

organized what was apparently intended to be a touching and humanizing scene in which obviously terrified adult hostages from Western countries watched as he patted the heads and shook the hands of their small children. For Western viewers, this little soap opera came through as a ghastly attempt to use children as fodder for the propaganda canons, a repulsive game played with human emotions. Saddam's showmanship backfired again when he paraded American and British pilots before the TV cameras. The pilots, with their droning recitations, their battered faces and cast-down eyes, told an unspoken but all too clear story of how they had been beaten and forced to give false testimony.

Of course all TV networks carried extensive coverage of the crisis and the war, including the CBC, CTV and Global TV. The point about CNN was that it carried very little else: its menu was news, live wherever possible, plus sports results and plenty of commercials for its vastly swollen audience of consumers. With a great world crisis unfolding, CNN was able to broadcast everything that happened publicly, usually when it happened, with repetitions of major developments, which was also useful since nobody can spend all their time in front of a TV set. As Geneviève Rossier of Radio-Canada said on the subject of press pools: "Journalists were hoping for a quick end of the war, because soon you would have to belong to a pool to go to the bathroom." CNN's format allowed even for that. Other networks used a lot of time on "talking heads" -- experts with some greater knowledge than the average viewer, who sometimes were successful in adding a dimension of useful background and interpretation. But in the fast-moving scenario of a one-month war, nothing could compete with the real thing.

Like other television productions, CNN's war produced a star -- Peter Arnett, a small, tough New Zealander and a veteran of the Vietnam press corps, whose pugnacious face and body language tells its own story. Arnett fought like a tiger, Mr. Turner said in a conversation before his speech, to stay in Baghdad when all remaining correspondents were told to leave the country on the outbreak of war. Some left on instruction of their employers. Some, including the BBC crew, objected and sought permission to stay. For whatever reasons, because of Arnett's personal tenacity or because Saddam Hussein recognized the direct-diplomacy potential and propaganda value of CNN, only Arnett's request was granted. For much of the war, CNN was the only Western news organization inside Iraq, and when Saddam wanted to say something to the world, he called in Arnett.