

V TO BE A WITNESS, OR TO TAKE IT FROM TV?

Editors and news managers did not know in January what everybody learned at the end of February: that it was going to be a one-month war almost entirely waged from the air. The huge build-up of reporters in the desert was, like the huge build-up of foot-soldiers, based on the premise that they were facing a gruelling ground war of unpredictable length. This simple fact was not discussed at the CIIPS seminar. It helps to explain the apparently ludicrous picture of several thousand reporters in Saudi Arabia, mainly taking their information from briefings and other reports carried live on CNN, which editors and other home-bound colleagues could see for themselves in their offices. Sometimes, when briefing rooms were full, reporters watched in their hotel rooms, an environment not much different from home. As it turned out, the war could have been fairly well covered from Washington or any electronically equipped home base, but nobody knew that in January.

This also helps to answer General Sidle's complaint that a lot of small-town American newspapers cluttered up the scene with their own reporters instead of leaving it to the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* -- "the biggies." These reporters were sent to do hometown stories on home-town GIs, a legitimate assignment for which they did not have to be experts on the Middle East. Canadian and other foreign reporters were there partly for similar reasons -- to cover our own troops in whatever action they might see, but also to provide a Canadian view, which, as we learned in Vietnam, was often very different from the viewpoint of American reporters.

Jeffrey Dworkin, a CBC radio news producer, was one who tried to change what he called "the gloomy gestalt of this meeting." He protested the negative view generally taken of the performance of the media, claiming for his own reporters a record of achievement in explaining to Canadian listeners what was going on and why. Mr. Viorst's "splendid" articles in *The New Yorker* had also been used as the basis for radio documentaries on the programmes *Sunday Morning* and *As It Happens*, he said.