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Combat news

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cover Iraq conflict

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BY ROB SEITZ

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Operation Iraqi Freedom will be remembered as a war brought into the household like never before. Up-to-the-minute coverage, embedded reporters, and visual images of shock and awe proportions were witnessed by countless Americans in their living rooms and workplaces as Iraq was liberated.

But how was the coverage being generated by those doing the liberating — the U.S. military forces? Armed with the latest video technologies, groups of military journalists rode, marched, flew, and sailed alongside their military brethren, documenting the action.

Cooperation And Coordination

“Covering Operation Iraqi Freedom was the most unbelievable experience of my life,” said Mike Huth, chief of broadcast operations for the U.S. Army Reserves, who spent more than a month in Kuwait and Iraq. “I guess as it is in any war there are a lot of things I would like to forget, things I wish I hadn’t seen, but the speed with which we blew through the country was amazing.

“It seemed like we never slept, but we were so jacked up with



Tech. Sgt. Marcos Coriano, videographer from the 1st Combat Camera Squadron Charleston AFB, SC, documents members of the 821st Tanker Airlift Control Element as they conduct operational readiness checks on their equipment.

excitement, it was wild,” added the videographer, who among other stops in his career, spent 10 years in Germany as a civilian video editor.

As with all the military branches, there was crossover of equipment and resources. Huth was deployed to document not only the Reserves in action, but he saw a considerable amount of front-line activity while dispatched with a U.S. Marine tactical unit. As with many of the deployed military journalists, Huth used Sony DSR-PD150 and Canon XL1 camcorders, as well as **Avid Xpress DV** NLE software on his Dell laptop.

While recording the Reservists in action, much of Huth’s responsibility included sending back B-roll footage to the Public Affairs Department in the United States, so the video could

be shared with various television media markets. “I shot 53 hours of footage, 164 people, and four generals,” Huth told **GOVERNMENT VIDEO**. “We weren’t like the [commercial] news stations in that we didn’t have a reporter standing in front of the camera. I was asking the troops questions while filming them, then sent the stuff back to Scott.”

That would be Scott Ferguson, chief of broadcast operations for the Reserve’s Public Affairs Department at Fort McPherson, GA. Depending on the personnel interviewed and their respective camp, Ferguson would determine which television stations would be appropriate to receive the B-roll.

For example, edited footage of the 459th Engineering Company out of

West Virginia involved soldiers from Charleston, WV, as well as Ohio and Pittsburgh, PA. “So we contacted news directors in the tri-state area,” said Ferguson. “I’d tell the news directors that we have a soldier from your market in action in Iraq, would you be interested. And their response was nearly always, ‘Yeah, how fast can you get it to me? Can you do a satellite feed?’”

Land, Air, And Sea

At another branch of the service, the U.S. Navy’s Media Center in Washington, DC, provided news and information for sailors and Marines through a half-hour weekly program called *Navy-Marine Corps News*, as well as brief news updates that were inserted into live programming six



PHOTO BY: STAFF SGT. QUINTON T. BURRIS, 1ST COMBAT CAMERA



Huth used Sony DSR-PD150 camcorders, as well as equipment from Canon and Avid.

times a day on 170 ships around the world through American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS).

"After September 11th, we had sent over a team to cover Fleet activities in the Arabian Gulf region," said James Kudla, who was Commanding Officer of the Naval Media Center at the time of this interview, but has since retired. "So we already had a media presence in that area, if you will. Prior to [Operation Iraqi Freedom], we would cover routine things sailors did and air it to his or her fellow shipmates. Now we obviously show them in a much different capacity, but either way, when they see that their contributions are noted, it builds a real esprit de corps."

Out in the field, the journalists filming for the Navy and Marines used the same type of equipment as the Army. The Navy reporters were responsible mostly for covering military actions from ship to shore, and once on land the Marines took over.

"We were out there to tell our story to our sailors," Kudla said. "We were well positioned to provide timely news and information of what the Fleet was doing. We showed the sailors the value of their contributions."

The Air Force has a unique compo-

nent for its journalists, as some are aerial qualified, meaning they have gone through a rigorous training to be able to perform their journalistic magic at Mach 1 aboard a jet fighter. Major Jim Fabio headed the Combat Camera Documenting Group for the Air Force. Stationed in Kuwait, he spent between 12 and 18 hours a day working at a laptop computer and editing footage for *Air Force Television News* and non-military news programs.

Fabio deployed five-person teams to record the action, including an officer who acted as producer, two still photographers (who used Nikon D1X digital cameras), and two videographers with Canon XL1 and Sony PD150 camcorders. Within each team, one videographer had received aerial training, while the other had not.

"We found that for the ground-pounders — the ones not aerial qualified — the Sony PD 150 worked best," Fabio said. "And for the guys in the air, the Canon XL1 gave us what we were looking for." The videographers would transfer footage from a Sony GV-D900 video walkman via IEEE-1394 (i.Link) to their Dell Latitude C840 laptops for editing.

Environment And Objectivity

The harsh desert climate of the Middle East did present some problems for the equipment, Fabio said. "Some of our equipment did suffer from the environment, because it's pretty rough out there," he added.

The military journalists were loaded up with gear, carrying at least two cameras, laptop, tripod, and cell phone, plus the regular soldier gear of weapons, food, and chemical suits.

In caring for his equipment, Huth said plastic bags were useful. "We tried to keep our equipment in plastic bags as much as possible when we were not using them," Huth said. "But we have a lot of gear we are carrying, plus all the vehicles are kicking up a ton of dust. And then there's the sandstorms — wicked."

As with the other branches of the military, the Air Force worked to provide objective pictures and stories to send back home. One of Fabio's journalists in the Iraqi desert was Bob Jensen, chief of news operations for the Combined Forces Air Component Commander of the Office of Public Affairs. "Objectivity and telling the truth are the foundations of what we do," Jensen said. "We aren't there to do propaganda. We are there to tell the news, good and bad."

And what type of story angles were Jensen and his team looking for? "We were looking for B-roll of our aircraft and people doing critical operational missions and mission support to use in *Air Force Television News'* one-minute reports, and for offering up to the commercial media as well," he said.

"The big point for the Air Force was to go beyond showing just the hardware and concentrating on our people. It's people who fly the planes, fuel them, load them with bombs, fix them, and provide all the support needed to complete the missions. We also tried to find ways to provide the media with imagery that supported telling the various major mission stories." ■