann provided perhaps the most bizarre commentary on April 3, when he compared a gas station's giveaway of \$10 in free gas to vehicles bearing American flags with "suicide bombers" and "human shields." According to Olbermann, all three are examples of "purchased patriotism."

Olbermann suspected some drivers put flags on their cars even if they weren't in an especially patriotic mood: "I don't think I'm going way out on a limb here to assume that somewhere in that block's long line of drivers near Lake Ronkonkoma waiting for their five free gallons, were a few who weren't really that gung ho about the war, but just stuck a flag in their windshield wiper to get the gasoline *gratis*. Unintentional or not, that's purchased patriotism. And as we are reminded every time we hear about Iraqi human shields and forced suicide bombers, purchased patriotism is one of the things we're fighting against."

CNN's biggest black eye came after the war concluded, as top news executive Eason Jordan disclosed on the April 10 *NewsNight* that the network had, over the years, concealed stories of Saddam's brutality out of fear the Iraqis would imprison or kill those who worked at CNN's Baghdad bureau. In an April 11 op-ed in the *New York Times*, Jordan said CNN did not report that an Iraqi cameraman who worked for CNN had been kidnaped, beaten and subjected to electric shocks; that Iraqi officials had attempted to kill CNN's reporters in northern Iraq; and that "several Iraqi officials" had told him privately that Saddam "was a maniac who had to be removed."

All of those stories came to CNN's attention long before the war. The question of how much or how little CNN could report from its Baghdad bureau was made moot on Friday, March 21, when Iraqi authorities expelled reporter Nic Robertson and his staff. Earlier that day, at 6:10am ET, Robertson reported on a press conference by Iraq's Information Minister, who would later become infamous for rejecting the idea that U.S. forces were in Baghdad when the assembled journalists could see American tanks maneuvering on the other side of the Tigris River. On this, the second day of the war, the Information Minister was trying to dismiss pictures that CNN viewers had been watching for hours, narrated by CNN reporters embedded with coalition forces:

"Swift reaction from Iraqi officials this morning to those images people have seen of Iraqi soldiers surrendering and pictures of armored columns of coalition forces inside Iraq," Robertson told anchor Anderson Cooper. "Information Minister Mohammad al-Sahaf saying that none of these soldiers that were seen there surrendering were Iraqi soldiers. Indeed, he implied that it was some kind of play. 'Who are these people?' he said, and 'where were they?' There will be some sort of investigation into that, and we would know more about it in the future, he said. He also talked about the armored columns and said, 'Well, where is this desert? Which desert are they in?' An indication they're trying to portray the fact that these columns are perhaps not in Iraq, that they might be somewhere else." Despite the neutral tone of Robertson's presentation, his report made it clear that the Iraqi propagandist's explanations for CNN's images of invasion and surrender were absolutely ludicrous.

<u>CNN War Coverage</u>	
Overall Grade:	C+
Wolf Blitzer	B+
Aaron Brown	B-

The next morning, however, as Robertson and the rest of his staff reached Amman, Jordan, CNN Baghdad producer Ingrid Formanek suggested to Paula Zahn that the Iraqis who expelled them were only acting like the Americans: "Well, obviously the situation had grown more tense in Iraq in recent days due to the bombing, and the [Iraqi] officials were feeling the pressure. It's been a great propaganda campaign. I mean, all sides want to control the media as much as possible, and that goes for the Iraqis as well as the Americans. And their concern was that they weren't getting their message out. They were increasingly tense as the bombing went on, and they just got very much more difficult to work with in the days during the bombing."

Later that day, March 22, CNN chose to give extensive coverage of marches and demonstrations against the war in Iraq. From just before noon until midnight that night, CNN ran 38 reports on protests in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. But despite the volume of coverage, and the fact that CNN had a reporter, Maria Hinojosa, dedicated to covering the anti-war protests, CNN's coverage failed to scratch the surface. Not once did CNN tip viewers to the radical agenda of the events' sponsor, a group called International ANSWER, which is an outgrowth of the communist Workers World Party. Nor did CNN show any of the extreme rhetoric of protest speakers. Only once in 38 stories did CNN balance their stories about street demonstrations by mentioning that polls showed such anti-war sentiments were shared by only a small minority of Americans.

Instead, CNN's sanitized coverage put a positive spin on the protests. Reporting from New York City that Saturday afternoon, Hinojosa championed the diversity and size of an anti-war, anti-Bush march. Hinojosa detected "a very diverse group of people" with "a lot of family members," "a children's contingent" and a "religious contingent." Though the number of protesters was much smaller, Hinojosa passed along protest hype as she relayed how "I have heard a lot of people coming up and saying that they have heard a million" attended.

Nearly two weeks later, however, a CNN anchor finally probed the reasoning of those who saw the U.S. as a greater evil than Saddam Hussein. At about 1:35pm ET on April 3, Wolf Blitzer, in Kuwait City, interviewed a U.S. citizen, Tom Cahill, who was in Amman, Jordan. Cahill was a human shield for five weeks at a Baghdad water treatment plant which the coalition never bombed.

Blitzer asked whether he still had the same sympathy for the Iraqi people that he had when he arrived in Baghdad. Cahill responded: "Yes, and even more anger at the United States government. I've been an activist all my adult life. I'm 66. I've been an activist more than 40 years, and the rage in me has been growing all these years. And the anger is another one of the reasons I went to Iraq."

Blitzer challenged him: "But you saw firsthand what life was like under a regime, like Saddam Hussein, a regime that's been documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, international human rights organizations, as a cruel regime, one that endorses torture and other human rights abuses. Did you emerge at all sympathetic to Saddam Hussein?"

Cahill rejected the idea: "No! No! I know little about Saddam Hussein, only what I hear from Amnesty International, but the people of Iraq, the people I saw, seemed okay. I mean, I didn't see much evidence of a dictatorship there except a lot of soldiers and an awful lot of pictures of Saddam Hussein. I think he spends most of his waking hours posing for sculptors and artists and photographers."

Blitzer gave him one last chance to redeem himself: "One final question, Mr. Cahill. Would you agree that the Iraqi people will be better off without Saddam Hussein and his regime in power?" Cahill wouldn't have it: "No, I don't agree!"

Blitzer, who anchored from the Persian Gulf during the afternoon and early evenings (Eastern Time), was a solid and fair questioner. Aaron Brown, who began at either 8pm or 10pm ET, broadcasting until 2am ET, was more equivocal and self-conscious, but he offered little of the liberal commentary that marked his pre-war coverage.

Echoing his former ABC colleagues, Brown began his March 26 *NewsNight* by highlighting the second-guessers: “There is some suggestion coming out of the Pentagon today and this evening that this war will take longer than many anticipated – months to fight. That’s the *Washington Post* reporting on the story, and that will be one of the story lines we’ll be looking at today.”

In general, CNN was the cable network most preoccupied with ensuring that the relatively few and increasingly inconsequential anti-war protesters were represented in their coverage, even as events disproved the protesters’ premises and predictions. Even after the resistance in Baghdad had collapsed, Iraqis had showered kisses and flowers on troops, and polls showed nearly 80 percent support for the war, some at CNN persisted in describing an America “split” between “pro-war” and anti-war camps. During CNN’s “At This Hour” news update at 1:13am on April 11, CNN’s Heidi Collins balanced a large rally in support of U.S. troops and a small number of hooligans: “Americans remain split over the war. A pro-war rally was held in New York Thursday at Ground Zero while in California, vandals spray-painted anti-war slogans on more than 50 SUVs and trucks apparently targeted for their gas mileage.” That’s balanced coverage – at least according to CNN.

<u>FNC’s War Coverage</u>	
Overall Grade:	B+
Brit Hume	A
Shepard Smith	B+

Fox News Channel

Anchors and commentators on the Fox News Channel refused to adopt the liberal media’s standard for “objective” war reporting, where objectivity demanded an indifference to whether America succeeded or failed. “There is nothing wrong with taking sides here,” FNC’s Neil Cavuto stated in an on-air reply to a critic on March 28. “You see no difference between a government that oppresses people, and one that does not, but I do.”

Yet this patriotic attitude did not compromise the quality of FNC’s war reporting and analysis. Indeed, by refusing to embrace the reflexive skepticism of most of the media elite, FNC’s audience was not misled by the unwarranted second-guessing and negativism that tainted other networks’ war news. On his 6pm ET *Special Report with Brit Hume*, anchor Brit Hume provided an excellent one-hour summary of the war each night. The Fox anchor with the most face time, Shepard Smith, worked hard to keep the focus of the story exactly where it belonged: in the war zone, with Fox’s embedded battlefield reporters.

Those who watched Fox were well-served by the networks’ refusal to fall into the standard traps of repeating liberal conventional wisdom as fact. On March 24, for example, the same night Jennings led with bad news about a downed helicopter and termed the U.S. advance

“cautious,” Hume on his *Special Report* explored whether doubts about the military’s plan were valid at that point.

Hume reported, “In the air and on the ground, U.S. commanders say the war is going well. But the POWs taken over the weekend, and the first battlefield casualties, of any moment have generated much excitement in the U.S. media, including a remarkable story in the *Washington Post* declaring that the losses had raised doubts about the military’s strategy.”

Hume asked an FNC military analyst, retired Air Force General Thomas McNerney, “What about this strategy? Is it time for it to be changed? And if not, why not?” McNerney replied that, “It’s a brilliant strategy. It’s been planned extremely well and it’s now being executed extraordinarily....The Third Infantry Division has raced the distance equivalent to [that] from Normandy to Belgium, unprecedented in the history of warfare. Even George Patton would be extraordinarily proud and envious of this.”

Hume broke in: “Well, wait a minute. I know, but we got from Normandy to Belgium [before]. What’s so special about this?” The difference, McNerney replied, was that while the coalition had moved 600 kilometers in four days in Iraq, moving from Normandy to Belgium “took us three months. And the fact is, is they have not had a Scud missile fired at Israel or Kuwait. We haven’t had one airplane shot down. They have not launched one fighter sortie against us and our casualties have been very light. This is an extraordinary accomplishment by any measure. Don’t change the strategy. Just continue to execute it.”

When it came to covering the anti-war protesters, FNC also broke with the rest of the media pack. On March 22, the day CNN offered sympathetic and sanitized coverage of anti-war demonstrators, FNC’s Rebecca Gomez stressed that, “the vast majority of Americans support President Bush and his decision to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom....But the anti-crowd, anti-war crowd, refuses to acknowledge the polls and once again shut down and disrupted a great part of the Big Apple.”

Gomez showed a taped interview in which she asked one protester, a woman, whether she would “agree with the decision that Saddam Hussein needed to go?” The woman affirmed, “Yeah.” Gomez then asked, “But you don’t agree that it should have been done by a war?” Again, the woman said, “Yeah.” Gomez then asked the logical follow-up, “So then how?” The woman offered no response other than a confused sigh.

Gomez also told anchor Gregg Jarrett that some in the crowd had been hostile: “They were cursing at us; they were pushing us. You know, we were trying to do interviews and they were getting in the way, and pushing the microphone, and saying to us a lot of things that I can’t mention on television, and just very angry at the media, thinking that somehow we’re helping this war effort that they’re against.”

The main blemish on FNC’s war record occurred as weekend host Geraldo Rivera, whose reputation for theatrics is well-known, was traveling with the Third Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in central Iraq. During a report which aired at about 11:35pm ET on March

30, Rivera boastfully disclosed the unit's mission — to attack irregular Iraqi forces attacking coalition supply lines near the city of an-Najaf, a mission he sketched out in the desert sand.

"The 101st, the unit to which I have been assigned, is working in an-Najaf," Rivera revealed. "Now, the first and second brigades have cut off the south of an-Najaf, and the north of an-Najaf. The unit that I'm with, the third brigade, is now going to move in here to cut off the west of an-Najaf. So they're effectively going to surround it. I'm going up there in just a couple of hours." Rivera left Iraq soon after the incident, although he rejoined the 101st after it had safely established itself in Baghdad.

The Baghdad Reporters

After CNN's Nic Robertson and his crew were expelled from Baghdad on March 21, none of the U.S. networks had their own full-time correspondents in the Iraqi capital until CBS's Lara Logan arrived on April 4. But the networks developed associations with other journalists to continue reporting: National Geographic's Peter Arnett filed reports for NBC and MSNBC; ABC used freelancer Richard Engel; CBS talked to *New York Times* reporter John Burns by phone; while CNN and FNC interviewed a variety of English-speaking journalists from European media outlets.

For all the risk to journalists who holed up in the Palestine Hotel during the war, little valuable reporting came out of Baghdad before U.S. forces arrived. Until the dictatorship ran away April 9, reporters were under the control of the Iraqi Ministry of Information. They could not witness very much from the confines of their hotel. They could not visit damaged government buildings unless the Iraqis took them there, nor could they dare report anything that would seriously offend the Iraqi government. All they could do was repeat the dubious claims of Iraqi officials, visit bomb sites that the Iraqis claimed illustrated civilian damage, and narrate the nightly bombing of Baghdad.

Given those impediments to accurate reporting, the networks should have used reports from these correspondents sparingly, and emphasized for the audience the difficulties these reporters faced. But ABC instead chose to highlight the stories of civilian suffering which Engel reported, even though it could not be known whether a bandaged person shown in a hospital bed had been hurt or killed by U.S. bombs, Iraqi anti-aircraft fire falling back to the ground, or even an ordinary accident in a city of five million.

Anchor Peter Jennings actually provided the first casualty report which ABC admitted it could not validate. On March 20, less than 24 hours after the war began, Jennings showed his *World News Tonight* audience video of a young girl in a hospital bed: "We have been getting some video in from Baghdad at the moment, from both al Arabiya, which is a new television cable satellite network in the Middle East, funded in Saudi Arabia....and al Jazeera, which is

<u>The Baghdad Reporters</u>	
Best:	John Burns
Worst:	Peter Arnett Richard Engel

owned by the Qataris...We cannot tell you what these pictures represent, except some poor child has been hurt. We do not know how, but they are reporting tonight that 37 people have been injured in the course of attacks on Baghdad today and that is all we can tell you. It's a little out of context, but there it is."

ABC highlighted Engel's reports of Iraqi suffering allegedly caused by the U.S. military, and of Iraqi anger towards America. On the March 28 *World News Tonight*, he reported that "witnesses say a missile exploded in this poor Baghdad neighborhood. It was packed with people shopping this evening. All those killed have been described as civilians. The Iraqi news agency called the missile strikes 'a new American crime.'" Engel concluded: "Iraqis didn't expect this war to be without casualties, but they had faith in American technology and its ability to strike with accuracy. In fact, they're still convinced Americans have that ability, which is leading some people here to start believing the government's propaganda that coalition forces are deliberately trying to kill civilians."

On the April 2 *World News Tonight*, Engel highlighted the claim that the U.S. had bombed a "maternity hospital." He asserted: "Iraqis are growing increasingly enraged by the mounting damage to civilian sites — including this maternity hospital." After the obligatory video of an injured child, Engel went to the streets to gather public opinion: "I asked this man if he thinks the war is about liberating him from Saddam's brutal regime. 'Liberation?' he asked me. 'Who asked for America to liberate us?'"

The next night, Engel reported how the power was out in Baghdad: "It surely must add to the tremendous stress people here are already feeling. This woman had a Caesarian section today just before the blackout. Her baby was a month premature. She told me that when the bombs started dropping this morning, she became terrified and immediately went into labor. The doctor said if she didn't have a C-section, she'd lose her daughter." Engel then quoted the Iraqi doctor: "There is an increase in the incidence of premature labors, high increase in the incidence, and there is increase in the incidence of stillbirth in our hospital." Of course, neither Engel nor anyone who worked for ABC could confirm any of these stories.

But when the Iraqis were liberated six days later, Engel was liberated, too. On the April 9 *World News Tonight*, the reporter showed his conversation with a U.S. Marine, who asked Engel, "Do you feel safer now that we're here?" Engel smiled and nodded, "I certainly, I certainly do."

Yet less than 48 hours after Iraqis toppled the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad — and before U.S. forces had even managed to take full control of the city — Engel decided that chaos in the city meant "time may be running out" for the Americans. "There is a growing sense of disillusionment," Engel contended since "Iraqis wanted U.S. troops to bring them freedom and security." His report that night only featured Iraqis discontented with the U.S., including a man who charged: "Now we know that America came to occupy us. They came to steal our oil and our riches and then to leave."

Because ABC was so accepting of his reports, Engel might have been more useful to the Iraqi cause than any of the other correspondents, but *National Geographic Explorer's* Peter Arnett, who was heavily used by MSNBC and NBC during the first week of the war, was the most

outrageously biased Baghdad reporter. Arnett appeared on Iraqi state television March 30 and bragged about the usefulness of his reports to those who would halt the U.S. effort to topple Saddam: "Within the United States, there is growing challenge to President Bush about the conduct of the war and also opposition to the war. So our reports about civilian casualties here...help those who oppose the war." He then praised the "determination" of Iraq's army, declared the U.S. war plan a "failure" and arrogantly proclaimed that he had warned the Bush administration that Iraq wouldn't be a pushover.

For that, NBC and MSNBC correctly decided to cease using Arnett's reports, and *National Geographic Explorer* fired him. But while the networks distanced themselves from the propaganda Arnett spouted on Iraqi state television, they seemed untroubled by the pro-Iraqi propaganda he spouted on MSNBC and NBC, as Arnett parroted the false claims of Iraqi officials without a trace of professional skepticism.

On the *Today* show on March 26, he told Matt Lauer a horrifying — and false — story about the U.S. using cluster bombs on civilian targets in Baghdad: "We traveled down a wide road, and we got to the scene, and shops on both sides of this highway had been destroyed, Matt, and there was smoldering, 20 or so smoldering vehicles in the street. Residents said that 11 o'clock this morning, local time, two missiles came in, exploded, and the first journalists there earlier said they counted 15 corpses. It was smoldering on the road. We saw body parts being handed around by people and it was, later the Information Minister, Mr. al-Sahaf, complained that the U.S. has started using cluster bombs in the Baghdad area."

An hour later, Arnett dutifully repeated the Information Minister's claim about "cluster bombs," again without any skepticism or doubt. NBC finally summoned its Pentagon correspondent, Jim Miklaszewski, who told *Today's* audience the claim was highly doubtful, that cluster bombs are normally used against troops in the field, not urban areas. Miklaszewski explained: "It would be very unusual if, in fact, cluster bombs were used inside Baghdad. And if you look at pictures...a cluster bomb would create a Swiss-cheese effect, thousands and thousands of holes in the target, and we don't see that."

In stark contrast to Arnett's approach, CBS's Dan Rather interviewed by telephone the *Times's* Burns that night for a report on the exact same incident. Burns did his best to expose the Iraqi propaganda component of the story: "When we are taken to these incidents, and this is by far the worst of them that we've seen, there's a sort of Greek chorus, quite expectedly, led by what appear to be Ba'ath Party officials in uniform waving Kalashnikov rifles and pistols, joined by local residents singing the praises of Saddam Hussein. But as we moved amongst the crowd, the remarkable thing to me was that the people there showed absolutely no hostility to this large group of Western reporters. And when they asked us where we came from, the response was, 'Good, good,' and they shook our hands. Now, this could only mean that they make a distinction between governments and people. It could mean something else."

Rather asked whether Burns could say whether or not Saddam was losing control. "In some respects, the [component of the] government...that delivers services to people has largely disappeared, and yet the control of the government over the people toward the security apparatus remains just about absolute. There is still a tremendous unwillingness on the part of

ordinary Iraqis to challenge verbally, or in any other way, the authority of this government. And I think that tells us a great deal about the kind of government which has been here.”

CBS’s own reporter, Lara Logan, made it back to Baghdad just before Saddam’s final collapse. Unlike Burns, she reported Iraqi propaganda ploys at face value. On the April 5 *Saturday Early Show*, Logan told viewers about some dubious videotape that was released a day earlier, purportedly showing Saddam walking on a Baghdad street amid Iraqi citizens. She speculated that the sight of a living Saddam would put joy into Iraqi hearts: “And people here have been buoyed by the sight of Saddam Hussein on Iraqi television last night, greeting with, greeting people in a residential area of Baghdad.”

Four days later, after his regime had collapsed, Iraqis gathered in the streets to denounce Saddam and pound his likeness with the soles of their shoes.

Embedded Reporters

Before the war began, the Pentagon placed several hundred volunteer reporters in key military units, giving them a ground’s eye view of the war’s progress. One positive side effect: hours of cable TV coverage were filled with actual eyewitness reporting, hours that would otherwise have been consumed by the repetitive analysis of pundits and experts in studios thousands of miles from the action. While none of these reporters could offer a complete picture of the war itself, their stories greatly increased the public’s understanding of the war and their knowledge of what life was like on the desert battlefield.

<u>The Embedded Reporters</u>	
Best:	David Bloom Walter Rodgers Greg Kelly
Worst:	Ted Koppel

These reporters excelled when they acted as the viewers’ eyes and ears in Iraq. NBC’s David Bloom, who would later die from a blood clot in his lung, offered riveting coverage of the Third Infantry Division’s drive towards Baghdad and an intense sandstorm that turned day into night. Reporting for hours on end in his innovative “Bloommobile,” live on MSNBC, he was able to take viewers directly to the battlefield for an immediate sense of the conditions faced by American troops. Bloom’s colleague Kerry Sanders conveyed a similar sense of immediacy as he was on the scene March 28 when Marines found bloody scraps of U.S. uniforms at a hospital in southern Iraq, evidence which raised chilling fears that American POWs had been tortured.

CNN’s Walter Rodgers seemed the very model of what a good “embed” should be. He narrated hour upon hour of armored troop movements, often under enemy fire, without straying from his “just the facts” style or betraying a single bit of the vital information he was entrusted. “We were treated to the commanders’ reports — the commanding generals’ reports.

We were shown all the maps of the operations before they began," he recounted on the April 13 *Late Edition*. "It was like [being] a kid in a candy store for a reporter."

MSNBC's chief foreign correspondent, Bob Arnot, who also reported for NBC, was impressed at his close-up view of the war. He told MSNBC's Chris Matthews on *Hardball*, April 9, that what he personally witnessed added up to "real vindication for the administration. One: credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Two: you know what? There were a lot of terrorists here, really bad guys. I saw them. They took women and children hostages, kept them in their own homes. And lastly, this whole idea of Iraqi freedom, the administration may have come up with it at last minute, but I'll tell you, it's like Paris 1944. Coming into town here, people are yelling and screaming, 'Go, go, USA!'"

FNC's Greg Kelly went along with the Third Infantry Division's daring first thrust through Baghdad on April 5, an attack that the mission commander estimated killed thousands of Iraqi fighters, with one American death. Two days later on the *Fox Report*, even as the Iraqi Information Minister continued to deny the presence of U.S. forces in Baghdad, Kelly was broadcasting from the military parade grounds in the center of the city. "The situation very much under control. We only see American military vehicles here this time," he reported.

Turning to an American soldier, Kelly informed him, "The Iraqi Information Minister doesn't seem to think that you guys are winning and that you guys are really here. What do you have to say about that?" The soldier replied, "Well, he's just across the street from us; we'll go over and talk to him."

As they traveled with U.S. forces, the embedded reporters tried to gauge Iraqi public opinion. On April 3, CBS's Jim Axelrod recounted for the *Evening News* how he had seen happy civilians as his unit moved north earlier in the day. He narrated the pictures: "Look how they were met. These are men, women, children, smiling and waving. We heard people say, 'Welcome,' 'Hello, Mr. Bush.'"

The same night, NBC's Tom Brokaw offered an audio report from *New York Times* reporter Dexter Filkins with the Marines, who affirmed Axelrod's reporting: "As we get closer to the capital city, it's becoming clear to these people that it [the removal of Saddam Hussein] actually may happen and what I saw today, what I witnessed today was a really warm reception by just about every Iraqi that we passed. People waving and people cheering....A husband and wife pulled over in a pickup truck and she said 'you've saved us from him, you've saved us from him. We love, we love you, we love you.' And the Marines saw that and I'd say they were buoyed by the whole thing."

That same night, ABC's Ted Koppel, embedded with the Third Infantry Division, offered a more grudging assessment: "There were some modestly enthusiastic onlookers....There was one trooper tossing plastic frisbees to some of the kids. That probably got more of a reaction and more enthusiasm than anything else did."

Koppel was the rare embedded journalist who spent his time lecturing and pontificating instead of recounting the historic events that surrounded him. On the first full day of the war,

March 20, Koppel abruptly inserted his own views into ABC's prime time coverage as his unit pushed deeper and deeper into enemy territory. At about 10:22pm ET, he told anchor Peter Jennings: "We ought to take note of the significance of what is happening here because this is an invasion that in this particular case, of course, was not prompted by any invasion of the United States. I know that members of the administration have been creating a tenuous linkage between al-Qaeda and the Iraqis so that there is that linkage between 9-11 and what's happening here now, but this is a more pro-active, pre-emptive kind of operation, certainly a larger pre-emptive operation than I think the United States of America has ever engaged in, and whichever way it goes, I think it's going to shift the plates of the world."

The following Monday, March 24, Koppel — who had moved hundreds of miles into Iraq in less than a week — concluded a *Nightline* report with a warning that dangerous days lay ahead: "The U.S. military has only just begun to engage the first of the enemy's strongest and most capable divisions. There is no reason to believe that ultimately, perhaps even in the next week or two, U.S. forces will not prevail. But success will come at a significant cost."

Koppel continued his speech: "Forget the easy victories of the last twenty years; this war is more like the ones we knew before. The President has determined that U.S. security and national interests are at stake. Such determinations always carry with them a high cost in blood and treasure. Watching that unfold on your television screens, sometimes watching it live, as it's happening, will not be easy for you. Telling you if and when things are going badly for U.S. troops, enabling you to bear witness to the high cost of war, is the hard part of our job. In a famous couple of lines from the movie *A Few Good Men*, Jack Nicholson, playing a Marine colonel, snarls: 'You want the truth? You can't handle the truth.' Well, this is no movie. We'll do our very best to give you the truth in the hope and the belief that you can handle it."

Koppel had moments of usefulness, however. Near the end of the war, he took advantage of his presence on the ground to deflate enemy propaganda. On ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, Koppel was asked about Iraqi claims that U.S. forces had been driven from the Baghdad airport. "Trust me," he declared, standing outside in just shirt sleeves. "I'm at Saddam International Airport, and I'm not here alone."

Three nights later on *Nightline*, after Saddam's statue was toppled, Koppel lectured those Arab media outlets that insisted on presenting obvious Iraqi falsehoods alongside American military statements that could be confirmed through independent reporting: "Until the very end, the Iraqi government continued to play out the charade that it was inflicting huge losses on U.S. forces, that there were no U.S. troops at the airport, let alone inside Baghdad itself. And in a mockery of objective reporting, a number of international news agencies presented the competing claims of Baghdad and Washington as if they had equal merit: 'U.S. forces claim to be inside Baghdad, but the Iraqi Minister of Information continues to insist,' that sort of thing," he scoffed.

But before the end of that April 9 program, Koppel had reverted to form: "It may seem an ungracious note on which to end, but beware the euphoria. Ripping down Saddam's pictures, toppling his statues. Those are the benign, photogenic events that can delude us into misunderstanding what lies ahead. There are hundreds of thousands of scores to be settled in

this country. Blood debts to be repaid. The U.S. military doesn't want to get into the middle of that, but if it doesn't there are likely to be lynchings and massacres that will sicken the world and make the establishment of a new government hideously complicated. It is good that people are finally able to believe that Saddam's regime has been crushed. The military victory was difficult enough, but now comes the hard part."

If Geraldo Rivera had been formally "embedded" with the 101st Airborne, he would have been selected as the worst embedded reporter for his careless revealing of military secrets. Instead, Koppel takes that "honor." Like the gimmicky Rivera, Koppel often behaved as if he — not the vast military force that surrounded him — was the real star of the show. Reporters like Bloom, Sanders, Arnot, Rodgers, and Kelly never faded into the background, but they had the good sense to let the story tell itself, as did CBS's Byron Pitts, who bore witness to the character of the men with whom he was traveling.

After returning from Iraq, on the April 15 *Early Show*, Pitts recounted what he considered his best war story, an episode which had played out on live television on April 9 as Saddam's dictatorship melted away: "For me, one of the great moments was [watching] the captain in charge of Lima company, 31 years old from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who remained so calm in such a difficult situation....People were, Marines were on their stomachs. I was laying on my back and this guy sat up, ankles crossed, and very calmly made decisions."

The Marines were under attack. "There was one point when one of his young corporals said, 'Sir, we've spotted where the fire is coming from. There are three people, let me take the shot,'" Pitts continued. "And he [the captain] said, 'Have you identified their weapons?' He said, 'No, sir.' He said, 'Do not take the shot until you can confirm the weapon.' The corporal pushed; he said, 'No, not until then.'"

"Moments passed and we saw three heads bobbing up and down. We all assumed that those were [the ones who had been] firing. And moments later, a man, his wife and daughter stood up. This captain made the right call. Three people are alive today because this Marine made the right call," Pitts concluded.

It's a good story, and now the whole country knows about it because the military agreed to let trustworthy reporters travel with military units, and because Byron Pitts made the risky choice to be one of those reporters who helped tell America the story of Gulf War II.

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