

You know what it's like. On the surface three smiling faces: Richard Lindley, Dorothy Josem and me. Under the surface the legs paddling away like mad, and many days and weeks of practice gone into the performance. Synchronised event planning. Two hundred and fifty people may have appreciated what one Council member called 'one of the best MS events ever' but it didn't half take a lot of hard work. I'm sure that if we counted our combined emails they would total many hundreds. All that paddling under water.

As a former soldier as well as a war reporter himself, Richard was frankly obsessive about this event. It was he who thought of the Imperial War Museum as a venue. And the IWM responded magnificently – the staff there was thrilled with the crowds who came swarming through the wire at them on a dark January night. Thank heavens I'd overcome opposition and insisted on asking for some overflow facilities in an upstairs room. Apologies to those who found themselves marched up there at gunpoint to watch the show on a monitor, and a medal to Council member Mike Hollingworth who single-handedly fought off successive attempts to break out.

Lots of negotiation had produced some top brass, deftly dealt with by Chairman John Simpson, BBC World Affairs Editor, and, famously, the liberator of Kabul.

The war correspondents explained the problems. Kate Clark told us how formidable the military PR machine was. Michael Nicholson, bearing the scars of countless battles



(Left to right, back row) Sir David Nicholas, former editor ITN; Professor Phil Taylor of Leeds University; General Sir Michael Rose, former Commander, UN Protection Force, Bosnia; Anthony Loyd, foreign correspondent, *The Times*; Michael Nicholson, reporter ITV News/ITN. (Front row) Jamie Shea, Director of Information, NATO; John Simpson, World Affairs Editor, BBC; Brian Hanrahan, correspondent, BBC Radio

REPORTING WAR – OR JUST COVERING IT?

By John Mair

with the censors, said that quite frankly the military would do their damndest to prevent reporters getting at the truth. His old Falklands rival Brian Hanrahan argued that the important thing was to have enough people in the field to wander off and get their own first-hand version of what was really happening.

NATO PRO Jamie Shea – who'd flown over specially from Brussels – said the best thing the military could do was tell the truth, but he admitted that could mean putting across the good news about us and the bad news about the enemy. General Sir Michael Rose said the military/media relationship could be a kiss/kiss affair – access in return for accuracy. He expected the media to be far more rigorous than it was, and not just accept what Jamie Shea and other PROs told them.

And then of course the warriors back at media HQ, former ITN Editor Sir David Nicholas and the BBC Ten o'clock News editor Mark Popescu, told us of their fights with the MoD, and the difficult judgements they had to make about how much of

the horror of war they could show their audience.

Charmingly, former Defence Secretary Lord (Tom) King agreed that the military did often see the media as their enemies, but insisted that soldiers were only secretive for humane reasons – to protect their own people.

Summing up, Professor

Phil Taylor, the expert on military/media relations, said that this was an 'odd couple' relationship which, with the growing importance of the media, just had to be more about co-operation than conflict.

As the drumbeat to war in Iraq was heard, this was a well-timed, as well as a well-attended, event. It justified all that under-water paddling.



(Above) Former ITN journalist Frank Miles puts a question from the packed audience at the Imperial war Museum. (Below, l to r) General Sir Michael Rose; Lord (Tom) King, former Defence Secretary; John Simpson

