

THE MILITARY-CIVILIAN GAP AND FUNCTION OF ARMY PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
AS AN INTERMEDIARY

by

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## **Abstract**

This case study explores the gap in attitudes, information and contact between soldiers and civilians and what Army public affairs officers do to try and bridge that gap. The study was exploratory and as such, brought up more questions than it answered. In-depth interviews were conducted with three Army public affairs officers from three different Army installations. A total of five community leaders from towns surrounding the installations also were interviewed. Most of the comments from public affairs officers and community leaders were positive. While the public affairs officers felt they could do a better job telling the Army's story if they had more resources, the community leaders didn't necessarily feel they were missing out on information. Some stereotypes or biases were detected in comments suggesting the Army was only interested in helping itself and on the flip side that there are just some things civilians would not understand. Further research on the military-civilian gap, particularly the gaps between certain demographics, would be usefully not only in helping public affairs officers target their messages but also in helping military recruiters better connect with possible enlistees.

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## ***Introduction***

Since the end of conscription in 1973, much discussion has circulated related to the widening gap in attitudes, information and contact between civilians and members of the U.S military. The gap, which Harvard professor Samuel Huntington first attributed in his 1957 book, *The soldier and the state: the theory and politics of civil-military relations*, to the fact that the military's function is very different from that of civilians (cited in Cohn, 1999, p. 2). Members of the military are trained in the use of violence, while the majority of civilians are not.

The relationship between those who have killed and seen killing in battle and those who have not is always fraught with tension, taboo, and unrecognized effects. Studies of World War II soldiers' attitudes toward civilians showed a contradictory mix of desires: to protect people back home from knowledge of the horrors they sometimes saw and made, the wish to have the people understand their experience, and despair for their ability to do so. Civilians for their part, often wanted simply to believe there was a simple moral clarity to the war." (Lutz, 2001, p. 230)

Thomas Ricks, a military correspondent, Pulitzer Prize winner and member of Harvard University's Senior Advisory Council on the Project on U.S. Civil-Military Relations, identified three sources of the widening gap: "civilian ignorance of the military arising from a decline in the number of individuals with military experience in the postconscription era; politicization of the military, accompanied by a growing estrangement from the values of civilian society – 'private loathing for public America;' and the post-Cold War security environment, which lacks the kind of unifying threat that the Soviet Union had posed during the previous four decades" (cited in Holsti, 1998, p. 8).

Many critiques of the military-civilian gap suggest that the military has become increasingly estranged from the society it serves (Hooker, 2003, p. 4). And although some researchers, such as Hooker (2003), state that the gap has been greatly exaggerated, the existence of this gap in civil-military relations has not been disputed. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of Army Public Affairs Officers<sup>1</sup> (PAOs) as intermediary agents between Army installations and their neighboring communities. This case study will focus on how each PAO addresses the military civilian gap and military and civilian perceptions of each other.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Department of the Army Public Affairs (PA) Field Manual (2000), “the PAO’s primary mission is to assess the PA situation, advise the commander on PA issues, assist him in making the best possible decisions, and translate his decision into effective PA operations. PAOs employ the decision-making process to plan, coordinate and supervise the implementation of a PA strategy that helps the commander meet his obligation to communicate with the American public, soldiers, home station communities and the Department of the Army community. PAOs analyze the situation, anticipate issues, assess implications, and develop comprehensive operations, which meet the news and information needs of internal and external audiences and facilitate media operations.” Civilian PA practitioners have the same skills as military PA personnel. “They provide critical support during war and non-combat operations by providing a vital link between deployed forces and the home station community, and in many situations, may be called upon to deploy with the units they support, or as individual augmentees.

## *Literature Review*

### *The Problem: The Widening Civilian-Military Gap*

In a paper prepared for the Triangle Institute for Security Studies “Project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society,” and later published in *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-military Gap and American National Security*, two Duke University professors found that in spite of the gap in civil-military relations, the public expresses a continued confidence in the military despite a decline in trust of the government and other public institutions (Gronke & Feaver, 2001, p. 129).

Gronke and Feaver suggest that the professed confidence in the military masks a hidden alienation between the groups. Examining data from the Triangle Institute for Security Studies survey, the authors found that 56% of civilian elites (a group sampled from “Who’s Who in America” and lists of religious, political and foreign policy leaders) with no military experience agreed strongly with the statement that they are “proud of men and women who serve in the military.” While a majority, that response was 35 to 40 points below responses by elite military (a group of current and future military officers at military professional education institutions) responses and 15% below elite civilians with military experience. The authors conclude that, “this is a real yawning gap, and is cause for concern among military advocates, as well as others who wonder how civil-military relations will change with the emergence of a new generation of leaders inexperienced in military affairs” (2001, p. 140).

America historically has accepted the necessity for a military more highly ordered and disciplined than civil society (Hooker, 2003, p. 5). But as Gronke and Feaver pose, “Does this confidence extend beyond a mere appreciation that the military is capable of

doing what it is asked to do? Is there an underlying sense of alienation between the groups, acknowledged or latent” (2001, p. 146)? When asked if “most members of the armed forces have a great deal of respect for American civilian society,” 26% of respondents showed “some disagreement” and only 43% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” (2001, p. 148).

Gronke and Feaver suggest that social distance from the military “cultivates in civilians shallow and superficial support, the kind that results in affirmative answers to easy questions but masks a deeper alienation that could quickly come to the fore if optimistic security conditions change (2001, p. 130).” Most respondents, the authors say, are aware of the socially desirable response. In some ways, the authors note, the distrust is quite apparent and in situations where civilians have less contact with the military, support for military culture falls. “Civilians are confident that civilians respect the military and the elite military is confident that the military respects civilian society; each group however, doubts to some degree whether the respect is reciprocated” (2001, p. 148). In short, the authors found that “the culture gap thesis expects that public statements of support and respect belie underlying negative stereotypes civilians (especially elite civilians with no military experience) hold about the military and the military hold about civilians” (Gronke & Feaver, n.d., p. 22).

In her book, *Homefront*, Catherine Lutz (2001), a professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, examined some of the stereotypes in the military and civilian worlds and the dynamics between one Army installation and its neighboring town over the years. What she found was a past often glossed over in official records even though it remained vivid and sometimes messy in the minds of the soldiers

and civilians who lived it. In the early 1900s, many landowners and townspeople fought a proposed new Army installation. The town's newspaper warned people to "keep their heads" and not seek to profit on the soldiers coming to the installation and instead insisted that the proper and patriotic course of action was to charge a little less to those "who are offering their lives for ourselves and our homes" (p. 29). Articles such as those reminding the townspeople of their patriotic duties were followed in later years by admonitions in the newspaper for youth to register for the draft. Many of the articles asked veterans' descendants if they were going "to be slackers and wait until they are dragged into the army? Have they degenerated and become a race of timid weaklings" (p.34)? In her book, Lutz recorded stories relating to the differences between soldiers and civilians since the installation's earliest years.

Of longstanding are these contrasts: A civilian is protected, a soldier the protector. A civilian enjoys peace and safety, the soldier faces danger and war (nuclear warfare's actual collapse of this fact notwithstanding). No matter his or her gender, a civilian is feminized, a soldier masculinized. The status that a warrior accrues is obvious from the frequent mention of veteran status on jobs résumés and in political campaigns: Valor gives value, virility virtue. In stronger terms, the soldier is emotionally disciplined, self-sacrificing, vigorous, and hardworking. By definition, then, the civilian is weak, cowardly, materialistic and wealthy, and self-centered. The civilian is soft, lacking experience with both the physical discipline that hardens muscles and with the hard facts of death and evil that the soldier faces down. (Lutz, 2001, p. 228)

In *The widening gap between the military and society* (Ricks, 1997, p.66), the author interviewed Marines returning home from boot camp. He found the newly minted Marines were "repulsed by the physical unfitness of civilians, by the uncouth behavior they witnessed, and by what they saw as pervasive selfishness and consumerism." As an



older Marine told Ricks, “When I got out of boot camp, in 1946, society was different. It was more disciplined, and most Americans trusted the government. Most males had some military experience. It was an entirely different society – one that thought more about its responsibilities than its rights” (1997, p. 68).

The marine wasn’t far off with his comments. According to Hooker, “public support for the military and its values has remained surprisingly enduring even as the level of public participation in military affairs has declined” (2003, p. 7).<sup>2</sup> In the Triangle Institute for Security Studies survey, two thirds of the elite military respondents said that political leaders were somewhat or very ignorant regarding military affairs (Gronke & Feaver, 2001, p. 156).

Although voiced less often, Lutz argues, the evaluation of the average soldier by the public also can be negative. Instead of the soldiers seen as the protectors and the civilians the protected, the soldier can be seen as “a slacker, playing cards and drinking, while the civilian supports him.” The soldier’s time is defined by “waiting, not activity, and destroying, not producing” (2001, p. 229).

As the word itself suggests, the *civilian* is assumed more civilized or civil, that is, peace loving, polite, or well bred, while the soldier is a barbarian with a club, witlessly pursuing war. Said one soldier, “I came here in 1947 for two weeks’ training. And there were signs on the streets downtown: ‘Soldiers and Dogs Not Allowed’.... The civilian folks who don’t deal with the military don’t understand at all. We’re human beings. We raise our kids like they raise their kids. ...[But the people in town saw us

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<sup>2</sup> In 1950, just six years after the end of World War II, slightly less than 1% of Americans were serving in the military. In 1972, just before the end of the draft, 1.12% of Americans were serving in the military. Today’s all-volunteer military is made up of just under half a percent of the American public (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., 1950, 1072; Department of Defense, n.d., 1950, 1972).

as] martinets versus real people. ... The killers were at Fort Bragg, and the real people were downtown.” (2001, p. 230)

Soldiers also are seen by many as dependent on a government wage. “Because they receive cash payments from the government and many services in kind, soldiers live in something that bears a strong family resemblance to a social welfare state” (2001, p. 231).

However, Lutz found, many soldiers felt they had a right to certain treatment because they were defending the nation. “I guess it’s good that the military calls people to feel superior,” a school official told Lutz, “because if you want to go in battle with the enemy, you need to feel superior, but not necessarily when you go to the school. ... It’s hard for a person just to take off that personality, simply because they come into the civilian community” (2001, p. 238).

In their study of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies data, Gronke and Feaver (2001, p. 155) found that “stereotypes followed a distinctive pattern, with a consistent civil-military gap. In short, if alienation exists not only when groups say they feel estranged but also when their attitudes and opinions about the other groups reflect division and hostility, then the data support the conclusion that there is considerable latent alienation between the military elite and elite civilians.”

In a review of the military-civilian gap debate, Lindsay Cohn (1999) summarized the problems anticipated by a gap that was allowed to get large enough to cause problems. The problems Cohn identified were:

- A civilian society ignorant of and therefore unsympathetic to the military’s special needs and uninterested in electing officials who would be militarily prudent,

- A military which may turn hostile and cease to regard its obligations to society in response to isolated from and by indifferent civilians,
- A military whose size or effectiveness might decline, and civilian officials with so little military understanding as to be uniquely *unqualified* to make intelligent military policy. (p. 7)

Because the military depends on civilians for manpower and support for its mission, proposals to bridge or at least narrow the gap merit serious consideration (Holsti, 1998, p. 41). Holsti identifies three broad approaches to narrowing the civilian-military gap. The first is the restoration of conscription or a broader plan for mandatory national service. Second, he suggests curtailing the costly infrastructure of on-post facilities that enable military personnel to meet almost all of their needs without much contact with civilians. And finally, changes in the education of the officer corps (1998, p. 40). Over the long run, however, efforts to reduce the isolation of the military through education may offer another approach to narrowing the civilian-military gap (Holsti, 1998, p. 41).

As Ricks (1997, p. 76) points out, “the U.S. Army must justify its existence to the American people. Again, this suggests that the Army will become more like the Marines – small, expeditionary, and, for the good of the institution, better at explaining itself to Congress and the media.” One way the Army attempts to justify its existence to the American people is through its public affairs efforts.

*A Solution: U.S. Army Public Affairs*

The Army’s “enduring” mission is to “provide necessary forces and capabilities to

the Combatant Commanders in support of the *National Security and Defense Strategies*” (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2007). The Army’s 2007 posture statement (DA, 2007), a document that includes information on the Army’s transformation to a modular force, its core objectives, mission and plans for the future, states that in order to continue supporting the nation, the Army needs “to sustain our All-Volunteer Soldiers, their families, and our Army Civilians and to maintain the trust of the American people, whom we serve in this time of war and uncertainty.” During World War I, the Committee on Public Information was created to sell the “war to end all wars and to maintain public support” (Holm, 2002, p. 59). In World War II, it was the Office of War Information that was tasked with keeping the public informed and supportive. Although strict censorship regulations were in place in World War II, the media still managed to maintain public support for the war. The beginning of major tensions between the military and media began during the Vietnam War. During the war, reporters saw discrepancies between what they were told by official reports and what they saw in the field. Many military commanders blamed the war’s failure and lack of public support on the media and the reports sent back where “from the vantage of its living room, the American public was instantly aware that their sons were dying at an alarming rate and that previously heroic notions of warfare did not apply” (Holm, 2002, p. 60).

In response to the military’s experience with the media in Vietnam, the Army shifted its approach in telling its story. During the invasion of Grenada in 1983, the Army used an exclusionary tactic. Six hundred journalists turned up to cover the successful invasion. Fifteen were given the story and refused to share their material with the rest of the reporters. The U.S. victory went largely unreported (Holm, 2002, p. 60). When that

tactic backfired with media, the Army switched to a pool system during the initial stages of the Gulf War in 1991. “Although cooperation between the Pentagon and the press made media coverage the most comprehensive to date, lingering mistrust denied the press full access, and denied the military proper credit for its successes” (Holm, 2002, p. 60). During operations in Somalia in 1993, Haiti in 1994 and Bosnia in 1995, an almost completely open access policy was implemented. Lessons learned from these operations prompted the Department of Defense to establish the Principles of Information, which state:

- 1) Information will be made fully available, consistent with statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by current and valid security classification. The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act will be complied with in both letter and spirit.
- 2) A free flow of general and military information will be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their family members.
- 3) Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the government from criticism or embarrassment.
- 4) Information will be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect national and operations security or threaten the safety or privacy of the men and women of the Armed Forces.
- 5) The Department’s obligation to provide the public with information on its major programs and operations may require detailed public affairs planning and coordination within the Department and with other government agencies. The sole purpose of such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public; propaganda or publicity designed to sway or direct public opinion will not be included in Department of Defense public affairs programs. (DA, 2000, p. A1)

Today, in the midst of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is the job of Army

Public Affairs to garner support for the troops by telling the stories of the more than 600,000 soldiers on active duty. According to its Web site, the mission of Army Public Affairs is “to fulfill the Army’s obligation to keep the American people and the Army informed, and to help establish the conditions that lead to confidence in America’s Army and its readiness to conduct operations in peacetime, conflict and war” (DA, n.d.). In a *Washington Post* article about public affairs training at Fort Meade, MD, one of the Defense Information School instructors said “some students find it a bit hard to swallow the notion that the military should be open with information that might embarrass the government. We’re teaching them to be honest, but the challenge is getting them to believe we really mean it” (Vogel, 1998). Kenneth Bacon, then-assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, told Vogel, “Everybody thinks public affairs at the Pentagon involves trying to spin stories to the press and public. One of the things we explain... is that as a democracy, we have to explain what we’re doing.” To explain what it is doing and to apply the Principles of Information to tell the Army’s story, installation public affairs offices employ three main components – media relations, community relations and command information.

#### *Media relations*

The function of media relations at Army installations is to facilitate the Army’s interaction with local, national and international media. One way the Army does this is by encouraging its commanders at all levels to engage the media. The Army Public Affairs Field Manual 3-61.1 (DA, 2000), encourages, “leaders at all levels need to educate media representatives and facilitate their efforts to provide accurate, balanced and credible presentation of timely information.”

In a 2005 Gallup poll, 95% of the general or flag officers surveyed said they were willing to speak to the media; 84% said they are encouraged at least occasionally to speak with the media by their chain of command; and 86% said speaking with the media is part of their official duties (McCormick, 2005, p. 41). According to a report from a military-media conference convened to discuss the Gallup results, “military officers are perceived as more willing to cooperate with journalists in these areas. Large majorities of the military and media respondents say that military officers are willing to speak with the media, provide journalists access to military operations and personnel to help reporters write their stories, and provide security assistance to journalists” (2005, p. 41). Media relations sections help facilitate this access to military officers and soldiers, and help disseminate the Army’s story to surrounding communities, answer queries from media, setup interviews, and release news.

According to the field manual (DA, 2000), the objective of media relations is to support the news media’s efforts by providing “accurate, timely, balanced, credible coverage of the force and the operation, while minimizing the possibility that media activities will disrupt the operation.”

#### *Community relations*

Community relations programs are in place in the Army to help garner support for the installation, soldiers and their families, and their missions.

Public opinion about the Army is greatly influenced by the actions of each command. What the command does for its local community, or fails to do, affects the perceptions and attitudes of the American people, upon whom the Army depends for its support and existence. This applies not only to official acts, but also to unofficial acts, which by their commission or omission affects public opinion. (DA, 2000)

Community relations practitioners use different methods, such as interaction with local veterans, civic, and community groups, to increase the public's understanding of the Army. The public affairs field manual instructs commanders to maintain a continual connection with community leaders in order to develop an effective two-way channel of communication and resolve conflicts. The goal of community relations is to:

Develop an open, mutually satisfactory, cooperative relationship between the installation and the community. A successful community relations program improves the community's perception of the Army and its appreciation for the installation and the soldiers, family members and civilians who are part of the installation. It is based on openness and honesty. Community relations objectives are community assistance and social improvements for the community in which the military must work and live. (DA, 2000)

In conclusion, the Army public affairs field manual states that community relations' activities are "vital to instilling and maintaining the confidence of internal and external publics in our great Army. Commanders and PAOs cannot leave the prospect of successful relations to chance. Too much is at stake" (DA, 2000).

#### *Command information*

Installation command information programs are comprised of products such as installation guides, newspapers, television programs, and Web sites that Public Affairs Offices use to keep soldiers, families, and community members up to date on current Army information. According to the public affairs field manual (DA, 2000), "the Army provides an expedited flow of complete, accurate and timely information, which [sic] not only communicates the Army perspective, but also attempts to educate audiences and engender support for the force." Service members need to receive information about their participation in operations from both command information products and civilian media



outlets in order to better understand their mission, their role in it, and what effect it is having on local, regional, national, and international levels. Command information products also are intended to garner support for the service members by sharing their stories. As the public affairs field manual states, “The general public is interested in soldiers, their lifestyle, how they are being treated and their ability to accomplish a given mission. Information about these topics provide reassurance, confirming that soldiers maintain professional and ethical values and are being cared for adequately” (DA, 2000).

Because most civilians don’t witness soldiers’ lives first hand, public affairs officers can help bring soldiers’ stories to the public using their own public affairs tools and by helping outside media tell soldiers’ stories. Whether they intend to or not, the government and the media have the ability to influence public opinion during war. This ability is greater when the public has some likelihood of witnessing the conflict for itself (Baroody, 1998, p. 35). One way the Army helps media create a more intimate look at events is by embedding reporters with the troops. Besides Army reports of the Iraq war, 700 U.S. media embedded with troops during the beginning of the war to provide practically minute-by-minute coverage. “News coverage of the dangers faced by soldiers and the conditions under which they fought further strengthened America’s bond with the military” (McCormick, 2005, p. 34). In 1999, and again, in 2005, Gallup conducted a survey on behalf of the McCormick Tribune Foundation to gauge the public’s perceptions of the military and the media. The 2005 poll showed 77% of Americans were “very interested” in coverage of terrorist threats against the U.S. and human casualties inflicted by military operations. Six in 10 Americans said they were interested in stories on terrorism, the performance of the armed forces during war, war casualties and discussion

of reasons for the war. The poll also showed, “the media and military may significantly underestimate the public’s interest in news stories about individual members of the military, cost of military operations and rebuilding of Iraq” (p. 36). Embedding was a popular practice with all three groups with the majority of each believing that, “embedding enhances the public’s understanding of the war, helps the morale of the troops, improves the public’s perception of the military and improves the credibility of the media coverage” (p. 39).

After the Gulf War, Iyengar and Simon (1993) demonstrated how the media swayed the public’s focus from domestic issues to the war as the media changed its focus. Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Americans were most likely to say drug usage and crime, the state of the economy, and the federal budget deficit were the biggest problems facing the U.S. (p. 374). Just three months later, after coverage of the Gulf War “absorbed virtually all network news time,” the Gallup poll respondents named the Gulf crisis as the nation’s most important problem.

In their analysis of the network news reports on the Gulf Crisis, Iyengar and Simon found that, “more than 50% of all reports examined emanated directly from official spokespersons” (p. 382). Military officials had helped to set the agenda for the media and in turn, the American public. Today, the Army’s messages travel through public affairs officers. While this case study doesn’t look directly at the effects of agenda-setting from the perspective of the public affairs officer, it does use the theory as a basis for examining their thoughts on how well they are getting their message out to the American public.

### *Agenda setting*

In 1972, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw conducted the first empirical study to test Bernard Cohen's statement that:

The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read. (1963, p. 13)

In a study of undecided voters in the 1968 presidential campaign, McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 177) attempted to match what Chapel Hill, N.C., voters "*said* were key issues of the campaign with the *actual content* of the mass media used by them during the campaign." The fact the media and voters found many of the same issues to be important "was taken as evidence of the media's power to influence the salience of issues, thereby setting the public agenda" (Gandy, 1982, p. 6). McCombs and Shaw (1972) summed up their findings:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position ... The mass media may well determine the important issues – that is, the media may set the 'agenda' of the campaign. (p. 176)

Since the Chapel Hill study much of the research on agenda setting has been focused on political campaigns. However, in his 1982 book, *Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy*, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., (1982) suggests going beyond agenda setting to determine who sets the media's agenda and for what purpose it

is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society. “It has become almost trite to say knowledge is power,” Gandy (1982, p. ix) suggests. “And whereas its power may not be comparable to that which emerges from the barrel of a gun, knowledge, or the lack of it, largely determines when and how well that deadly power is used.” Although most matters aren’t quite that dramatic, Gandy states, all policies are dependent upon the success of the interested parties in getting their messages across to the public and specifically those who shape policy.

In a study of the Washington press, Stephen Hess (1981, p. 126) suggested that journalist tend to work with sources they identify with, however, interaction with some sources, such as military public affairs offices, is inevitable. Because of the closed nature of reporting on military installations, media are dependent on military public affairs offices to provide them with information subsidies, a term coined by Gandy to describe controlled access to information at little cost or effort to the person receiving the information.

Those with the power to control information not only control its consumption, they also influence the decisions that are based on that information...it is through the provision of information subsidies to and through the mass media that those with economic power are able to maintain their control over a capitalist society. (Gandy, 1982, p. 8)

The use of information subsidies often is inevitable when it comes to journalists meeting their deadlines. Gandy (1982, p. 11) suggests that journalist enter into a type of economic exchange with their sources with information as the capital: sources provide information in order for journalist to meet deadlines and fill space, and, in return, sources are in charge of the information provided.

Faced with time constraints, and the need to produce stories that will win publication, journalists will attend to, and make use of, subsidized information that is of a type and form that will achieve that goal. By reducing the costs faced by journalists in satisfying organizational requirements, the subsidy giver increases the probability that the subsidized information will be used. (Gandy, 1982, p. 62)

When not providing information relating to a crisis or mass “educational” target, the public relations approach to information subsidies “is focused on generating a sense of ‘good will’ in the community about its corporate neighbor.”

Gandy (1982, p. 74) cites estimates, albeit from 1982, that at least 3,300 government workers are employed with the goal of creating information subsidies that produce or reinforce “an impression of competence and efficiency,” or result in “the adoption of a preferred perspective on some policy.” At every level of government, in every agency, there are information specialists who make sure the nation’s public media carry the message forward.

In study of public relations’ influence on the news, Judy VanSlyke Turk, looked at how well government information officers in six Louisiana agencies succeeding getting their messages into the local newspapers (1986, p. 15). Turk looked at what types of subsidies the public information officers provided to journalists and what criteria the journalists used when choosing information. Journalists used information from 225, or 51%, of the 444 subsidies from the six agencies in an eight-week period (1986, p. 21). Journalists cited newsworthiness 82% of the time as the most important factor when considering a subsidy. “The to-use or not-to-use decision on 365 of the 444 information handouts received was based on whether journalists judged the information to be timely, important to the public and readers, a report of unusual as opposed to routine happenings

or a report involving prominent individuals or organizations” (1986, p. 22). More administrative considerations, such as available space, management policy on how news certain news should be covered, staff resources and deadline pressures, were cited 18% of the time as influencing information selection (1986, p. 23). Turk specifically noted the tendency of journalists to choose information intended to inform over that intended to persuade. “Those whose public relations behavior is straightforward are more successful in getting their information into published news stories than those who attempt to be persuasive” (1986, p. 25).

Patricia Curtin cites several studies by Turk that conclude many journalists believe public relations practitioners to be self-serving, which devalues the newsworthiness of their information subsidies. Variables that can increase practitioners’ credibility with journalists include personally knowing the source, the acceptance of stories on news wires and source prestige (1999, p. 55). Curtin interviewed 21 editors and reporters found they were more likely to use information stemming from non-profit or government entities. Subsidies coming from profit-seeking organizations were seen as an economic drain on the newspapers and an attempt at getting free advertising (1999, p. 67).

### *The Knowledge Gap*

So, according to previous studies, public affairs officers should stand a decent chance at getting their subsidies into the news at least half of the time. But, when Department of the Army public affairs officers send the Army’s story forward to the public media, is it reaching the intended audience? According to the original study by

Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien (1970), dealing with the knowledge gap, “as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease.” Gandy offers three factors that are most often seen as reinforcing this pattern:

- (1) information systems, including the mass media, tend to distribute information in a form most familiar to users with more education;
- (2) information users with more education and more highly developed communication and analytical skills have a greater variety of uses for available information; and
- (3) information users in the upper classes have more interpersonal contacts where policy-relevant information often serves as social currency (1982, p. 178)

Thus, the knowledge gap suggests that public affairs offices may not be reaching their intended targets when sharing the Army’s story – unless the targets are only those with higher education or those who have been “initiated” into the Army way of life, such as soldiers, veterans, and Army family members. As Gandy puts it,

Because of bias toward the already initiated, many stories for the average viewer are nothing but, ‘words, words, words’ ... information is valued in terms of its ability to reduce personal uncertainty, and guide personal decisions. It is also valued for its ability to generate uncertainty in others, or to influence individual and collective behaviors through the selective reduction of uncertainty. Because of the price of information, and the inequitable distribution of personal and economic resources, uncertainty is also maldistributed in society. (Gandy, 1982, p. 178)

### *Research questions*

To further explore the military-civilian gap and the role of Army installation public affairs offices in bridging that gap, in-depth interviews were conducted with three Army public affairs officers and leaders in the communities surrounding the three installations. This paper will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of concern among three PAOs regarding the military-civilian gap and what strategies and tactics are they using to address their concerns?

RQ2: How has the role of PAOs in addressing the military-civilian gap changed since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., Sept. 11, 2001?

RQ3: How successful do civilian leaders feel PAOs are at bridging the military-civilian gap and what are their areas of concern and suggested solutions?



## *Methodology*

Case studies were chosen to initially explore this topic because little previous research was found dealing with this particular aspect of the military-civilian gap. Most previous studies dealt with the relationship between the military and the media or focused specifically on the public's perception of war coverage. In their book *Doing case study research*, Dawson Hancock and Bob Algozzine, promote case study research as a method for researchers who hope "to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved" (2006, p. 11). In a look at misunderstandings about case study research, Bent Flyvbjerg disputes five misunderstandings:

- 1) Theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge
- 2) One cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development
- 3) The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building
- 4) The case study contains a bias toward verification
- 5) It is often difficult to summarize specific case studies (2006, 219)

In argument against the first misunderstanding, Flyvbjerg states that by depending solely on context-independent knowledge, researchers can only hope to attain a beginner's knowledge. "Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity" (2006, p. 222). While conducting research and learning about case methodology "in action" at Harvard, Flyvbjerg "found the literature and people who effectively argued, 'Forget the conventional wisdom, go ahead and do a case study.' I figured if it was good enough for Harvard, it is good enough for me" (2006, p. 223). The reflection of real-life in case study research is important in developing a nuanced view of

reality and for researchers to develop the skills needed to do good research (2006, p. 223).

In dispute of the thought that case studies cannot be generalized, Flyvbjerg puts forth the test of the black swan as Karl Popper laid out in 1959. Using falsification, Flyvbjerg states, case studies are ideal for generalization. Under falsification, if just one observation does not fit, a proposition must be rejected or revised.

Popper himself used the now famous example “all swans are white.” And proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigation and theory building. The case study is well suited for identifying “black swans” because of its in-depth approach: What appears to be “white” often turns out on closer examination to be “black” (2006, p. 228).

According to Flyvbjerg the third misunderstanding stems from the second that case studies cannot be generalized. Because that was debunked, the third misunderstanding can also be revised. So, after a closer examination of the qualitative method, Flyvbjerg revised the first three misunderstandings:

- 1) Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals. (2006, p. 224)
- 2) One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas "the force of example" is underestimated. (2006, p. 228)
- 3) The case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone. (2006, p. 229)

The fourth misunderstanding set forth by Flyvbjerg that there is a bias toward verification, is revised as follows:

- 4) The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification. (2006, p. 237)

In defense of his revision, Flyvbjerg cites numerous researchers who have conducted intensive, in-depth case studies and reported "that their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts, and hypotheses were wrong and that the case material has compelled them to revise their hypotheses on essential points" (2006, p. 235). He also suggests that the bias toward verification applies to all methods, not just case studies and other qualitative methods.

Flyvbjerg chalks up the fifth misunderstanding, that it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies, to the nature of the method. The studies often contain a good deal of narrative and approach the complexity and contradictions of real life. "This tends to be seen by critics of the case study as a drawback. To the case study researcher, however, a particularly 'thick' and hard-to-summarize narrative is not a problem. Rather, it is often a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic" (2006, p. 237). And so he revises the final misunderstanding:

It is correct that summarizing case studies is often difficult, especially as concerns case process. It is less correct as regards case outcomes. The problems in summarizing case studies, however, are due more often to the properties of the reality studied than to the case study as a research method. Often it is not desirable to summarize and generalize case studies. Good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety. (2006, p. 241)

Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich from Pennsylvania State University suggest that qualitative research, such as case studies, is an “approach rather than a set of techniques, and its appropriateness derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored” (1980, p. 491). Khairul Baharein Mohd Noor outlines two basic methodological research traditions in social science, positivism and post-positivism. Citing *Management research: An introduction* by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, Noor states that while positivism emphasizes natural science, post-positivism:

Is about a reality which is socially constructed rather than objectively determined. Hence the task of social scientist should not be to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience.  
(2008, p. 1602)

So while positivism is best paired with a quantitative approach, post-positivism “that deals with understanding the subjectivity of social phenomena, requires a qualitative approach” (2008, p. 1602.)

In order to add to the literature base on this topic, case studies were chosen as the method to explore the military-civilian gap, and whether or not it is addressed by Army public affairs officers. Information on installation public affairs offices was found online via installation public affairs Web sites. Interview requests were emailed to seven PAOs at four Army installations that were chosen to regionally – eastern, midwestern and western. All public affairs offices, however, operate under Department of the Army guidance and the public affairs field manual, so each office should be run in a similar manner. The PAOs were both military officers working as unit PAOs and Department of the Army civilians working as installation PAOs. Three – one from each region – agreed to phone interviews. Two surveys were emailed to unit PAOs. One was sent to a PAO

who was too busy to set up an interview time and the other to a PAO who was deployed to Iraq at the time. Neither of the emailed questionnaires was returned, however, the unit PAOs' installations were represented in the study by the installation PAOs.

Over the course of two months, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three Army public affairs officers and five leaders from nearby communities. A single case included an installation public affairs officer and leader(s) from nearby communities. Each group was asked questions about the relationship between the installation and the community and what is being done to bridge the military-civilian gap. Specifically, public affairs officers were asked about their mission, how they feel their jobs contribute to the military, what their relationships are like with nearby communities, how they communicate with nearby communities, what are their biggest challenges and how their jobs have changed since Sept. 11, 2001. The three PAOs – one military officer and two Department of the Army civilians, both with prior military service, were asked questions to gauge their opinions of the military-civilian gap and what methods they use to communicate with their surrounding communities. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

City officials such as mayors, city administrators and managers are often invited to installation ceremonies and informed about events happening on installations by community relations employees. For this reason, mayors, and town administrators and managers were chosen to participate in this study. Information on city officials was found via community Web sites. Emails were sent to a list of 31 city officials. Five respondents agreed to phone interviews. At least one other community leader agreed to a phone interview, but didn't respond to further emails or phone calls. The five city officials

interviewed included mayors and city managers/administrators. The interviews were conducted over the phone during a two-month period and included questions about whether they knew the PAO at the nearby installation, who they communicated with on the installation, how they would describe their community's relationship with the installation, whether they were informed about what was happening on the installation, what they felt community members' opinions of service members were, what has changed between their community and the installation since Sept. 11, 2001, and what PAOs on the installation could do better to communicate with them.

In the email inviting participants, PAOs and community leaders were informed that the interviews would be recorded. Participants gave their consent by responding to the email and granting an interview to the researcher. To encourage a more candid dialog, participant names and other identifying information such as the name of their town or installation was not used. To maintain this confidentiality, each installation will be referred to as Fort A, Fort B or Fort C. The towns surrounding the installations will be referred to as Town 1A and Town 2A; Town 1B and Town 2B; and Town 1C respectively. The installations were chosen regionally – one in the western U.S., one centrally located, and one in the eastern U.S.

## *Results*

### *RQ1 results*

**RQ1: What is the level of concern among three PAOs regarding the military-civilian gap and what strategies and tactics are they using to address their concerns?**

All three public affairs officers listed community relations as part of their mission. They thought sharing the Army and soldiers' stories was an important contribution to the success of the Army. One of the PAOs described the importance of his mission:

It helps to explain to the American public what the Army actually is, what we're actually capable of, and what our abilities are. And I honestly think that's a very important job because we are the sons and daughters of the American population. And I know that sounds like a sound byte, but there's no other way to put it. Besides that, it is the American public who pays our bills, so they have a right to know what their Army is doing. And that is one of the neatest things about this job. I've got to try and educate the population who may have the wrong idea of what we do or how we do it. And I can't do that directly so I have to do that through the media and sometimes I have to educate them first so they can translate it into easy to understand terms. So how important is it? I'd say it's very important.

The other two PAOs also mentioned keeping the communities and the public informed of what the Army is doing. "The Army is very good at its job," said the Fort B PAO. "We've been doing it for a long time and to the extent we tell the American people what we're doing and how well we do it, they will maintain their appreciation for what we do, continue to support us publicly, and support our soldiers and that is extraordinarily important."

To help keep their nearby communities informed, the PAOs and their staff work with the media and the installation's command to get their messages out. Fort B's PAO credited working with the media as being his most successful tool for improving relationships with the communities. While Forts A and C are a driving economic force in each of their areas, Fort B is in the unique situation of being surrounded by a large metropolitan area. Whereas other installations can carry out high-value community engagements in their surrounding towns, Fort B would have to conduct those 10 to 15 times for the same payoff. By using the many media outlets in the area, "we can reach the largest number of people with our message and sway opinions, develop attitudes and explain ourselves much more easily using the media that's available in the area and I think that to the extent that we do that, we do ourselves a service." Besides external media, the PAOs use their own installation newspapers and community programs to connect with their surrounding communities.

Two of the PAOs specifically mentioned community programs that connected units with towns around the installation. Members of the units attend city council or chamber of commerce and other town meetings to lend their help to town issues. Although the third PAO didn't mention a specific community outreach program that partnered a unit with a town, he did note that, "the best salesmen that we have are the actual individual soldiers," who are often sent into the community for speaking engagements. A majority of the installation's soldiers also live in the communities around post and in that way represent the military in the communities.

When asked about community members' perceptions of soldiers, all of the PAOs were quick to respond that the community members respected and supported the soldiers.



Although, the Fort C PAO went on to add that a large underlying fact in the communities' support of soldiers was economics, and that the community members know Fort C is the "bread and butter" of the area. Fort B's PAO said that although individual soldiers were respected, there was a larger anti-war movement in his area:

I'm not sure I would say that generally speaking the institution of the Army and the work that soldiers do is much admired. But I believe that I can probably say without fear of overstating it that individual soldiers are admired a great deal by members of the community, even those who are part of the antiwar movement and that's evident even from some of the signs that you see being carried in antiwar demonstrations that we've seen take place in the capital. They're all along the themes of support our troops, God bless our troops, and then they go the extra mile of saying support them by bringing them home. And even in their engagements with the media they talk about how they love our soldiers, the way they want to support them is by bringing them home. You don't see any of the resentment of soldiers that you may have seen in the old days that some of the older generation of folks like me might remember.

Both the Fort C and B PAOs, specifically noted the fact that people support the troops, even though they don't support the war.

Each of the PAOs noted the lack of staff as a hindrance to their outreach efforts. To tell the stories of approximately 51,000 soldiers, Fort C PAO has a staff of six, when the office should be staffed at 12. "The hiring process leaves a little bit to be desired," he said. Fort B's PAO said he lacks the manpower for his installation to utilize technology to a greater extent.

I would like to have more of a multi-media capability, and to make better use of the Web. I'm not sure what the payoff is of that, but I know it's someplace that we haven't really invested a lot of time and money yet. And I think there's a lot that we can do to reach people if we provide them with a reason to visit a Fort [B] Web site that has multi-media

content, that offers something to the casual browser. I don't have the resources to go after something like that. Gosh, I don't think anyone in Army public affairs really has the resources to do what they'd like to do with Web sites. I'd like to do that. I think it's an untapped market. To the extent that young people are wired these days, I think it's a shame that we're not doing more in that area.

### *RQ2 results*

#### **RQ2: How has the role of PAOs in addressing the military-civilian gap changed since Sept. 11, 2001?**

Each of the three PAOs said that their jobs have changed since Sept. 11, 2001, with the most notable change being security on the installations. Before September 11, the media would just come onto Fort C. "It was a gentlemen's agreement that they wouldn't just come on post and do a story and then not let us know that they're in our area. It was common courtesy and that worked very well. Now that the post has gone to access control points we meet them off post and bring them on. So logistically it has added another element to our job," noted the Fort C PAO. Besides the logistics shift, he also noted that he thought more people were focusing in on the Army. "They want to know what it is that we are doing. They're showing an interest in our soldiers."

Fort A's PAO also felt that military leadership has taken more of an interest in public affairs since September 11. Where command meetings may have been closed off to public affairs in the past, this PAO is finding more doors opened.

There was a certain mindset that public affairs is the media. So to certain planners and executers ... public affairs officers were to be kept at arms length. There was an alert posted on the door if there was a PAO headed your way. Now they understand that to include us in behind-the-door discussions and the planning cycles and background information is a benefit and not a detractor – that we're not

going to go blab what we hear behind closed doors to the first microphone that gets shoved in our face. But that really honestly was the mindset. You know there had been such a distrust and fear of the media, and we're talking less than a decade ago, that this was still pretty prominent. So the evolution has been fairly fast if we're talking about military cycles and pretty complete. So my job has changed quite a bit and it's gaining a level of trust, it's gaining a level of respect, it's understanding the big picture and why it benefits them as well as me. So it's been an interesting evolution.

The Fort B PAO also noted the change in security as the biggest change in public affairs since September 11.

We've built a wall around ourselves for securities sake, which is obviously something that we have to do. But that means the kind of day-to-day interaction between the people inside the gate and the people on the outside of the gate has to get managed. You know either through an event or some deliberate effort to go out and do community outreach or in some other way. Sure, probably 70 percent of our soldiers and families live outside the installation in community housing and all of our civilian workers of course live out in the communities and we interact with people all the time. But you know organizationally for Fort [B] to interact and touch the lives of people and for them to see large groups of people wearing the uniform of the United States Army... You know the kind of things that used to happen, there used to be a road going through the installation and you drove through it and you saw activity on your left and right. You knew a little bit about the Army as a result of that. That opportunity is no longer there, and I think that it has meant they we have to work a lot harder on the community relations' side to link soldiers with people. I think that may be one of the reasons the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs has put such an emphasis on outreach and engagement. It seems to me that the Army has kind of turned from media relations being the focus of public affairs at the headquarters level to more community relation outreach and engagement activities. That's just kind of a shifting I think I've sensed over the last couple of years. And I think that that may have something to do with it. Of course the fact that we're a nation at war since September 11<sup>th</sup> has changed the role of what we do in public affairs

because not only are we talking about what the Army does to prepare to defend the nation, the training of our soldiers and shining a light on government activity fulfilling the obligation of democracy and all that, but we're also you know, I'm trying to make certain that America stays connected to the men and women you know who make the big sacrifice in combat. And we're having to make sure that that sacrifice continues to be honored and I guess that goes to representing the interest of the Army in a way that's very different from peacetime. Certainly the job hasn't gotten any easier. I would say that.

One question posed to community leaders was if they thought civilians' attitudes toward the military had changed since September 11<sup>th</sup>. One community leader, who also held a high-ranking leadership position at the nearby installation before September 11<sup>th</sup>, said he didn't think attitudes had changed at all, but the fact that there are now gates around the installation makes civilians feel a little less welcome. While he thought people generally understood the need for the added security, he thought there were probably fewer people who visited the post as a result. "Personally, I think at some point, and I don't know what that point is, we ought to take all the gates down and we ought to take the guards away and reopen it. But I don't think that's going to happen," he suggested, saying he didn't feel military installations were a terrorist target.

Town 1C's mayor also noted security as a change he's seen since September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, he said, the installation appreciates the impact the gates have had on community members and have tried to make it as easy as possible for those who may have business on post or need to drive through. Another change he noted is an increase in communication, especially with those soldiers and their family members living off-post. And, he added, "they tell us frequently that the best thing we can do as a local community

is support of a military base is to provide an environment that that soldier who's deployed doesn't have to worry about their family.”

Town 1B's mayor said that if anything, civilian attitudes toward the military have only become more supportive since September 11<sup>th</sup>. Probably one-third of the town's residents are either active-duty military or retired military, he noted.

Town 2A's mayor said one change in his position since September 11<sup>th</sup> is that all of the area mayors are invited to attend briefings and live teleconferences with deployed unit commanders. “I know real time what's happening over there. I get, probably three or four times a week, an update from Baghdad as to what is going on over there...It's a lot of good information...they feel that we're a part of it and we're here to help.”

### *RQ3 results*

#### **RQ3: How successful do civilian leaders feel PAOs are at bridging the military-civilian gap and what are their areas of concern and suggested solutions?**

While the mayor of Town 2A said Fort A did an “excellent job” of communicating with his community, Town 1A thought the post could do a better job. The Town 1A city manager did say, however, that his town's relationship to the post was better than in the past and that other towns, closer to the main gates of the installation, had better relationships with the installation than Town 1A. The city manager did note that developing the relationship would be beneficial to the city. “It certainly benefits us if nothing else you know folks are frequenting our restaurants and motels and everything else so they are bringing some money into the community.” The mayor of Town 2A didn't feel there was anything the installation could do better to communicate with

members of the community. Town 1A's city manager didn't believe Fort A had a "conscious program" to tell community members what was happening on post for the next six months. He suggested the post provide information to the local newspaper detailing what's happening on the installation. Both towns also receive the weekly Fort A newspaper, of which the city manager said, "But I mean if that's their way of saying what's going on it's probably okay. I mean, it's a pretty good newspaper. It's a pretty thick document." Town 1A's city manager also suggested that at some point the installation remove its access control points, although he admitted he didn't think that would happen. Besides the installation newspaper, both city officials mentioned interactions with the post's command and other employees on post as well as receiving invitations to events and ceremonies on post as ways the installation communicates with them.

Two community leaders near Fort B were interviewed – one mayor and one city administrator. According to the mayor, Town 1B's relationship with Fort B is "very good." Town 2B's city administrator labeled his town's relationship with the installation as "mediocre."

I think that they could do a better job. They're incredibly bureaucratic. Often times they can't make a decision because the person that really makes the call is in Denver or some other part of the country and it just, you know [the Department of Defense] has to buy off on it or the [Judge Advocate General's] office somewhere else. You know on a people-to-people level, they're great. But when you're really trying to do something major... I mean theirs is a bureaucracy that is daunting to me, and I've seen bureaucracies.

One suggestion Town 2B suggested to better communication with Fort B was to have at least a quarterly meeting with the garrison commander to discuss issues of mutual

interest. Town 2B's city administrator broached the idea to the post's garrison commander, but nothing came of the idea, he said.

They're so wrapped up in their own business. Really the only time they go out of their way to communicate with us is when they want something and that's a fact. They need something or they want something, they'll show up and they're handshakes, smiles and how you been? But if we want something, it's not as easy.

One avenue available to both towns is a community program where a unit is assigned to each town to help with any issues they may have. Town 2B worked through their unit to lease a piece of unused land and neglected ball fields from the installation.

The town finally just gave up, deciding it wasn't worth it.

They had a certain piece of property that is contiguous to our city limits ... they used to lease that to the school district and there was a high school on it and it had some ball fields and stuff. We were kind of challenged on recreational space, and I said we'd like to be able to have access to that. We'll clean it up; we'd just like to use the ball fields. That's all we want to do. And they turned it into a \$2 million project and told us, "Well we can't let go of the property; we have a need for it." Well they've got 35,000 acres, most of it undeveloped open ground and we were talking about using a couple of acres. ... The garrison commander, commanding general was all for it. The public works director, who had been a colonel, who was retired, came up with all the reasons why that just wouldn't work. [An officer involved with the project] invited me over to sit in on a meeting so I could answer any questions and they asked me to leave because it was inside-the-house conversation. So, that's anecdotal. And we were talking about, "Hey you know we just want to have basically a license or a lease to use it. You can cancel it in 60 or 30 days. We'll take care of it. The only thing we ask is to have access to it. Your people can use it too." And they couldn't get it done.

Town 1B's mayor thought the flow of information from the installation to his community was "very good." Newsletters and updates on training exercise that may

produce a lot of noise were two of the methods of communication with the town. “I don’t know that there’s anything they need to do more. They’re viewed as good neighbors. They let us know what’s going on.”

The mayor of Town 1C though Fort C does “a pretty good job” of keeping the community members informed about what is happening at the installation. For the last six years, the mayor noted, warfighting has been the number one mission on the installation. “I would say there probably was a level of more engagement between the Army leadership at the local base and the community when they did not have warfighting taking up such a dramatic amount of their time.” The mayor noted he didn’t see that as a “solvable problem,” but just an “observation.”



## *Conclusion*

While all of the public affairs officers and city officials had generally positive remarks about the relationships between the installations and the nearby communities, there were some areas that could stand for improvements. While the community members didn't necessarily feel their communities were missing out on receiving information, the public affairs officers felt they could be doing more to tell the Army's story if they had more resources. The in-depth interviews did provide more insight into any latent hostilities between the military and civilians, which may not have been detected in a written survey, the most notable being the Town 2B city administrator, who found fault with the red tape involved with working on projects with the military. Of note is the fact that the administrator didn't have any previous experience with the military before accepting that position. While other city officials, many of whom had prior military experience, seemed more willing to accept the bureaucracy as just the Army way and even to assume that civilians wouldn't understand certain aspects of the Army. One city official, a retired Army colonel, made several comments such as, "We all three [Vietnam veterans] can look at a message that you would look at and it wouldn't tell you much, and really know what's going on. And I'm not trying to put you down, but you know when you look at certain things and people say this is that; we understand."

Limitations to this study included the number and type of interview subjects. Because of time constraints more community leaders weren't interviewed. And, almost all of the community leaders had prior experience serving in the military.

Since interviews were conducted, the Army has introduced the Army Community Covenant, which “is designed to develop and foster effective state and community partnerships with the Army in improving the quality of life for Soldiers and their Families, both at their current duty stations and as they transfer from state to state.” Local, state and military leaders are participating in covenant signings between April and December 2008 to recognize the “strength of Army Soldiers and their Families and the support of their local community” (DA, 2008). The Army Community Covenant states,

Together, We are committed to building strong communities.

We, the Community, recognize...

... The commitment Soldiers and their Families are making every day.

... The strength of Soldiers comes from the strength of their Families.

... The strength of Families is supported by the strength of the Community.

... The strength of the Community comes from the support of Employers, Educators, Civic and Business leaders, and its Citizens.

We, the Community, are committed to...

... Building partnerships that support the strength, resilience, and readiness of Soldiers and their Families.

... Assisting in the implementation of the Army Family Covenant. (DA, 2008)

Further research on how communities perceive gestures, such as the covenant signings, would be interesting, along with more research on the relationship between military installations and nearby communities in general. Such topics could include quantitative studies on how dependent communities are on military dollars and also how public affairs officers help to set the agendas in their installations’ neighboring towns. A quantitative study could look at how successful the Army has been at setting its agenda during Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom and how successful its information subsidies

have been in playing a role in that agenda setting. Further research on relationships and stereotypes between certain demographics could include focusing in on the relationships between younger soldiers and college students, or Department of the Army civilians and soldiers. One city leader said he thought town's closer to installations had better relationships with the installation. A study could look at how installations' relationships with communities improve or deteriorate as the distance between them increases. Most of the community leaders in this study had prior military experience; conducting a study involving more interviewees without military experience would be beneficial. While this study looked at how public affairs officers help bridge the military-civilian gap, any further research on the gap would be beneficial to help public affairs officers target their messages, and it could also be beneficial to Army recruiters.

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