

January 12, 1984

"THE OVER-OMNISCIENT AMERICAN PRESS"

Remarks at the INTV Convention, Los Angeles

To Be Revised

IF OUR GOOD LORD, JESUS CHRIST, HAD A SECOND COMING TO EARTH TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, HE WOULD BE MANUFACTURED INTO A STUMBLE BUM OR INEPT "NONLEADER" BY AN INCREDIBLY ADVERSARIAL, ALL-KNOWING PRESS.

IF GEORGE WASHINGTON AND HIS CONTINENTAL ARMY WERE PREPARING TO CROSS THE DELAWARE UNDER CURRENT REPORTING PHILOSOPHY, THE PRESS WOULD BE EXTOLLING THE VIRTUES OF GEORGE III AND DECRYING THE INHUMANE SUFFERING OF UNDERCLOTHED OR PARTIALLY BAREFOOT SOLDIERS IN THE BITTER COLD OF VALLEY FORGE. I CAN IMAGINE THE LINE OF QUESTIONING: "DID YOU KNOW YOUR LEADER IS A MEMBER OF THE WEALTHY LANDED GENTRY? THAT HE IS FULLY CLOTHED ON A HORSE, RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE AND THAT HE WILL REAP ALL THE GLORY WHILE YOU HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF BEING KILLED, MAIMED, OR WOUNDED? DID YOU KNOW GEN. WASHINGTON DOESN'T ACTUALLY KNOW THE NUMBER OF ENEMY AND HAS TO DISTORT ESTIMATES OF THEIR STRENGTH? DO YOU KNOW THAT CORNWALLIS ON A NETWORK INTERVIEW CHARGED WASHINGTON WITH BEING A WAR MONGER AND A SELF-SERVING GLORY SEEKER AT YOUR EXPENSE? DO YOU REALIZE PAUL REVERE DIDN'T EVEN NOTIFY THE PRESS WHETHER THE BRITISH WERE COMING BY LAND OR BY SEA? AREN'T YOU IN GRAVE DANGER HERE AT VALLEY FORCE? WOULDN'T YOU RATHER BE BACK IN YOUR WARM HOME MAKING LOVE TO YOUR WIFE OR SWEETHEART?"

THE INSOLENT, DISTORTIONS, AND ARROGANCE OF THE PRESS, BOTH ELECTRONIC AND PRINT, HAVE REACHED SUCH DISTASTEFUL PROPORTIONS THAT IT HAS FINALLY ALIENATED A LONG-SUFFERING AN BUT/INCREASINGLY PERCEPTIVE, INTELLIGENT AMERICAN CITIZENRY-- A RECENT TIME MAGAZINE ARTICLE REPORTED THAT PUBLIC RESPECT FOR THE PRESS IS AT A NEW LOW;

A SLIGHTLY SAVING GRACE, ALBEIT VERY SLIGHT, IS THAT BOTH REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN VICTIMIZED BY HOSTILE SCRUTINY, INSOLENT QUESTIONING AND RELENTLESS ATTEMPTS TO DISCREDIT. (NOTE THE NEGATIVE TREATMENT ACCORDED RECENT PRESIDENTS JOHNSON, NIXON, FORD, CARTER AND REAGAN WHICH IMPAIRED THEIR ABILITY TO EFFECT A NATIONAL POLICY.)

SURVEYS, LETTERS AND PHONE CALLS FROM THE PUBLIC FOLLOWING THE GRENADA RESCUE MISSION OR INVASION (DEPENDING ON YOUR VIEWPOINT) STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT EXCLUSION OF MEDIA DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS. MY WIFE AND I PERSONALLY PHONED IN OUR VOTE ON THE INFORMAL ABC SURVEY SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT ACTIONS.

MY VOTE MAY SEEM LIKE AN ANOMALY BECAUSE OF MY LONG-FULL STANDING STAUNCH SUPPORT OF /FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA.

HOWEVER, MY VOTE WAS CAST FROM AN UNUSUAL PERSPECTIVE... FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A FORMER COMBAT INFANTRY BATTALION COMMANDER IN WORLD WAR II, A FORMER RADIO NEWSCASTER, A 28-YEAR

BROADCAST EXECUTIVE AND 9½-YEAR FCC COMMISSIONER.

I HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY APPALLED BY A HOSTILE PRESS, PARTICULARLY ELECTRONIC PRESS, THAT SEEM TO USE OR MIS-USE IMPORTANT NEWS EVENTS TO GAIN A FEW MORE RATING POINTS FOR THEIR OWN FINANCIAL GAIN AND PERSONAL AGGRANDIZEMENT WITHOUT REGARD TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST OR THE TRUE PUBLIC INTEREST.

LET'S FACE IT, NEWS HAS DEVELOPED INTO A BIG BUSINESS. THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH HAS OFTEN BEEN SUBJUGATED TO THE QUEST FOR FINANCIAL GAIN, POWER, AND GLORY -- THEY CRITICIZE ACTIONS OF THE MAIN STREAM DOERS SO AS TO EMBELLISH THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OBSERVER (OR REPORTER) OF THE EVENTS. IN MY OPINION, OUR NATIONAL INTEREST IS OFTEN SABOTAGED BY ACCUSATORY, RUDE, UNPATRIOTIC REPORTERS WHO CLAIM THE FIRST AMENDMENT SANCTIFIES ANY BEHAVIOR. THE PUBLIC AT LONG LAST SEEMS TO RESENT OVER-ADVERSIAL JOURNALISTS HOSTILE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

IN GRENADA OR EVEN IN VIETNAM, JOURNALISTS SHOULD REMEMBER THEY ARE OBSERVERS AND REPORTERS, NOT GENERALS OR EVEN LIEUTENANTS. THEY ARE NOT TRAINED OR QUALIFIED NOR HAVE THEY BEEN ELECTED OR SELECTED TO EXERCISE HIGH COMMAND. YET THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PRESS, THEY CAN INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION AND DETERMINE COURSES OF ACTION BEYOND THEIR GOVERNMENTAL OR MILITARY QUALIFICATIONS OR ASSIGNMENT.

IN GRENADA, I BELIEVE SECURITY AND THE URGENT NEED FOR MILITARY SURPRISE WERE ALLOTTED THE PROPER FIRST PRIORITIES

WHEN THE PRESS WAS INITIALLY EXCLUDED. AS FOR VIETNAM, MY FORMER WORLD WAR II TRAINING AND MILITARY INSTINCTS SEEM TO TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER MY BROADCAST PREROGATIVES AS I PERCEIVED AN OVER-POWERFUL, OVER-CRITICAL PRESS SABOTAGING OUR MILITARY EFFORTS AND OUR NATIONAL WILL. THE VIETCONG IN NORTH VIETNAM WERE SHOWN MOVIES OF AMERICANS DEMONSTRATING AGAINST THE WAR AS ENCOURAGEMENT TO THEIR CONTINUANCE AND EXPANSION OF THEIR WAR EFFORT. I WAS APPALLED BY MY OLD FAVORITE NEWSCASTER, WALTER CRONKITE, TELLING AN NAB LUNCHEON AUDIENCE AT THE CONVENTION THAT "THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SERVED IF THEY RECEIVED THEIR REPORTS FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTERS THAN FROM GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S HEADQUARTERS. I THOUGHT: "WHAT A PREPOSTEROUS STATEMENT. WHO WROTE THAT TERRIBLE SPEECH FOR WALTER ---HE DIDN'T COME TO BE KNOWN AND LOVED AS UNCLE WALTER BY PUTTING OUT SUCH UNKNOWLEDGEABLE BS! A MILITARY COMMANDER HAS ALL SOURCES OF INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO HIM, I. E., TOP SECRET RADIO TRANSMISSIONS FROM BEHIND ENEMY LINES, PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE, DIRECT TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE, PRISONER OF WAR REPORTS, FRONT LINE REPORTS, CIC (NOW CIA) REPORTS, ETC. A REPORTER ONLY KNOWS WHAT MILITARY PERSONNEL TELL HIM OR WHAT HE OBSERVES FROM A VERY NARROW VANTAGE POINT. DURING

WORLD WAR II, I TALKED TO MANY REPORTERS IN AFRICA, SICILY, ITALY, FRANCE AND GERMANY INCLUDING ERNIE PYLE A NUMBER OF TIMES, HAL BOYLE AND OTHER AP, UP AND INS REPORTERS. BELIEVE ME, I WAS ONLY A CAPTAIN OR MAJOR AT THE TIME, BUT I KNEW MUCH MORE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN MY AREA THAN THEY DID. I BRIEFED THEM--HOWEVER, THEY WERE SUPPORTIVE OF THE ARMY AND PARTICULARLY THE FRONT LINE INFANTRYMAN. AS FAR AS I KNOW, THEY WERE NOT CORRECTING THE GENERALS RUNNING OF THE WAR -- THEY WOULD REPORT A CORRECTIVE OR DISCIPLINARY ACTION ONE HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL MIGHT HAVE TAKEN AGAINST ANOTHER, BUT THE REPORTERS OF THAT ERA DIDN'T PRESUME TO KNOW MORE THAN THE HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS TRAINED TO CONDUCT MILITARY OPERATIONS.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT? I'M CERTAINLY NOT ADVOCATING FCC INVOLVEMENT IN NEWS DIRECTION.

FIRST, AS A STAUNCH ADVOCATE OF FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS, I BELIEVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS SHOULD HAVE REASONABLE ACCESS TO REPORT EVENTS AS THEY SEE THEM TO THE PEOPLE. THE KEY HOWEVER, WORD IS "REASONABLE" --/REPORTERS CAN'T HAVE ADVANCE INFORMATION OF TOP SECRET OPERATIONS NOR SHOULD THEY BE PERMITTED TO INTRUDE IN SENSITIVE ^{military} OPERATIONS.

I BELIEVE REPORTERS HAVE A RIGHT TO BE WRONG. BUT I ALSO BELIEVE PUBLISHERS, EDITORS AND BROADCAST EXECUTIVES HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAKING SURE THEY ARE NOT WRONG TOO OFTEN OR WRONG TO THE POINT THAT THEY REFLECT UNFAVORABLY ON THEMSELVES, THEIR PUBLICATIONS OR THEIR BROADCAST

COMPANIES. PEOPLE IN PUBLIC LIFE, AND THIS INCLUDES THE
INHERENTLY
MILITARY, ARE/SUBJECT TO BIASED HATCHET JOBS, BUT THERE
SHOULD BE SOME REASONABLE LIMITATIONS TO RUDENESS, SCURRI-
LOUS STATEMENTS AND IGNORANCE OF FACT SO THAT SOME SEMBLANCE
OF JOURNALISTIC DECENCY AND TRUTH CAN BE MAINTAINED. I
ALSO BELIEVE THAT IN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT OR IN
A WAR, THERE SHOULD BE REASONABLE CONCERN THAT NATIONAL
INTEREST IS NOT INADVERTENTLY OR "VERTENTLY" UNDERMINED.

IN THIS CONTEXT, I BELIEVE BROADCASTING EXECUTIVES HAVE
TO MORE AND MORE ASSUME A ROLE SIMILAR TO PUBLISHERS OF
NEWSPAPERS. NEWS AND VITAL INFORMATION ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT
FUNCTIONS OF BROADCASTERS WHO HAVE A NATIONAL MANDATE TO
OPERATE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST. NATIONAL INTEREST IS PUBLIC
INTEREST-- PUBLIC INTEREST IN BROADCAST JOURNALISM IS BEST
ACCOMPLISHED BY A FREE PRESS WITH COMPETENT, EVEN-HANDED
PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS DIRECTED BY RESPONSIBLE PROFESSIONAL
MANAGEMENT.