

## II WAR BEHIND THE LINES: JOURNALISTS VS. GENERALS

This ancient clash of interests has gone on almost forever. We can trace it back at least to classical times when wrathful rulers sometimes slew the messengers who brought bad news from the battlefield. At the Ottawa seminar, Major-General Winant Sidle (retired) recalled that in the American revolutionary war and then the war against Mexico, communications were too slow to pose much of a security problem, but when the telegraph arrived, trouble began.

The solution was censorship. In the Civil War, both sides used censorship, and it was effective sometimes and not effective others. In fact in all our wars, up through the Korean War, censorship was the answer. And I should add it was quite successful really in World War II and the Korean War because the press didn't complain too much and they got to see everything that was going on -- almost everything anyway. Now, when Vietnam came along it was a new situation.

The current generation of American generals had its baptism of fire in Vietnam. The outlook of the men who shaped the information policies for the Gulf War is deeply marked by what they consider was unfair news coverage by American reporters in Vietnam. General Sidle is a generation older than Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, but they all share the Vietnam background. General Sidle's experience in defence information goes back to 1949. It is relevant to the present topic because of the jobs he held during that protracted and traumatizing war, which the United States eventually lost. An important element in the defeat was a loss of confidence and of belief in the war by the American people. The military and others, apparently including President Bush, blame journalists for creating the climate in which that loss of faith, and hence the loss of the war, happened. The president repeatedly said that his troops would not have to fight Saddam Hussein "with one hand tied behind their backs."

General Sidle was in the centre of that clash between the army and the press corps, which has heavily influenced the way in which subsequent American military operations have been run from the public information point of view. A Second World War veteran, he was Defence Department spokesman in 1966-67, then chief of information in Vietnam in 1967-69, the period when the tide of public opinion was