Unit Introduction

Welcome to the real world. As you may know, the Department of Defense must sometimes use media pools to enable the media to cover a story when space limitations or conditions on the ground warrant such drastic measures. Media pools are used as a last resort, but they are used.

But what is a media pool? The DOD defines a media pool as, “A limited number of news media who represent a larger number of news media organizations for news gathering and sharing of material during a specified activity. Pooling is typically used when news media support resources cannot accommodate a large number of journalists. The DOD National Media Pool is available for coverage of the earliest stages of a contingency. Additionally, the combatant commanders may also find it necessary to form limited local pools to report on specific missions.”

Regardless of where you are stationed, stateside or overseas, you could receive a call telling you the Secretary of Defense will be making a stop at your installation tomorrow afternoon to hold a news conference. Oh, by the way, traveling with him is the National Media Pool. So today we are going to talk about media pools, the DOD National Media Pool and how the concept of pooling relates to the military-media relationship.

PAOs anywhere at any level may be called upon to implement, manage, monitor or escort a media pool; therefore, you must have the knowledge of what is expected of you and how to do it effectively.

OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the purpose of media ground rules in military operations.
2. Explain the functions of media facilitation.
3. Explain Department of Defense media pool employment.
4. Explain employment of embedded media.

Unit Overview

A roadmap of how we will reach these goals include:

- Needs
- Function
- Membership
- Precedence
- Criteria
- Makeup
- PAO responsibilities

Background

In order to discuss the subject of media pools and how we have progressed to where they are today, it's necessary to reach back to the unit of instruction on Public Affairs History.

One of the most important teaching points of that unit was a discussion of the Sidle Commission recommendations. Some of the most significant recommendations include:

a. Media pools, when used, be as large as possible and that pools be disbanded as soon as possible.

b. The creation of the DOD managed National Media Pool (a standing group of Washington-based military journalists who could be rapidly deployed) to cover the initial phases of any future operation.

Now that you have an understanding of the basis on which today's concept of media pools came about; let's take a look at the needs of the media.

Needs

In order for reporters to be effective working in a pool environment, there are a number of reporter needs that must be met. Not only do the pool reporters need access to the battlefield or operational area, they also need access to people who have the information they need to report the action accurately. This information can come through briefings, interviews (to include senior military officials), news releases, and being able to "view the action." Finally, pool reporters will often require transportation and communications within the theater of operations.

Media Pool Function

According to DOD, the use of pools should be limited to the kind envisioned by the Sidle Commission. Pools are meant to bring a representative group of journalists along with the first elements of any major U.S. military operation. These pools should last no longer than the very first stages of a deployment -- 24 – 36 hours and should be disbanded rapidly in favor of independent coverage. Pools are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. forces.

Media pools are designed to be non competitive. After all, the object of the pool is to seek the widest possible coverage of the event for the broadest national audience. They function as a unit and coverage responsibilities are usually divided among the members of the pool. For example, in a military operation the newspaper reporter may cover the shelling, while television covers the helicopter assault, the wire service covers the beach landing and so on. All media products are shared among the pool members and with the media at home, and no member of the pool will attempt unilateral reporting before all coverage has been shared. That is, one reporter can't hold something back or go off on a separate agenda unless the other members agree.

Organization

Media Pool Organization and Membership

By understanding the capabilities of each **type of media organization**, we see that the **aim of the National Pool is to provide the means for sophisticated coverage of a military operation at the national level.**

Wire Service: Wire Service members must have a news and photographic capability and be capable of providing breaking news and photos immediately to a large multi-media, national audience. Participating wire services must also be capable of deploying photo developing and transmitting equipment with the pool.

Television Network: Television network members must produce and transmit general daily news broadcasts to a nationwide audience and be capable of deploying a satellite earth station with the pool.

Radio Network: Radio network members must be capable of providing breaking immediate news to a large, nationwide audience.

Newspapers: Newspapers must already be providing general coverage and publishing at least five times a week.

Newsmagazines: Newsmagazines in the pool must provide general, national coverage and circulation. They must be published weekly and have photographic coverage as part of their capabilities.

Membership Precedence

By reviewing the following priority listing for the National Media Pool, one can readily see the aim is to provide the means for sophisticated coverage of a military operation at the national level. The National Media Pool membership precedence is as follows:

1. Associated Press
2. Still photographer
3. TV camera person
4. TV reporter
5. Radio reporter
6. Newspaper reporter
7. TV crew member
8. Newsmagazine reporter
9. Newsmagazine photographer
10. Wire reporter
11. Newspaper reporters (2)
12. Still photographer

Interim Review

Q. What is the function of the DOD National Media Pool?

Q. What are the types of media that make up the DOD National Media Pool?

Q. What is the precedence in which the DOD National Media Pool is staffed?

Interim Review

Q. What is the function of the DOD National Media Pool?

A. The function of the pool is to seek the widest possible coverage of a military event for the broadest national audience.

Q. What are the types of media that make up the DOD National Media Pool?

A. (1) Wire services (2) Television (3) Radio (4) Newspapers (5) Newsmagazines

Q. What is the precedence in which the DOD National Media Pool is staffed?

A. (1) AP reporter (2) Still photographer (3) TV Camera person (4) TV reporter (5) Radio reporter (6) Newspaper reporter (7) TV crew member (8) Newsmagazine reporter (9) Newsmagazine photographer (10) Wire reporter (11) Newspaper reporters – 2 (12) Still photographer

Participation Criteria

Because of the many potential participants in the National Media Pool, certain criteria have been established to provide fair opportunities for all media organizations. The media organizations and their individual representatives to the National Pool are also expected to understand and agree to more requirements than listed here, but some of the more important ones include:

Quarterly Rotation: Standing members of the pool rotate quarterly. If an operation should occur in January through March the newsmagazine might be Newsweek. However, if the operation takes place April through June, it might be Time Magazine. The same type of rotation applies to other types of media. Regardless of when they happen to be in the stand-by resource, all media organizations participating must meet certain criteria.

Active involvement: Media organizations must have active involvement with the U.S. military, demonstrated by their conducting interviews with senior civilian and military personnel in the DOD, routine coverage of the DOD. (Regular coverage of military subjects and operations, visits to military units and representation at Pentagon press conferences, etc.)

Commitment to maintaining operational security: In exchange for increased knowledge of current/future operations, the media have requirement not to report deployment timelines, locations, etc.

Pool Makeup

So what actually determines who deploys with the National Media Pool? Some of the considerations that go into that decision include:

1. Demonstrated competence covering the military

2. Willingness to sign a non disclosure statement

3. The discretion of the Joint Task Force Commander

4. The names contained on the “on-call roster” for the National Media Pool, if it is activated

5. Maintain a sufficient staff in Washington, D.C. to fill the void if the national pool is activated

6. Agree not to disclose the activation of the pool for an operation, much less where and when the pool is going. (Media pools are told as little as possible when the pool is activated. They are told to activate, are given the name and telephone number of the DOD contact and told eventually where and when to show up.) Being U.S. owned and operated helps to ensure the news organizations commitment to meeting the informational needs of the American public.

7. Being able to provide experienced representatives to the deploying pool

8. Be U.S. citizens able to deploy with a four-hour tether

9. Be committed to the security of the military operation

10. Be prepared with a valid passport for anywhere

11. Have up-to-date immunizations (DOD specifies the time limits for the shots)

12. Have gear appropriate for a long “back-packing trip to a remote area”

13. Be willing and able (both physically and mentally) to operate in field conditions with the troops, understanding that they will at least, in theory, be exposed to the same dangers and hardships as the troops.

14. Media organizations and individual media representatives also understand and agree to adhere to established ground rules.

PAO Responsibilities

Logistics

1. You are the one who will arrange or coordinate the logistical requirements. Such tasks could include picking up the pool at the airport or landing zone, arranging transportation to units within your area of operation to medical care if pool members need it.

2. You may also have to arrange lodging, meals (media pool members are provided the same courtesies equivalent to a military 0-4) on a reimbursable basis and some sort of work space. Both print and electronic media need a place to prepare their material and pool their work.

3. What about equipment? Have you arranged for helmets, canteens, flack vests, chemical warfare gear, etc.?

4. Access to the story: Be aware that arrangements will need to be made for access to operating units- the troops, key people and commanders for interviews, observation and demonstrations. Pool members may also need transportation to the battle area. The question then becomes, should media representatives ride in or on the equipment going into battle. This is where you make a recommendation and your commander makes the decision.

5. Arrangements may also be needed for media representatives to attend briefings or for briefings to be arranged for their benefit. A daily, unclassified briefing on the general nature of the operation, its successes, failures and key points is recommended.

6. Determine in advance what reporters may videotape and photograph, to include any charts and diagrams, and how much time will be available for questions and answers following the brief.

PAO Responsibilities (Cont)

7. Filing stories: You will be the resident expert on filing from the theater. As such, you need to know if media may use their own satellite uplink antenna and INMARSAT phone sets to transmit video and still images. Will they use their radio or yours? If they don't have their own sophisticated equipment or can't use it because of operational security concerns, how do the television and radio journalists get their stories back to their editors and producers?

8. Do you have aircraft or land vehicles that can make special runs or is a regular logistics run already set up? Have arrangements been made with your unit or staff communicators to allow media access to official channels? Do you have fax capability through the INMARSAT system.

9. Advise media escorts before the National Media Pool arrives in your theater that you don't have a way to process film, so everything should be digital.

10. If a security review of media reports is required, the security review procedures will have to be folded into the filing processes.

11. You can expect to monitor the pool and help the members regulate and administer themselves. The members of the pool are supposed to combine efforts and regulate themselves, but making sure they do can be a big job. You provide guidance, but require them to make their own decisions.

Operating Principles

There are nine principles that were established to help facilitate the flow of information during contingency operations from the military to the media and subsequently to the public.

1. Open and independent reporting will be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations.
2. Pools are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. military operations. Pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of early access to a military operation. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity, within 24 to 36 hours when possible. The arrival of early-access pools will not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists already in the area.
3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for specific events, such as at those extremely remote locations or where space is limited.
4. Journalists in a combat zone will be credentialed by the U.S. military and will be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect U.S. forces and their operations. Violation of the ground rules can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion from the combat zone of the journalists involved. News organizations will make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with U.S. military operations.
5. Journalists will be provided access to all major military units. Special operations restrictions may limit access in some cases.
6. Military public affairs officers should act as liaisons, but should not interfere with the reporting process.
7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders should be instructed to permit journalists to ride on military vehicles and aircraft whenever feasible. The military will be responsible for the transportation of pools.
8. Consistent with its capabilities, the military will supply public affairs officers with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and will make those facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage. In cases when government facilities are not available, journalists will, as always, file by any other means available. The military will not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.
9. These principles will apply as well to the operations of the standing Department of Defense National Media Pool system.

Embedded Media

The idea of embedded media was somewhat of a controversial decision that Secretary Rumsfeld and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Tori Clark, made for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Let's start with a little background.

All the services met at CENTCOM Headquarters and collectively decided they could support 920 embeds. After the embed program was announced, 775 media signed up and the program was implemented. Obviously, those who signed up would need some sort of basic survival training so a number of boot camps for the media sprang up.

Six hundred and sixty reporters were matched up with units, and when combat began March 19, 2003, 550 journalists were actually in position. Beside the 550 embeds there were nearly 700 unilateral journalists at the CENTCOM Coalition Media Center at Qatar.

As the embed program began to mature, some unforeseen issues began to surface. First, reporters found their way around the notification of next of kin process. And second, once embeds feel there is no longer a benefit to being embedded (in terms of access to key leadership, access to the battlefield, etc.) they will bail.

Embed Challenges

With the advent of the embed program a number of challenges for both PAs and reporters also surfaced.

1. Reporters had to secure their own visas, country clearances, etc.

2. Ground rules: Embedded reporters had extensive ground rules to sign, unilaterals did not.

3. There were more reporters than PA practitioners, but PA practitioners still had to keep track of them, see if their needs were being met and if the on-scene commander was not unnecessarily endangering his men and women as a result.

4. Moving products: Media mostly handled this themselves, but still a lot of video products and personnel were moved via military conveyance and the coalition air commanders usually required the media to be escorted by a PA practitioner anytime they moved in theater.

Lessons Learned

1. Contrary to popular belief, this is not the first effort to embed media.

2. Overall the OIF embed program is viewed as a success with much positive coverage.

3. The embed program was a major part of the overall Information Operations campaign.

4. The key to success was ACCESS.

5. The media was myopic and "covered the war through a soda straw "aperture." A lot of senior military leaders say the coverage in Iraq was one-sided - showing only the negative aspect of the war.

6. Not reliable for the LONG HAUL! Always another story to cover.

7. We now have a generation of media and commanders “who get it.”

But . . .

1. The embedded reporter’s tenure with a unit is largely driven by money

2. No media on the battlefield = lost stories

3. Embeds are unreliable for the LONG HAUL because there is always another story to cover.

4. Sometimes there is a lack of single story endurance; no follow up

5. Embedding may not work everywhere because of host nation sensitivities

6. Even though there were problems, the embedding program was very successful in bringing the fight to America’s living rooms; dispelling misinformation, showing the world that Saddam Hussein and Baghdad Bob were lying through their teeth.

Review

Q. What are the basic requirements to be able to participate in the National Media Pool?

Q. What are some of the considerations used to determine who can participate in the DOD National Media Pool?

Q. Explain the PAO's roles and responsibilities for facilitating media pool.

Q. Which of the following is not an element of support the PAO must provide the National Media Pool?

A. 1. Access to on-going operations

2. Reasonable access to key information

3. Free meals, lodging and transportation

4. Filing support and security review

Summary Review

Q. What are the basic requirements to be able to participate in the National Media Pool?

A. (1) Quarterly rotation (2) Active involvement (3) Commitment to maintaining operational security

Q. What are some of the considerations used to determine who can participate in the DOD National Media Pool?

A. See listing on pages 28 of this unit of instruction

Q. Explain the PAO's roles and responsibilities for facilitating media pool.

A. Logistics e.g. transportation, lodging, meals, work space, access to troops and senior commanders, assistance in filing stories, monitor the pool and provide necessary assistance

Q. Which of the following is not an element of support the PAO must provide the National Media Pool?

A. 3. Free meals, lodging and transportation

Closing

As Public Affairs Officers you could be the lifeguard for such media pools. The media pool could be deployed for a humanitarian effort. It could be deployed for a combat situation. It could be… you name it. As a Public Affairs Officer, you'll be in the deep end of the pool with no lifeguard around if you don't know how media pools operate.