

**Missouri National Guard Crisis Response  
in the Age of Instant Communication**

Professional Project

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## Introduction

The July 2011 cover of *Guard and Reserve Magazine* featured a photograph of five Missouri National Guard soldiers digging through a collapsed building in Joplin, Mo. The Guardsmen, from the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, had worked through the night of May 22 looking for survivors at the local Walmart, which had collapsed after being hit by an EF-5 tornado. As the sun began to rise on the morning of May 23, Ann Keyes, a Missouri National Guard unit public affairs representative, took the picture at first light.

In the days following the tornado, the photograph was picked up throughout the United States and the world in military and civilian publications and websites. It became the defining shot of the National Guard's response to the tornado, telling the story of the Guard's mission better than any news release could have.

Three years earlier, that photograph would have been impossible.

Keyes took the photo with her iPhone and e-mailed it from the same device to the Missouri National Guard's public affairs office. From there, it was uploaded to Facebook and Flickr, and sent out to state and national media outlets. From start to finish, the entire process took seconds.

Keyes is the first to admit that it is not a technically great photo. It is impossible to identify the soldiers in the shot, the lighting is poor, and there is no discernible framing in the shot. Where the photo succeeds, though, is in its quick and accurate telling of the story of what the Guard was doing. Thanks to leaps forward in modern technology, it was also of a high enough quality that it could be used by both print and online publications. The story of that photograph illustrates the sudden evolution of public affairs in disaster response. Between the last major disasters in 2008 and the 2011 disasters, the public

affairs community had adopted a number of new tactics, techniques, and technologies, largely based around social media sites.

When the 2011 disasters hit, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs office put three years of training and theory to test. The public affairs staff, which had embraced social media and online outlets since the last major state emergency missions, found itself in new territory. Throughout the year, Guard public affairs had to find the best and most efficient ways to leverage traditional and new media to complete its mission of telling the Missouri National Guard's story in a timely, accurate manner.

Adopting social media for disaster response was not an instantaneous or easy process. Instead, it was the result of nearly 10 years of Defense Department policy changes, evolutions in attitude and ability concerning operations security, and a change in leadership in the Missouri National Guard.

When four back-to-back emergencies hit the state in 2011, each came with its own challenges. The January/February blizzard response was a proactive effort to prevent a major disaster through a strategy of communication aimed at public safety. In April, the southeast Missouri flood was a pitched battle with the Mississippi River coupled with a major political battle at the state and national level that saw the Guard caught in the middle. The Joplin tornado was one of the deadliest tornados in American history, and resulted in several unusual missions that no state National Guard had ever taken on. Finally, the northwest Missouri flood was an exercise in waiting and rapid responses as the state monitored record water releases from the Gavins Point Dam.

Through it all, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs community was responsible for telling the Guard's story and keeping the public informed. The end

product was the result of adaptability and flexibility on the part of those assets, as well as an acceptance that embracing new, interactive media means sacrificing a certain level of control over the dialogue. Although not without failures and frustrations, a study of the Missouri National Guard public affairs community's response to four major disasters can provide an insight into the constantly changing media environment as well as a way forward for other military and civilian agencies facing similar issues.

This document analyzes the actions taken, products produced, and decisions made by the Missouri National Guard public affairs office but also identify shortfalls and provide a way forward through a new standard operating procedure. The end result is a comprehensive document that will outline how National Guard public affairs offices can be successful when supporting civil authorities during future missions.

As a public affairs officer, this project has been critical to giving me better insight into my career field and a better appreciation for how traditional and new media are used by public affairs practitioners on all levels. By gaining a better understanding of what we accomplished in 2011 and where we failed, I hope to add to the career field's knowledge base by identifying our shortfalls and showing what the most effective means of communicating in new and traditional media are.

Please note there are two minor deviations from the proposal. First, two interview subjects were unavailable, but I interviewed more than twice the number I initially estimated. The second is the organization of the overview of operations. This was done purely for organizational purposes, as was projected in the proposal.

## **Chapter 2: Field Notes/Professional Skills Component**

*This section includes an analysis of the Missouri National Guard's use of traditional and social media during the 2011 emergencies. Because of the availability of subject matter experts and the time consuming nature of the content analysis, a chronological listing of activities did not work. For example, most of February and March were spent collecting, printing and analyzing approximately 730 newspaper articles and news releases. I believe this section is sufficient to function as a representation of more than a year of interviews, research and analysis, albeit in a much more formal and organized manner than required.*

*In order to get the full picture of the response, I interviewed 20 individuals who participated in the emergency response missions that year. The experience of the individuals interviewed ranged from relatively inexperienced privates first class to field grade officers. At the beginning of each chapter, an overview is given for context on each emergency.*

*This section also offers an analysis of how the Missouri National Guard's messages were picked up in traditional media outlets (newspapers) and how the Missouri National Guard used social media during the response. This content analysis is particularly useful because it serves as a reminder that while social media offer a lot of exciting possibilities, traditional media like newspapers still have a much larger potential in-state audience.*

*The final two chapters of this section demonstrate how the lessons learned in the research of this project have already been implemented into the Missouri National Guard's public affairs planning and response efforts. The "Implementation Since 2011" section includes specific details on that, while the "Revised Standard Operating Procedure" was written using the tactics, timelines and techniques developed in 2011 and refined since then.*

## **Past Emergencies**

The National Guard is the oldest component of the United States' armed forces, and the only one with a dual mission. This mission means the Guard provides trained, equipped soldiers and airmen both to the federal government for mobilization and to the state to protect life and property and to maintain peace, order, and public safety.<sup>1</sup>

The Missouri National Guard public affairs program's mission is to serve as a liaison between the Guard and the public. According to Army Regulation 360-1, the document that outlines the roles and responsibilities for Army public affairs, the three primary functional areas of public affairs are command information, public information, and community relations.<sup>2</sup> Command information tends to be internal communication, like a base newspaper, while public information comprises communication with the general public, often through the civilian media.

Going into 2011, the Missouri National Guard public affairs community was in a position of strength. In addition to having all public affairs assets physically within Missouri, the public affairs community had been empowered by the adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Stephen L. Danner, to use social media and emerging technology to get word out about the Missouri National Guard and its missions. According to Maj. Tamara Spicer, the state public affairs officer:

The Missouri National Guard began using social media after the election of Gov. Jay Nixon and his appointment of Maj. Gen. Stephen L. Danner, the adjutant general, in January, 2009. Social media provides the opportunity to share information more quickly, get direct feedback on your information, and obtain situational awareness in real-time.<sup>3</sup>



This change gave public affairs practitioners more outlets and options in communicating with the public, but the program’s primary focus is supporting civilian media.

The state public affairs staff is responsible for supporting the adjutant general through avenues including media requests, command information products, strategic planning, coordination, and messaging. The fulltime state public affairs staff is supplemented by nine fulltime unit public affairs representatives spread throughout the state, and traditional Guardsmen from the Army National Guard’s 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment and the Air Guard’s 131<sup>st</sup> Bomb Wing and 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing. The state office was primarily responsible for messaging and, during statewide emergencies, all public affairs assets fall under the control of the state public affairs officer.



**Figure 2.1 – Missouri National Guard public affairs assets are spread throughout the state, but fall under the operational control of the state public affairs officer during times of state emergency.**

The majority of the day-to-day work is done by the unit public affairs representatives, or, UPARs. The UPARs are spread over seven geographic areas throughout the state. These areas were picked because of factors including unit placement and media saturation. As reflected in the above diagram, these areas are St. Louis, Kansas City, Fort Leonard Wood, Springfield, Sedalia, Cape Girardeau, and Jefferson City. Each location has one UPAR with the exception of Jefferson City, which has three. Two of the Jefferson City UPARs are trained broadcast journalists, while the third is the Missouri National Guard's webmaster.

On a day-to-day basis, the UPARs function as local public relations managers. They support local units and administrative officers through publicizing events and training and coordinating media requests. During emergencies the contacts and relationships the local UPARs have forged with both their units and the local media and community are integral to an effective response.

In addition to its fulltime staff, the Missouri National Guard has approximately 30 public affairs soldiers and airmen who can be mobilized for duty. These include individual soldiers assigned to brigades and the 131<sup>st</sup> Bomb Wing and 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing public affairs shops. The majority of these uniformed public affairs specialists are in the Missouri Army National Guard's 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (MPAD).

Prior to 2011, the MPAD's soldiers did not have much experience during state emergency duty. The last round of state emergencies, which occurred in 2008-2009, coincided with an MPAD deployment to Kosovo. Although some individual MPAD members had experience with the state missions, most were either deployed during previous emergencies or were not yet members of the Missouri National Guard.

Leading up to 2011, the public affairs community had worked hard to integrate itself into an effective, cohesive entity. Although each particular group had its own duties and responsibilities under the guidance of the state public affairs officer, different groups consistently work together. Spicer added that preparation and inter-operability is key to a successful response.

When providing full-spectrum public affairs support and integrating full-time Soldiers and Airmen, traditional Guardsmen and civilian Unit Public Affairs Reps, it is much like all emergency response - it helps if you have worked with that individual before the incident. There is a saying that you never want to be exchanging business cards during a disaster, and that same concept applies directly to public affairs.<sup>4</sup>

Each year, for example, a public affairs conference is held to bring the disparate groups together. This proved beneficial during the 2011 emergencies precisely because it created relationships between the fulltime staff and traditional soldiers and airmen. It also ensured that each group knew the others' roles, responsibilities, and capabilities.

Although individual experience differs, organizationally, disaster response missions have become almost routine in Missouri. Since 2005, the Missouri National Guard has been mobilized for approximately 30 natural disaster missions. These have included ice storms, flooding, blizzards and hurricane responses through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. That last group of mobilizations include out-of-state missions like Hurricane Gustav and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in which other states requested assets and capabilities from the Missouri National Guard.

In 2008 Missouri experienced one of its busiest disaster years. There were seven total mobilizations that year, and two could be classified as major events. The first, in June/July, came in response to flooding along the Mississippi River north of St. Louis.

The second was a mission to assist civil authorities in Louisiana following Hurricane Gustav.

At the time these disasters occurred, the Missouri National Guard was not yet using social media. The crux of the Missouri National Guard's public affairs efforts fell in the realm of media coordination and news release production and distribution, said Michelle Queiser, a Missouri National Guard unit public affairs representative.

"Basically it wasn't even really releases, half the time," Queiser said. "It was calls and reporters calling me for information over the phone. It was the same information I'd write in for a release with what everyone else had and we would send it to state for a big release."<sup>5</sup>

Each day, the state public affairs office would pull together the latest information, including quotes from the unit public affairs representatives covering the flood. Around 3 p.m. daily, a release would be sent out statewide to the media detailing the Guard's latest response efforts. Although most of the newspapers in the state had adopted e-mail by that point, some, including *The Jefferson City News-Tribune*, still requested that information be faxed.

Although the newspaper and radio outreach efforts were successful, television remained a bit of a blind spot for the Missouri National Guard, according to Queiser:

Most of our information that got out was press releases or interviews over the phone – talking to radio stations over the phone. I don't remember seeing any video from our side. There were plenty of actual TV broadcasts, with stations.<sup>6</sup>

The 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment was deployed to Kosovo during this time, severely limiting the available video resources in the state. Furthermore, there was no way to distribute any video products that would have been created. When Master Sgt.

Shannon Bond, of the 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, created a video towards the end of the emergency, it was available only by request and on DVD.

Gathering b-roll and interviews during a response and putting together a video product afterwards was standard operating procedure in longer disasters, said Staff. Sgt. Christopher Robertson, of the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. Robertson had been sent out to do just that during a disaster response in St. Louis three years earlier.

According to Robertson:

Before 2011 it was a lot different. For state emergency duties, I believe in the 2004-2005 time frame, I was in combat camera but was asked to help the public affairs office during state emergency duty as a combat cameraman. I worked with their previous first sergeant, John Campbell, in broadcast as well as a little bit of still.<sup>7</sup>

The duo put together a three-minute video about the overall disaster response, but had no way of getting it to the public. Those same lags still existed in 2008. According to

Robertson:

Back then, there was no Twitter. Facebook was just invented by Zuckerberg and was not outside Ivy League schools yet. MySpace was being used a little, but there was no real social media marketing that companies or the government were really doing back then. Public affairs didn't seem to be doing things that way. What they were giving out to the public were press releases via e-mail or fax. Broadcast products weren't really marketed back then<sup>8</sup>

Despite the technical limitations of the time, the public affairs response to the 2008 flood was considered very successful.

Two months after flood operations ended, 1,200 soldiers were mobilized to go to Louisiana to help with the response to Hurricane Gustav. Capt. Michelle Matthews, who had recently transferred to the National Guard from the Army Reserve, was mobilized to go with the 203<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion as a public affairs officer. Matthews remembered the

situation being made particularly difficult because of spotty communication and downed power lines.

“We could take pictures and photos, but because there was no internet access, we couldn’t download anything,” Matthews said. “We had to physically carry things back to the public affairs office.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite communications difficulties, products were being put out. These included news releases, updates to the MoGuard.com website, and articles in *Bear Facts*, the Missouri National Guard’s then-monthly magazine. Additionally, Matthews coordinated interviews with radio and television stations whenever she was able to get into contact with them.

Shortly after the Missouri Guardsmen returned from Louisiana, a tectonic shift occurred at both the state and national levels. At home Jay Nixon was elected governor of Missouri. For the Guard, this meant a new adjutant general. Maj. Gen. Stephen L. Danner, a former legislator, saw social media as the way forward for public communication. Under his leadership, the Missouri Guard embraced social media at all levels, greatly enhancing the state’s public affairs reach.

The state public affairs office immediately worked to implement the new adjutant general’s vision and began using social media sites. Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and others gave the Guard a previously unavailable outlet to share and market its video products. A fulltime broadcaster was hired on, and the Missouri National Guard began producing and pushing video products.

As a result, audiences on those pages were, for the first time, able to see broadcast products of Guardsmen in action. Through social media and the Defense Video

and Imagery Distribution Site, or, DVIDS, Missouri National Guard products were picked up at the Department of the Air Force, Department of the Army, and National Guard Bureau level. Missouri National Guardsmen deployed overseas often were able to watch Missouri National Guard products on the Pentagon Chanel or Armed Forces Network.

The new broadcaster joined an already robust public affairs team. That team included four fulltime federal technicians, nine fulltime UPARs, and approximately 30 traditional, drilling soldiers and airmen with public affairs military occupational specialties or Air Force specialty codes.

The second shift came at the national level. After years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Defense Department was developing a policy that understood the importance of social media and its value as a public outreach tool.

## Literature Review

The primary research question this project seeks to analyze and answer is, “In the age of instant communication through the 24-hour news cycle and new/social media, how can a military public affairs office best leverage new and old techniques to complete its mission of bringing the public timely, accurate information during disaster response?”

In order to answer that question effectively, there are several sub-questions that must be answered and analyzed.

- 1) How has public affairs shifted in the past 10 years with the advent of online sites like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Flickr, etc.?
- 2) What is the most effective way of communicating through these sites?
- 3) What are the benefits of social media sites versus command publications or media distribution?
- 4) What are the drawbacks of social media sites versus command publications or media distribution?
- 5) How does being able to communicate directly with individuals change public affairs during crisis communication?

This topic and these questions are relevant to the military public affairs career field because it is in a period of flux. Before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, military public affairs had been reluctant to embrace new technologies. As will be discussed further in the literature review, the military has a long-standing tradition of shunning or outright disrupting new communications technologies. Recently, the culture has shifted. Leaders including retired Gen. David Petraeus and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey,



have embraced new media. With the senior leadership's seal of approval, there has been a trickle-down effect. Even so, many commanders and even public affairs office remain skeptical of the use of new media or, in some cases, view it as a danger to operations security.

By answering these questions in light of how such communications methods were used in conjunction with traditional methods during four state emergency missions, one may identify both the positive and negative impact of new media and constant communication over a wide range of platforms. These answers will aid fellow public affairs practitioners, but also offer cogent analysis to commanders and senior noncommissioned officers who, while still skeptical of new media, have to understand that it is not going away.

For public affairs practitioners specifically, answering these questions will shed some light on how the career field has changed so dramatically in such a short time. When Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in March 2003, the pinnacle of communications technology was satellite phones, which were often difficult to understand and came with a significant delay. Today, deployed troops can talk with their families back home on a standard laptop computer from a tent over Skype. Pictures and videos from cell phones can do anything from bring attention to potential war crimes like during the Abu Ghraib incident or promote positive news stories like the Missouri National Guard's Air Force Band, which enjoyed a viral video hit in August 2011.

This analysis will also be useful to civilian media. Understanding how military public affairs works, what the goals of military public affairs practitioners are, and understanding their strengths and limitations will allow journalists to use them more

effectively in their own reporting. Additionally, by reading the words of military public affairs personnel, this project will allow civilian reporters to understand them as individuals in a career field with their own values, rather than simple gatekeepers or, as some journalists view military public affairs, propagandists.

The two most important mass communication theories to this project will be gate keeping and agenda setting. The question where social media is concerned is to what extent each is possible.

At the Defense Information School, officers are taught to view the civilian media as a communications tool. In other words, the media is not the end target of a message or information, but merely a means through which it is transmitted. In that sense, doing an interview with a reporter is only nominally different than sending out a news release.

Social media outlets present a new opportunity for military public affairs. Like a command publication, such as a base newspaper, public affairs practitioners can set the agenda by determining what stories they pursue and publish. They can also practice gatekeeping by selecting certain stories or missions over others. As with the civilian media, these decisions are made as much because of time considerations as anything else.

Part of the reluctance of some military leaders to embrace new media is that they are sacrificing the ability to set the agenda or gatekeep by participating in a two-way dialogue with the audience. On the Missouri National Guard's Facebook site, for example, anyone can post a question or comment as long as it stays within the parameters of the community guidelines. As long as they do not use profanity, violate operations security, or libel an individual, their comment will not only not be removed, it will be answered by the public affairs staff or the appropriate section.

The research and journalistic methods used in this project will include content analysis and in-depth interviews. The content analysis will focus on products put out by the Missouri National Guard during state emergency missions in 2011. This will include the type of story, the information presented, and the target audience. It will also include social media interactions - positive, negative and neutral - and how they were handled.

Finally, as far as publication possibilities are concerned, my goal is to write a professional analysis that can be used by the Missouri National Guard public affairs community and submitted to military journals. Social media and the increased role it has given public affairs in planning and executing operations is a topic that leadership at all levels is interested in.

### **Evolution of Policy**

For the Missouri National Guard public affairs community, the 2011 disasters meant putting new technologies, techniques, and training into operational use. For the first time, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and file-sharing sites like Flickr, which either did not exist or were not at a point where they were deemed effective during the last great disaster in 2008, were integrated into the response.

The missions that public affairs soldiers and airmen conducted in 2011 included the use of both traditional and new skill sets. Uniformed print and broadcast journalists continued to practice their crafts. Public affairs officers and senior noncommissioned officers continued to lead teams and coordinate with media.

What had changed was the speed and the tools available to complete the mission. During the 2008 floods, the 24-hour news cycle was already a fact of life. Since then, a 24-hour information cycle and new ways to communicate directly with audiences online

had emerged. How the Missouri National Guard public affairs community was able to adapt to use these new tools was contingent on decisions made not only in Jefferson City, but in Washington.

Because the National Guard is a component of the armed forces, it is subject to the regulations and guidance of the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Defense Department. Although National Guard soldiers and airmen are responsible to the same federal mission as the active duty component and Army and Air Force Reserves, the Army and Air National Guard have a second, state-level mission. As mentioned previously, the state mission includes supporting the governor of the state during times of crisis. During these stateside mobilizations, the same basic information-sharing policies that would be used in an overseas deployment are followed.

Policy and regulations drive the military culture. In the past 10 years, the National Guard and Reserves have become more integrated with the active component than at any time since World War II. At any given time, roughly half the troops serving overseas are reservists. In the Missouri National Guard, a force of 11,500 Soldiers and Airmen, more than 17,000 have served overseas since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, according to Charles Machon, the curator of the Museum of Missouri Military History.<sup>10</sup> While that number includes Guardsmen who have retired, left service, or served multiple tours, it remains an extraordinary number. The integration of active-duty and reserve units is important in that it both requires and demonstrates that the concerns of National Guard leaders are in line with those of the active duty.

In order to understand the concerns of those leaders, it is necessary to put them in context. To do that, a very brief exploration of the U.S. military's relationship with the

civilian news media and new communications technology is necessary. There has always and will always be a heated debate between transparency and the benefits of allowing open communication versus exercising tighter control in the name of operations security and mission accomplishment. That debate, coupled with the growing reach of new communications technology and outlets, has led to major policy adjustments and changes that the Defense Department and various services have seen over the past 10 years.

This chapter seeks to give context to the climate the Missouri National Guard found itself in leading up to and during the 2011 disasters, and the policies that governed it. Analyzing the history, debate and controversy around ‘social media,’ the primary driving medium behind much of the response in the literature review will allow the project itself to focus on the implementation of those theories and the reality of those concerns during a mission setting.

The U.S. military has a long, unimpressive history with new communications technology. From the Civil War through the invasion of Iraq, the military has sought to control new technology through a combination of disruption and access limitation.

On Feb. 15, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued an executive order seizing control of telegraph lines for military use during the Civil War. The telegraph was a great leap forward in transmitting information across a wide area quickly. While the order states that it “is not intended to interfere in any respect with the ordinary affairs of the companies or with private business,” it also includes limitations on newspapers publishing military news and threatens that any newspapers that violate that limitation will be, “excluded thereafter from receiving information by telegraph or from transmitting their papers by railroad.”<sup>11</sup>

The repercussions of that order have colored relations between the military and media ever since, and set a precedent of the military controlling new communications technology during wartime. Often, private sector technology moved faster than military technology, but there was an ebb and flow. Less than 40 years after the Union government had effectively seized the telegraph during the Civil War, private industry had achieved dominance over the medium. During the Spanish-American War, media outlets published the results of battles before the War Department - the predecessor of the Defense Department - knew them. This prompted President William McKinley to write, "The New York World apparently had the only information to be had on the subject, and it would be wise for the Navy Department to depend upon it for its information."<sup>12</sup>

During the world wars that followed, the military and the media were working closely together to achieve the nation's goals. While it is noteworthy that broadcasters like Edward R. Murrow were able to transmit information back to the U.S. quickly through radio, there were no major clashes. That status quo would deteriorate during the Korean War and completely dissolve during Vietnam.

Following Vietnam was a period marked by quick conflicts with limited goals. The invasions of Panama and Grenada, along with Operation Desert Storm, used new concepts like media pools to control information flow. The early days of Operation Enduring Freedom, the invasion of Afghanistan, was largely a Special Operations Command endeavor, and was media access was tightly controlled. When Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in 2003, a program was launched with it whereby media were able to embed with troops going into the country. Media continue to be embedded with units throughout Afghanistan.

In the 10 years since Operation Enduring Freedom was launched, technology has improved immensely. Where once hard-to-get satellite phones were the pinnacle of technology, soldiers on remote outposts are now often able to use e-mail, blogs, Facebook and Skype to speak directly with their families in ways that were unimaginable when overseas contingency operations began.

The result of that leap forward in technology and communication has been a center of debate for the military. For the first time, troops in the field have access to technology that allows them to communicate directly and in real-time with the home-front. The extent to which such media should be limited or embraced has fueled an ongoing debate among military leaders and public affairs practitioners.

At the center of this debate are questions of operations security and the risk involved in allowing deployed troops access to a potentially globally audience. For combatant commanders and policy makers who set forth national and military objectives, allowing troops access to social media sites comes with inherent risks. To get to that point required nearly a decade of growing pains.

In 1998, the Defense Department released a new Website administration policy. The policy, which predated the social media explosion in the next decade, focused mainly on Defense Department websites and the dangers posed by hostile entities aggregating information through a wide variety of web-based resources.

The old threats have not gone away, but there is a new area of concern that (Operations Security) officers and planners must consider – the Internet. A disciplined approach to (Information Security) procedures in conjunction with the (Operations Security) process will ensure that sensitive but unclassified information is properly safeguarded.<sup>13</sup>

Although the proliferation of social media and file sharing websites could not have been foreseen, the concerns remain the same 13 years later.

Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, the chief of public affairs for the U.S. Army, commissioned an Army Social Media Handbook in 2011. In it, he stressed the importance of recognizing that information was moving more quickly than ever before and that public affairs practitioners must use all tools at their disposal to tell the Army's story. He specifically mentioned the positive use of social media by the military during natural disasters, including the Midwest floods and tornados of 2011, and the importance of being "the first with the truth, whether it's good or bad."<sup>14</sup> Lanza writes, "Social media can be a valuable tool for Army organizations. It helps Army organizations and Army commands establish credibility, accessibility and authenticity."<sup>15</sup>

Between the publication of the 1998 website administrative policy and the Army's Social Media Handbook, a debate that is far from settled raged throughout the armed forces and Defense Department. Service branches wavered between restricting access to social media sites and allowing the current, more liberal policy that stresses personal responsibility for operations security.

Perhaps the driving force behind the military's movement towards attempting to cautiously-yet-enthusiastically embrace social media is the recognition that social media are not going away and that service members are already populating those areas. From 2005 through 2007, social media boomed in popularity. MySpace, one of the first popular social media sites, was sold to NewsCorps for \$580 million.<sup>16</sup> Facebook, which had once been restricted to college campuses, opened up to anyone with an e-mail address in September 2006.<sup>17</sup> A new site, Twitter, began to grow exponentially in 2007.<sup>18</sup>



Larry Clavette, director of Air Force Public Affairs Agency in Washington D.C., recognized that young Airmen were on social media sites, whether the leadership was or not.<sup>19</sup> In a presentation, Clavette cited a study that said more than 50 percent of Airmen used social media platforms in 2006. They were having conversations regardless of the Air Force's "official" stance. That number was reflected in the other services and has grown with the expansion of social media platforms.

The same year Clavette's study was published, Jarret M. Brachman published an article titled "High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda's Use of New Technology." In it, Brachman traces the organization's use of the internet before 9/11 and heightened sophistication afterwards. Brachman argues that by effective use of internet resources, Al-Qaeda was able to evolve into an "organic social movement, making its virulent ideology accessible to anyone with a computer."<sup>20</sup>

In an editorial published in the *Los Angeles Times* earlier that year, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recognized that the U.S. military was losing the information battle. At that time, public affairs was largely reactive, focusing much of its efforts on responding to information requests, while enemy forces were increasingly sophisticated. While the U.S. military struggled to find a coherent policy and viable use for new media, Rumsfeld said, "the vacuum will be filled by the enemy and by hostile news sources who most assuredly will not paint an accurate picture of what is actually taking place."<sup>21</sup> Despite mounting evidence that increasing enemy sophistication was causing major problems for U.S. forces in overseas contingency operations, change was slow in coming.

In May 2007, the Defense Department issued an order blocking a specific set of recreational websites. In a press briefing, Rear Adm. Elizabeth Hight, the vice director of

the Defense Information Systems Agency, said the intent was “to preserve military bandwidth for operational missions and enhance DOD network security.”<sup>22</sup> At the time, Hight said the military was primarily concerned with MySpace and YouTube.

Hight stressed in her briefing that similar measures had already been taken two years earlier in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the policy change would affect only computers on the Defense Department network. Service members and their families could still access the sites at home. To drive home the point that it was a matter of bandwidth and security of the Defense Department network, Hight stressed that service members overseas could access the sites in Morale, Welfare, and Recreation tents.

Hight’s minor concession indicated a major cultural shift. Organizationally, the military began taking steps that reflected its understanding that while it could not control social media sites themselves, it could prescribe a code of conduct and guidelines for how service members could behave and what they could post on the sites. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell is currently the commander of the NATO training mission in Afghanistan. In 2008, he was the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth. On April 9, 2008, Caldwell issued a memo titled “Command Policy #19-08, Combined Arms Center (CAC) Interactive Internet Activities.” In the memo, Caldwell laid out basic guidelines for blogging that reflect those around the military. The memo stressed accuracy, attribution, propriety, and, of course, operations security.

Across the military there was increasing pressure to find a compromise between operations security and social media sites. Some commanders and units had found social media sites to be effective tools. Others continued to see them as a very real threat to their troops.

On July 24, 2009, the Joint Public Affairs Support Element of U.S. Joint Forces Command issued a paper titled, “Social Media and Department of Defense Communication.” The stated purpose of the paper was to inform leaders about social media, assess the current use of social media across the Department of Defense and other government agencies, examine the risks and benefits of social media, and, ultimately, recommend a way forward.<sup>23</sup> As Secretary Rumsfeld had recognized three years before the paper’s publication, the paper recognized that if military agencies were not communicating on social media, they were effectively abandoning a battlefield. That battlefield was even more critical in light of the changing media market. As traditional print outlets continued to decline, social media sites like Twitter were exploding.<sup>24</sup> Although all five military branches were experimenting with social media with varying success, an examination of sites and strategies quickly revealed there was no consistency of effort.<sup>25</sup>

On Aug. 27, 2009, Lt. Gen. Jeffrey A. Sorenson, chief information officer for the Department of the Army, released a memo defining social media tools and touching on the issue of operations security. Because many soldiers were operating on bases or networks under the jurisdiction of other services, Sorenson placed responsibility for correct and prudent behavior directly on the individual.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to individual soldiers having access to social media sites, they also have access to photographic and video technology that has grown by leaps and bounds in the past 10 years. If social media sites are viewed as bullets, smart phones are the rifles from which they are fired. On an iPhone or Blackberry, service members can take

photographs and videos and immediately upload them to social media sites or e-mail them to friends. Once again, this has been a source of trepidation for commanders.

Throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, instant communications have allowed unedited, un-vetted footage to travel directly from theater to America's living rooms. In some instances these images have portrayed war crimes and resulted in criminal prosecutions and/or widespread public outrage. Amazingly, in every instance, the photographs and videos taken were not taken by outside media or civilians, but by service members themselves.

Four of the most prominent instances were:

- In 2003-2004, Abu Ghraib came to public attention after photographs taken by members of the 372<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company. <sup>27</sup>
- In 2007, a group of U.S. Marines filmed themselves throwing a puppy off a cliff. <sup>28</sup>
- In 2010-2011, the so-called 'Kill Team,' a group of four soldiers from 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division took pictures of themselves allegedly committing war crimes. <sup>29</sup>
- In 2012, a video of Marines urinating on the corpses of what appear to be dead insurgents was most likely taken by another Marine. <sup>30</sup>

In all cases, the footage and photographs resulted in investigations and, in the first three incidents, punishment. It is notable that the exposure of these crimes was not the result of journalism, but was more or less self-reported by the Soldiers and Marines involved.

Just as with social media platforms, the military has recognized that the technology is out there, and has chosen to stress responsible use to combat any possible negative effects. Through programs like the Army Capabilities Integration Center and the Connecting Soldiers to Digital Applications programs, the Army is taking a proactive approach to making sure its soldiers have access to new technology.

Matt MacLaughlin, who said the apps are part of his team's mission to increase training effectiveness, also encountered resistance in the form of firewalls and enhanced required security features.<sup>31</sup> The team was able to overcome those limitations and push forward. The Army is also helping them move forward by increasing soldiers' access to digital technology.

One way the Army is doing that is through an ambitious program to issue each soldier a smartphone. According to Lt. Gen. Michael Vane, director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center, a pilot program has already been launched.<sup>32</sup> While the program may seem forward-thinking on the surface, it is actually reactive. Joint chief of staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey has gone on record saying that there is already a capability gap between the U.S. military and enemy forces where smartphones are concerned.<sup>33</sup>

Like social networking, the smart phone program also constitutes a security risk. Vane argues that the benefit of new information outweighs the risk associated with operating over an unsecure network. Vane echoed Dempsey, saying that both Afghan National Army soldiers and Taliban insurgents use smartphones while the U.S. military continues to use less user-friendly radios.

In December 2010, soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Combined Arms Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division were issued smartphones during a field test. The goal of the test

was to see how these soldiers would interact with their chain of command using text messages, applications, and other tools inherent to the technology.<sup>34</sup>

At Fort Lee soldiers going through advanced individual training in the unit supply specialist course were issued smartphones as part of their curriculum. The program, which began in July 2010, is the first of its kind.<sup>35</sup> The program has been successful enough that it is being adopted in other schools, including the Explosive Ordnance Course at the Army's Ordnance School.

Despite the military's embrace of new technologies and media, there are still major operational security concerns. Just as the military had to kowtow to the idea of losing control of its messages by engaging in two-way, uncontrolled conversations on social media sites, it has also had to adopt prioritizing transparency over security in some situations. That is not to say that the military is encouraging security violations. Instead, there is an organization-wide understanding that holds the potential benefits of social media are worth the risks.

On Feb. 25, 2010, the office of the deputy secretary of defense issued Directive-Type Memorandum 09-026, Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-based Capabilities. The document is often cited as having established the legitimacy of social media on Defense Department computers operating on the Non-Classified Internet Protocol Router Network, or, NIPRNET. The vast majority of all Defense Department computers are on the NIPRNET, so allowing access to social media on them was a major step forward.

The document did leave some restrictions on the NIPRNET. Access to websites related to pornography, gambling and hate-groups remained banned. Furthermore,

commanders retained the right to take “immediate and commensurate actions, as required, to safeguard missions.”<sup>36</sup> These include limiting access to the Internet for the purposes of security or maintaining bandwidth.

The U.S. Army Social Media Handbook spells out personal and unit security concerns. In addition to reminding soldiers not to give out information that could be combined with other information to give the enemy a better understanding of U.S. forces and potential weaknesses, it provides a list of steps soldiers can take to ensure their own security.<sup>37</sup>

The policies and procedures the Defense Department has pursued over the past 10 years reflect a growing belief that the secret to better operations security is better education. Public affairs officers, signal officers, and noncommissioned officers routinely make presentations to service members about how to avoid endangering themselves, their units, and their families. The military’s stated goal is to increase transparency and understanding – it is not to endanger lives. In the Missouri National Guard, every deploying unit and their family members receive a public affairs briefing that explains both the benefits and potential drawbacks of social media sites and smart phones. Once again, personal responsibility is the key.

Because policy is malleable, it is impossible to say where the next major developments will come in this area of research. It is fully possible that in a larger-scale war - or if there is another incident like Abu Ghraib - harsher regulations could be imposed on social networking.

As it stands right now from the literature, the military has been making genuine efforts to increase transparency and accessibility. The cost, of course, is control. That

remains scary territory for the military; however, for the time being, the military appears to be willing to take that risk. As the policy letters, presentations, and guidance have developed over the past 10 years, there is a clear movement towards greater transparency at the highest levels. With Gen. Dempsey as the Joint Chief of Staff, that trend looks to continue in the immediate future.

While the center of controversy remains fixed on overseas missions, how these new media can be and have been leveraged by the National Guard during state emergencies has emerged as a new and vibrant topic, worthy of further study. Simply put, social media have not just become a part of the public affairs culture, but have become the public affairs culture. Heather Blanchard, co-founder of Crisis Commons USA, told the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence in 2011, “Now more than ever, using social media during a disaster or crisis is a must do, rather than a nice to do. If you don’t listen to and communicate with the community you are putting yourself at a huge disadvantage. The conversation is happening around you; ignore it at your peril.”<sup>38</sup>

How social media were used to tell the National Guard’s story and relay emergency information during Missouri’s 2011 crises came as a direct result of the policies the Defense Department has pursued during the past decade. As noted by the inclusion of Missouri’s floods and tornado in Maj. Gen. Lanza’s introduction to the U.S. Army’s Social Media Handbook, the Missouri National Guard has also been influential through its response.

For the future of military public affairs policy and practice, understanding the benefits and possible dangers of social media during a state emergency is key to finding a way forward that completes the military’s mission while minimizing harm. By reviewing



the steps taken by the Missouri National Guard throughout 2011 and the evolution of its own policy and tactics, the military might better understand how to use social media as a tool to expand upon and improve its existing outreach capabilities.

## Operation Show Me Bitter Rain: The 2011 Blizzard

### 2011 Blizzard Overview:

On January 31, 2011, Gov. Nixon mobilized Missouri National Guard to support anticipated blizzard relief operations. This mobilization marked the first time in Missouri history the Guard was called to duty before what was projected to be an imminent disaster.<sup>39</sup> For the first time in living memory, Missouri National Guard state public affairs officer Maj. Tamara Spicer said, the Missouri National Guard was called up before the disaster actually struck.<sup>40</sup> This proactive deployment would be used again by Gov. Nixon when record floodwaters threatened the northwestern part of the state five months later.

As the National Guard began staging units at key sites in Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City and southwest Missouri, predictions for the storm were dire. According to the *Kansas City Star*, 8-12 inches were predicted in the Kansas City metropolitan area.<sup>41</sup> Fifty miles north, the *St. Joseph News Press* was predicting seven to nine inches.<sup>42</sup> In Springfield, the *News-Leader* predicted record snowfalls of 13-20 inches.<sup>43</sup> In St. Louis, the *Post-Dispatch* told readers to expect upwards of 20 inches of snow.<sup>44</sup>

Through most of the state, reality lined up with predictions. Eighteen inches of snow blanketed southwest Missouri.<sup>45</sup> Ten inches covered Springfield by Feb 2.

<sup>46</sup>Stockton, in Cedar County, received 15 inches of snow.<sup>47</sup> Hannibal was hit with 20-24 inches of snow.<sup>48</sup> Jim Salter, of the *Associated Press*, wrote “the storm was, if not unprecedented, extraordinarily rare.”<sup>49</sup>

Of the areas where Missouri National Guard soldiers and airmen had been staged, only St. Louis was largely spared by the storm. According to *Associated Press* reports, the city received only three inches of precipitation, “most of it sleet.”<sup>50</sup>

The end of the snowfall did not mark the end of the emergency. Following the storm, conditions continued to be poor thanks to high winds that blew the loosely-packed snow around.<sup>51</sup> The *Associated Press* reported that snow drifts and mountains of snow ensured enduring conditions that were “irritating at best and perilous at worst.”<sup>52</sup>

For the approximately 600 Missouri National Guard soldiers and airmen mobilized for the storm, operations began even as the snow was falling and would continue until the fallen snow had receded to manageable levels.<sup>53</sup> According to the initial news release sent out by the National Guard on Feb. 1, the Guard’s anticipated mission sets included route clearance for emergency vehicles, door-to-door safety visits, supply delivery, and generator support.<sup>54</sup> An additional skill set that had not previously been used was that of using military vehicles to bring emergency responders to patients and to bring patients to hospitals. This was the first time that those particular missions had been assigned during a state emergency mission.

#### **Missouri National Guard Public Affairs Response:**

With the storm quickly approaching, the Missouri National Guard public affairs office put together a plan for teams to support the areas where the majority of soldiers and airmen were staging.<sup>55</sup> These teams would be made up of the local civilian unit public affairs representative as well as uniformed personnel. For many of the soldiers from the 70,<sup>th</sup> this marked the first time working with a UPAR during an emergency. The

experience allowed the public affairs team to pair up its fulltime experience with military expertise, Spicer said.

“UPARs bring a lot of experience with local media and the local units,” Spicer said. “The MPAD brings state of the art equipment and all the military support gear needed, like Humvees.”<sup>56</sup>

In Kansas City the team consisted of UPAR Rachel Knight and Sgt. Lindsey Rost, of the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. Rost, a former member of the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (MPAD), was filling a public affairs position at the brigade level. The Kansas City effort would result in the biggest news story of the blizzard when soldiers from the 1-129<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery helped an expectant mother to the hospital.

In Springfield, UPAR Ann Keyes worked with a team from the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment consisting of Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins and Spc. Sarah Lupescu. The Springfield mission would reveal significant problems with the initial public affairs response that would necessitate the need for a revised 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment standard operating procedures.<sup>57</sup>

In St. Louis UPAR Bill Phelan worked with a 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment team consisting of Staff Sgt. Christopher Robertson and Spc. Jacqueline Courtney. Because the reality of the storm never matched the severity of the predictions, the St. Louis mission also highlighted shortfalls in the detachment.

At state headquarters in Jefferson City, a headquarters element supported the three teams. Maj. Tamara Spicer, state public affairs officer and detachment commander, led the headquarters with the support of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Quin, the deputy state public affairs

officer and detachment team leader, and Sgt. Jon Dougherty, the administrative noncommissioned officer for the detachment.

The mission marked the first time the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment had been activated for state emergency duty since its deployment to Kosovo in 2007-2008. For most of the team's soldiers, it was the first state emergency mission. Although detachment members had the training to complete their mission, the blizzard revealed many shortfalls in the unit's training and preparedness. Collins recalled:

We found out we were going to go down there and that we were also going to send a team to St. Louis. Maj. Spicer determined who was going to go and be on each team. It took a pretty long amount of time to get the teams together to get going.<sup>58</sup>

There were a number of factors in getting a team ready to go, said Dougherty.

“We had to coordinate where they were going to go, who they were going to link up with when they got downrange,” Dougherty said. “Of course, weather was a factor. Because it was a blizzard, it was snowing the whole time. We had to coordinate when they got down there how they were going to get their products out.”<sup>59</sup>

Some shortfalls were identified immediately. Now-retired Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins, the detachment's readiness noncommissioned officer, said that the detachment's equipment was not prepared for a quick deployment. Camera and video kits were not properly staged. The unit had recently received new Humvees, but did not have emergency equipment. According to Collins:

In some ways, we were prepared in terms of having the equipment we needed to have and vehicles we could take and that sort of thing. I think that I thought I was prepared to go down, but I didn't have the whole scope of a state emergency mission versus going to Kosovo, and the difference between working in the parameters of a state emergency mission versus working in the parameters of a regular deployment.<sup>60</sup>

In Kosovo, Collins said, the detachment's soldiers were working at a moderate, but not urgent, speed. They would cover training, events, and news stories but without constant pressure to turn around product quickly.

Expectations were high for the teams as they headed out the door. However, the detachment would soon learn those expectations did not match reality.

“The expectation was that was that we would get product out as quickly as possible, but the reality was that because of the logistics, it wasn't possible to do that,” Dougherty said “Between being out for hours at a time on these missions and not being able to access communications equipment or technology so they could get the product out, that was kind of a problem right off the bat.”<sup>61</sup>

While most of the detachment's soldiers used social media sites in their personal lives, they were unfamiliar on how to use them in an emergency setting. When the unit deployed to Kosovo, the military had not yet fully embraced social media. Furthermore, there were serious security issues that hampered access to the internet.

“We had a web presence, but it was very difficult to manage that because of the way the servers were run,” Collins said. “It was very minimal.”<sup>62</sup>

### **State Headquarters:**

As the teams were being dispatched, the state headquarters staff consisting of Maj. Spicer, Staff Sgt. Dougherty, Lt. Quin and UPAR Nancy Lane was responding to media calls and preparing information for release. Because the blizzard was poised to hit Jefferson City, the staff prepared to spend a few days at the Ike Skelton Training Site.

On January 31, as teams were being established and deployed, the Missouri National Guard sent out the first of 15 news releases specifically tied to the winter storms. Of those, 13 were sent out in the next five days.

In addition to the ongoing mission, the state public affairs staff had a number of staff and administrative roles to fill. By the time activation occurred, the staff had already put together a public affairs annex to be added to the operation plan and talking points that would be disseminated to senior leadership and the task force. Representatives also attended daily battle-update briefings. These briefings presented an opportunity to show senior leadership what the public affairs section was doing, what key messages and talking points needed to be disseminated, the level of media interest, and the concerns being reflected in new and traditional media.

The blizzard marked the first major state emergency mission in which the Missouri National Guard used social media. Throughout the blizzard, the Missouri National Guard monitored its own social media pages closely. Almost immediately after the mission began, First Sgt. Mary Williams observed a major change in the way people communicated.

As we saw people wanting more and more information, people relied on our social media sites, and we saw an increase in the number of people who were participating in our social media sites and who became ‘friends’ or chimed in based on the fact that they were looking on information for their county or city or wherever they lived. It did play a major role in how we disseminated information.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the Guard’s own social media sites, it became evident quickly that individuals in different communities were either communicating on the social media sites of their local first responders or making their own event-specific pages.

Using those pages to gather and disseminate information and quickly became part of the public affairs response, Williams said:

I remember being in the office and having people who were in the field call back and say, ‘Hey, make sure we connect with the social media sites that were created specifically relating to the state emergency duties,’” Williams said. “We linked to all those sites as well.”<sup>64</sup>

During subsequent state emergencies – monitoring of social media became standard operating procedure for the public affairs community. It would also spark a debate between the public affairs office and the intelligence section over which was the more appropriate office to conduct that monitoring.

Over the course of the emergency, the public affairs office supported media requests, mainly by telephone. In addition, the office oversaw all the public affairs assets in the field. Those assets primarily consisted of unit public representatives and 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment soldiers.

In each case teams would face challenges that would both hinder the current mission and lead to improvements that would help later missions.

**From the field:**

Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Collins and Spc. Lupescu arrived at the Springfield armory shortly after midnight on Feb. 1. With snow already falling, the ride down in the Humvee had been difficult. After making contact with Ann Keyes, the local unit public affairs representative, the two found room to set up, stowed their equipment, and went to sleep.

“Once we got going and got down there, I think my expectation was that we were going to hook up with leadership in Springfield in order to go out on missions and get



back b-roll and images, and that sort of thing that the major wanted to push out to the civilian news media so they could use it in their stories,” Collins said.<sup>65</sup>

Early the next morning cracks began to appear in their plan, Collins said:

One thing I didn’t realize in going out the door is that in going to Springfield, we weren’t actually going to the command post,” Collins said. “Looking back, that was probably the first mistake we made – deciding to go to Springfield instead of going to where the command post was.<sup>66</sup>

Although the vast majority of soldiers mobilized for the mission were staying at the Springfield armory, the command post where the public affairs element normally sets up was located 50 miles southwest at the Pierce City armory. In ideal conditions and with a civilian vehicle, the drive would have taken over an hour.

Because the team did not have face-to-face contact with the unit command, they were reliant on cell phones to communicate. Collins said he and Lupescu were also relying on the local unit public affairs representative, Ann Keyes, to keep them informed. Because her role at that time largely centered on media coordination by phone, Keyes was for the most part staying stationary .

The idea made sense on paper and would work in subsequent emergencies. During the blizzard though communications were hampered by poor phone reception as well as the fact that Keyes’ phone was often tied up with media calls. Collins recalls:

In the many instances where we weren’t with the UPAR, it was very difficult to get into communications with her because she was always on the phone with other military personnel trying to track what was going on and getting it sorted out. For us, getting to the missions and getting to what was going on so we could get material for our news releases was the biggest hurdle we ran into.<sup>67</sup>

Communication would become one of the key areas Collins and the MPAD would identify for improvement before the next state emergency mission. Collins said:

One of the things we took away from that was that there needed to be more regular communications. Basically, we communicated when we arrived, communicated when we were starting out the next day, and sort of communicated at the end of the day. As it went on, we realized there needed to be a lot more.<sup>68</sup>

During their time in Springfield, Collins and Lupescu participated in one major mission that highlighted shortfalls the MPAD had in terms of equipment, logistics, and mindset. The team met up with soldiers from the 294<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, based in Carthage and Anderson. The 294<sup>th</sup> had received a mission to escort and aid Highway Patrol officers to search for stranded motorists along a 30-40 mile stretch of I-44 outside Joplin. Collins said:

We left from Springfield and were supposed to meet up near Joplin with two of the National Guard vehicles and go on these patrols and follow them around. Apparently the road from the armory where the two vehicles were coming from to get to I-44 was really bad, because --- they probably had a quarter of the distance to go that we did, but we still go there before they did.<sup>69</sup>

Once the two joined up with their fellow soldiers, the team went down I-44 to meet with the Highway Patrol.

“It took us several hours to get there, and I-44 was closed,” Lupescu said. “The only other vehicles we saw on the highways were stranded semis that were in the ditch, or in rest stops, or wherever they could pull off safely. That was it.”<sup>70</sup>

Travelling was slow-going as well. Even in a Humvee, the roads remained treacherous.

“The road was super bumpy because the snow was packed down – it was kind of like potholes, but it was all snow for the entire drive,” Lupescu said. “And it was still snowing and dark outside. That took a really long time.”<sup>71</sup>

“We followed them around and got some images and information from the Highway Patrol and the Guard members about what they were doing and what was going on and started trying to build some b-roll and enough information for a press release and that sort of thing,” Collins said.<sup>72</sup>

The mission began 30 miles east of Joplin and continued back towards Springfield, Lupescu said<sup>73</sup>. The team found nobody, but checked every abandoned car and truck along the way.

When the Guardsmen and Patrolmen had finished their sweep, the team’s job was just beginning. For a number of reasons, including still being in a deployment mindset and not having fully embraced the continuous news cycle of state emergencies, Collins and Lupescu had not brought their editing equipment with them.

“Due to the nature of how quickly they wanted stuff out, we should have brought our laptops with us wherever we went and gone to the nearest place we could have to produce product and get it sent up,” Collins said. “We didn’t do that. One, because we didn’t really have that mindset when we started out, and number two, we had a snow bank in the back of our vehicle and I didn’t feel comfortable putting gear that fragile into that kind of environment. That was another thing that we had to consider for state emergency duty missions further down the road.”<sup>74</sup>

Due to the bizarre weather conditions both outside and inside their own vehicle, Lupescu said taking equipment with them would have been worse than useless.

“With the vehicle that we had, if we’d taken any more gear it would have been wet,” Lupescu said. “It was snowing inside our Humvee the whole time. Even if I’d taken

an editing system with me on that mission to Joplin, it would have had to have been in a waterproof case.”<sup>75</sup>

The team did not make it back to the Springfield armory until after 1 a.m. At that point, Collins said, all they could do was upload their photos to a computer and begin digitally processing video. They then went to sleep.<sup>76</sup>

Both agreed, in retrospect, that they were too focused on putting out finished products and thereby missed a valuable opportunity. Because of the conditions on the ground – there had been 18 inches of snow in Joplin – media outlets would have had a near impossible time getting around. The team encountered no media during their mission with the 294<sup>th</sup> and Highway Patrol. If they had been able to gather b-roll or pictures, it would likely have been picked up by news outlets.

“We could’ve somehow figured out how to get products back to state faster so they could’ve been posted to social media, whether that’s taking a picture on your phone and texting it up or e-mail it up or shooting some video real quick if you have a way to send it,” Lupescu said. “I was just so focused on getting a product done. If we’d had some b-roll or whatever - anything is better than nothing.”<sup>77</sup>

As the field teams struggled, the first photos for media distribution came from an unlikely source. Jennifer Archdekin, the Kansas City-area UPAR, had been stuck at her home in St. Joseph. Although the snow prevented her from getting to Kansas City, she was able to get to nearby armories. At one, she took a photo of soldiers checking their equipment. Her photo was included with early releases put out through social media and was widely re-printed. Archdekin said:

No one was being rescued, but it did depict the National Guard ramping up to do what they do, and that they were ready for what may come. That’s the beauty of

social media, and especially Twitter. You provide a quick Tweet stating what's going on at that moment.<sup>78</sup>

Spicer said early pictures of soldiers preparing for missions have become standard.

I noticed during Hurricane Sandy coverage, one of the first photos was a Soldier carrying a duffle bag into an armory in Connecticut. In today's 24-hour society, we need to provide images and our public affairs teams needed to be creative in reaching that goal.<sup>79</sup>

The St. Louis team was also having problems getting products out, but for a different reason. Staff Sgt. Christopher Robertson left Jefferson City at the same time as Collins and Lupescu. On his way to St. Louis, he picked up fellow soldier Spc. Jacqueline Courtney. He also made contact with the local UPAR, Bill Phelan.

Unlike Springfield, St. Louis had been spared the worst of the storm. While this was obviously good for the city, it meant there were not many missions for the National Guard. For the most part, soldiers stationed in the area spent their time working with local law enforcement. Robertson recalled:

When we arrived, the unit public affairs representative in St. Louis was already coordinating with civilian media. He already knew where they were going to be interviewing people and had connected them with interviews. It freed up myself and the print journalist to be able to gather our news for our stories, gather our elements for our stories.<sup>80</sup>

The state staff had told the departing teams that video was particularly important on the mission. Since becoming active in social media, Williams said it was easy to see the public's preference for video products.

"People are more inclined to look at a video than they are to read or go out and do anything but see a picture," Williams said. "The written word is secondary to video."<sup>81</sup>

The strength of print over video, as Robertson would discover, is that video needs to be on the scene when events are unfolding. In St. Louis it was difficult to find activity because the storm was not as bad as predicted. According to Robertson:

When you take that operational tempo and match it up with a slow environment, the two can collide and be a little in the middle. When you're trying to gather news as fast as possible and be right first, you often can't expect a zinger, a real compelling story off the bat.<sup>82</sup>

It took Robertson's team a full day longer than Lupescu and Collins to put together a broadcast piece. Robertson attributed the lull to his and Courtney's continual missing of military police, who were moving from area to area. The main reason it was so difficult to put products together was that there was not much going on, Phelan said.

"The storm wasn't as bad in the St. Louis area as predicted," Phelan said. "We encountered no real difficulties other than a lousy heater in the Humvee."<sup>83</sup>

Although there were major learning curves related to production of media, the Missouri National Guard staff excelled in areas such as statewide news releases and media coordination. Throughout the blizzard the Guard continued to send out the latest information on its activities.

While much of the public affairs department's logistical efforts were concentrated on Springfield and St. Louis, the most important story of the blizzard occurred in Kansas City. There, UPAR Rachel Knight joined Sgt. Lindsey Rost, public affairs noncommissioned officer for the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, in responding to local media coverage. The pair divided the workload. Rost went on missions with the task force, while Knight acted as the team's nerve center, fielding media calls. It was in this capacity that Knight learned about a pair of Guardsmen who had helped an expectant mother the hospital. The result was an overwhelmingly positive story that remained the enduring image for the Guard in that disaster. According to Knight:

Two Guardsmen in a (medium tactical vehicle) busted through large snow drifts to bring a lady who was in labor to the ambulance up the road so she could be transported to the hospital. This one act brought media attention nation-wide and

aired on the Weather Channel. With all this and my phone ringing non-stop from the local stations, there wasn't much time for anything else.<sup>84</sup>

Knight first learned of the story from a local television station that had found it through Facebook, she said. After confirming the story with the unit and the state public affairs office, she began coordinating interviews with other interested media outlets. Knight recalled:

After I confirmed the information, I began working with the ambulance district, soldiers and news stations to set up interview with the understanding that the Soldiers may be called away to assist with the response at any time during their interviews. When it was all said and done, Fox 4, KCTV-5, KMBC 9, NBC Action News 41, the Kansas City Star, the Weather Channel, KMBZ News Radio 980, National Public Radio and more had taken an interest in the story. It really was a much bigger story than I had first anticipated it to be. But it made me extremely proud that the media picked a feel-good story to headline with.<sup>85</sup>

In Laclede County Matthew Wilson, who has worked as a UPAR for the Missouri National Guard at Fort Leonard Wood since 2009, was working from the Lebanon armory. Initially, Guard operations were limited to a few military police who reported to the local emergency operations center. Wilson said the Laclede mission was uneventful for the Guard aside from accompanying military police on a run to help emergency responders reach patients.<sup>86</sup>

There was one significant change from his previous state emergency mission, the 2009 ice storms in southeast Missouri. Unlike in 2009, social media sites were being used to transmit information both between the government and public and between agencies.

According to Wilson:

The office of emergency management in Lebanon had its own Facebook page and they posted information to the Missouri National Guard Facebook page as well. That was the first time I'd seen anything like that. That was kind of interesting as

far as people tagging on. It just shows if you keep sharing it, you're able to get your information out to a wider base of people.<sup>87</sup>

By piggybacking off one another's pages, the Guard and the Laclede County emergency operations center were able to reach a wider audience than they might have otherwise had.

"It got to a broader audience," Wilson said. "More people made comments on it. Once some of those folks who were only friends with the Laclede County Emergency Management Agency Facebook page saw ours, they became friends of ours and saw our posts, too."<sup>88</sup>

In emergency operations later in the year, coordinating communications efforts in social media with other government agencies would prove key to a successful response.

Blizzard operations ended much earlier than expected. After the initial snowfall, local agencies were able to step in and bring those areas back into manageable running order. By nightfall on Feb. 3, Lupescu, Collins and Robertson were back in Jefferson City. According to Lupescu:

When we were heading down there we thought it would be longer because they expected Springfield to get hit with ice really hard, but that never happened. It was only snow. We didn't have the power outages and stuff that we were expecting.<sup>89</sup>

As soldiers in the field concentrated on finding stories and creating products, at headquarters much of the effort was focused on utilizing social media in the response. The 2011 blizzard marked the first time the Missouri National Guard had used social media as a response tool. The two most important outlets were Facebook and Twitter. Both were initially part of a larger state effort to get word out about the importance of preparedness.



On January 31, 2011, the Missouri National Guard began using Twitter to spread safety messages in anticipation of impending bad weather. A message telling travelers to be careful on roads, particularly in rural parts of the state, went out even before Gov. Nixon's press conference during which he declared a state of emergency. Later that day the Guard posted another link to winter safety tips. Updates regarding safety tips and traveler information dominated posts before the Guard formally went on mission. Throughout the mission the Guard would continue to post information on road conditions, power outages, and other storm-related information.

At the same time, the Guard was directing readers to its Facebook page for photos and video of ongoing efforts. The aim of this cross-marketing was to ensure that as many people as possible were receiving all messages. In all, eight messages were sent out via Twitter on January 31. According to Guard standard operating procedure developed during the storm and refined through subsequent emergencies, , Twitter can be used as much as needed, whereas sites like Facebook are best updated twice a day maximum.<sup>90</sup>

Guard operations began on February 1. The Guard increasingly used Twitter for quick updates on Guard activities. Although the Facebook and MoGuard.com sites were limited because photos and video had to be uploaded, Twitter gave the Guard more options. Staying within the 140-character limit, the public affairs office began posting simple quotes from leaders and soldiers in the field. A tweet from Spc. Blake Renuard, described as "3<sup>rd</sup> generation Guard" said simply, "I've been stranded out here in conditions like this with no help, so I wanted to be there to help."<sup>91</sup> Shortly thereafter, a post from Lt. Col. Christopher Mickan, of 70<sup>th</sup> Troop Command, gave an overview of the

Guard's current position, saying "We are positioned and postured to execute any mission that comes to us upon request."<sup>92</sup>

Later that day, as operations began, specific mission sets were mentioned online. The 548<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company was heading to Kirksville to assist the local police department.<sup>93</sup> The 1138<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company was assisting Boliver law enforcement help stranded motorists.<sup>94</sup> Even in areas where troops were being staged but did not yet have specific missions, the units were listed as "standing by" in case they were needed. These quick updates were later supplemented with quotes.<sup>95</sup>

While Twitter was aimed at integrating the Missouri Guard's response into the state's prevention efforts, Facebook emerged as an effective means of communicating what the Missouri Guard was doing throughout the Defense Department. The U.S. Army, National Guard Bureau, and U.S Transportation Command were among the sites that picked up Missouri National Guard Facebook posts. Throughout the mission national agencies continued to echo Missouri Guard posts.

In addition to the easy reach it provided to a national audience, the Missouri National Guard also found Facebook to be an effective means by which to echo messages from other state agencies. The Laclede and Phelps County emergency operations centers both posted to the Missouri National Guard Facebook page.<sup>96</sup> Beyond highlighting the cooperation between the Guard and the counties it was supporting, the posts spread information to both the Guard and the county's audiences.

Unlike news releases or interviews, social media allowed for immediate feedback. That feedback was not always positive. On the morning of Feb 2, Spc. Lupescu posted her first broadcast story, a 55-second piece on the joint National Guard/Highway Patrol

mission.<sup>97</sup> The video received almost immediate negative feedback on the Missouri National Guard's Facebook site. A woman who said she had seen Guard vehicles pass a person who needed help posted what she had seen. Her comment, which she quickly took down, received an immediate negative reaction from others on the website.

The first stated:

Jee i like how some one can complain bu do nothing them self and the men and women of the guard has to leav there familys to go help the entier state so instead of complaining about the lil stuff get off ur but and do somethin about it. (*sic*)<sup>98</sup>

The second post read:

AMEN, Rob. Thanks to all the people out there risking their lives for us. My hubby is National Guard And Highway Patrol... All the various agencies involved in the efforts need to be commended!<sup>99</sup>

The National Guard's response was to alert the Joint Operations Center at Guard headquarters that there was a potential issue. The Missouri National Guard public affairs office then posted the following message:

Samantha - very sorry to hear that, if you want to send us details and we can look into it, please send to [ngmo.pao@us.army.mil](mailto:ngmo.pao@us.army.mil).<sup>100</sup>

The initial post was taken down by the poster, who then posted that it was "not a big deal" that the woman had received help and that the poster herself had a friend who had served in the National Guard and had died while serving in Iraq. The original poster never contacted the Missouri National Guard public affairs office. All told, the interaction, from stop to start, had lasted just over three hours.

“Negative posts are difficult,” Spicer said. “Over the years, we have grown to accept them and leave them in place. This allows the poster to have shared their concerns. We can also use that information to improve our response.”<sup>101</sup>

Lupescu, who manages the Missouri National Guard’s social media pages as part of her fulltime job, said the interaction was fairly standard.

“We don’t usually see too many negative comments or comments where they’re yelling or lecturing us,” Lupescu said. “When we do, we’ll comment back or send a direct message back depending on the situation. They’re usually cool with it, whether it’s for state emergency duty or anything else.”<sup>102</sup>

First Sgt. Mary Williams gained extensive state emergency duty experience with the Florida National Guard. She said social media has been a godsend for allowing individuals to bring their concerns directly to the Guard.

I remember being in Florida and the adjutant general, the first time they decided to call the public affairs out was because a person was standing in front of a house that was burning and said, ‘Where is the National Guard? They’re not here helping us.’

Our adjutant general back then was livid. We had over 3,000 service members who were out on duty, and those people actually thought the Florida Guard wasn’t out there doing its job. When you hear about it on the nightly news, how long had that festered in the local community before somebody talked about it on the news?<sup>103</sup>

By giving the public a direct means of communicating publicly with the Guard, social media is actually enhancing the Guard’s response capabilities as well as its ability to communicate directly with the public on specific concerns, Williams said.

I enjoy knowing that a person is going to be able to go to our social media site and say, ‘Hey, I haven’t seen the Guard in this area, but they need to be there,’ and we being able to say or post a picture within five minutes and say, ‘They’re actually there, you just didn’t see them,’ versus hearing about it on the nightly news.<sup>104</sup>

Although the blizzard response lasted only a few days, it allowed the public affairs community to identify a number of gaps in their responses as well as some areas that could be improved upon in future emergencies.

### **Messaging Analysis:**

Although the 70<sup>th</sup> identified numerous shortfalls in its own response plan, the mission was a success for the Missouri National Guard public affairs office. Between February 1 and February 24, the Missouri National Guard's clipping service found 164 newspaper articles featuring the Missouri National Guard's blizzard response. Although emphasis is being put on social media because it is new and offers additional audiences, newspapers remain a force to be reckoned with. The 164 articles examined reached a potential audience of 2,210,877 subscribers.

There were five core messages that the Missouri National Guard public affairs office wants to get out to the public in every emergency.

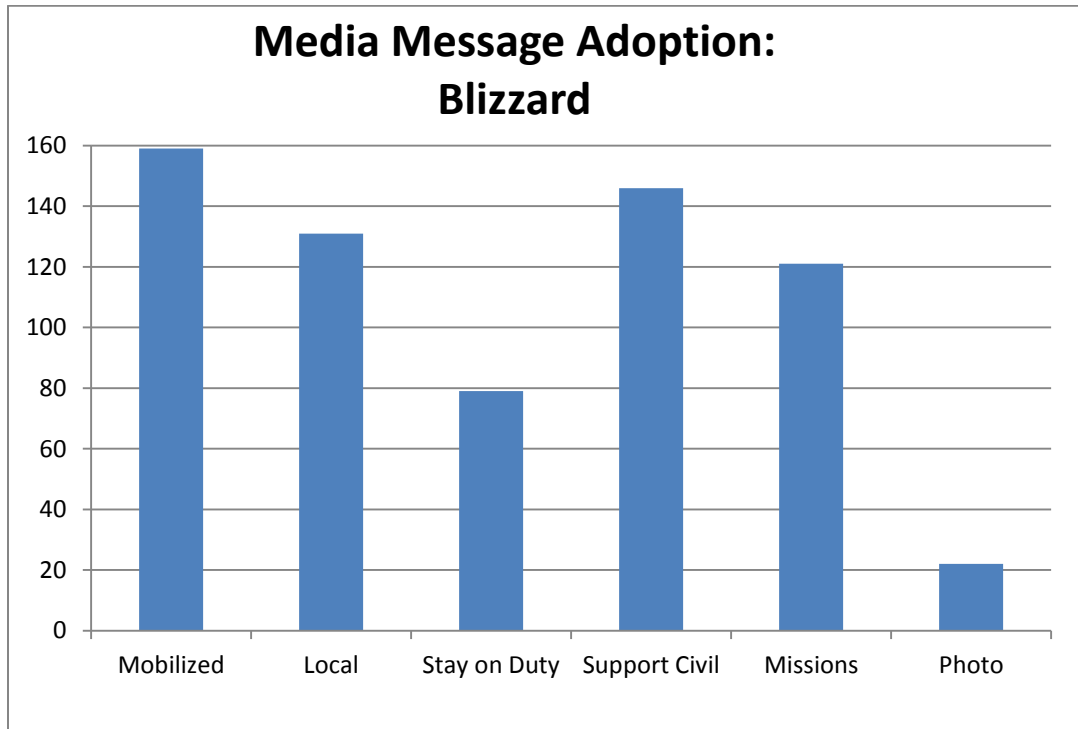
- 1) The Missouri National Guard is mobilized
- 2) The local angle, whether it is a local unit responding to a disaster or a local disaster that is being responded to.
- 3) The Missouri National Guard is working in support of civil authorities
- 4) The Missouri National Guard will remain on duty until released by local authorities and the governor.
- 5) Specific missions the Missouri National Guard is performing.

The specific points can be applied to any emergency even though specific talking points or mission sets might change.



**Figure 2.2 – This chart outlines the messaging included in all Missouri National Guard blizzard news releases.**

The following graph demonstrates how those messages appeared in 165 news articles.



**Figure 2.3 – This chart reflects how many newspaper articles picked up the Guard's intended messages.**

The Missouri National Guard was very successful with four of the five talking points. In the 100 articles analyzed, 100 percent included the mobilization message; 81.7 percent included local information; 90.24 percent included that the Guard would remain on duty until released by the governor; and 75 percent included information on specific missions.

The one command message not picked up with any regularity was that of the Missouri National Guard working in support of civil authorities. That message was picked up in only 25 percent of articles. Tellingly, that message was included in only 40 percent of the Missouri National Guard's printed news releases, versus 100 percent for messages 1, 2 and 5 and 93.33 percent for message 4.

The overwhelming number of articles were neutral to positive. Approximately 97 percent of articles contained no negative aspect. An editorial in *the Independence Examiner* stated the effectiveness of the information campaign succinctly: "We'll never know how many lives have been spared and suffering averted thanks to good information and common sense."<sup>105</sup>

Of the articles collected, two could be construed as negative while three others were potentially negative. In neither case did the negative articles have anything to do with specific National Guard actions, but rather with communications to and from county emergency operations centers.

The first of these appeared on February 4. The Polk County Sheriff's Office complained that it had not been offered assistance or equipment by a National Guard unit, the *Bolívar Herald Free Press* reported.<sup>106</sup> While the article was negative, it was not negative towards the National Guard but towards county politics. A self-described

“stubborn” sheriff had not been contacted by his county emergency operations center, but also had not contacted them nor attended any briefings before the emergency.

Five days later the *Bolivar Herald Free Press* published a “Grins and Groans” article. While the paper praised the storm response, it singled out the sheriff’s office and the county for not communicating.<sup>107</sup> Still, the article pointed out an area of possible improvement for the Missouri National Guard public affairs to learn from. The county’s southern commissioner said he, “thought everyone knew a disaster declaration meant assistance from the National Guard.”<sup>108</sup>

During a review of the storm response, both the Callaway County Ambulance District and National Guardsmen expressed dismay that it had taken a Guard unit a full day to arrive on-scene after a request for assistance had been approved. “They didn’t understand why it took so long for them to be deployed. They were as frustrated as we were about the delay,” Charles Anderson said in the *Jefferson City News Tribune*.<sup>109</sup>

A longer version of that same story appeared in the *Fulton Sun*. In it, Michelle Kidwell, the Emergency Operations Center director for Callaway County, said that the Guard had estimated six hours for the support to arrive, but it took more than 24 hours. Kidwell said she tried to keep the Humvees in Callaway County to assist ambulance calls but that “they didn’t want to stay here.”<sup>110</sup>

In Linn emergency managers, not realizing how bad the situation was, refused an offer for Guard Humvees on the first day of the operation. By the time the county realized they needed the Humvees to get medical personnel to areas covered by snow, the Guard personnel had been reassigned to other missions. It took an extra day to secure a replacement team. In that time, a patient died during an emergency call. Mark Schaefer,



the Osage Ambulance Director, told the *Linn Unterrified Democrat* that while he would not say the lack of effective transportation was the cause of the patient's death, it could have been a factor.<sup>111</sup>

None of the negative stories involved particular Guard actions as much as they did potential issues with the state emergency response model as a whole.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Although it lasted less than a week, the blizzard response was critical in allowing the Missouri National Guard public affairs staff to identify gaps and build on what went well. The biggest source of problems was the very reason the soldiers and airmen were called up in the first place: snow. "Looking back, the weather itself was the biggest frustration," Spicer said. "It impeded movement and made all efforts more difficult."<sup>112</sup>

While the Missouri National Guard avoided any major negative press, the mission proved less than successful for the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. The detachment's members had the skill sets they needed, but lacked a full understanding of the urgency of state emergency missions. There were also major equipment, logistical, and communications issues that needed to be worked out.

For Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Collins, the missions had been a wakeup call on the reality of the news cycle during emergencies.

The biggest thing was realizing that the news cycle runs much different in a state emergency than it does really at any other time," Collins said. "There's a lot more media interest, which definitely puts the pressure on the public affairs office, and that trickles down to the teams. The second thing was that the gear wasn't all prepared. That slowed us down from getting out in a timely manner."<sup>113</sup>

The detachment's leadership assigned noncommissioned officers to formalize goals, identify areas where the response had been weak, and implement realistic solutions. During the unit's March and April drills, state emergency responses were discussed at length.

A major, immediate change addressed the composition of the deployed teams. Because many of the problems the teams had encountered on mission had to do with coordination and organization, a public affairs officer or senior noncommissioned officer was added as a team leader.

"Expanding the team allowed us to split up if we needed to – maybe send one soldier in this direction to cover this story while the other soldier when in this direction to cover this story, with the officer team leader in the middle coordinating that effort," said Staff Sgt. Jon Dougherty.<sup>114</sup>

The addition of an officer also meant another asset to take photos, gather quotes, write stories, arrange media interviews, and coordinate with the state public affairs office. It also freed both soldiers to concentrate fully on putting together products.

Communications benchmarks were also instituted. Teams were expected to check in much more frequently with both the state public affairs office and the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD administrative noncommissioned officers than they had been during the blizzard.

"We needed to communicate more with the support back at state headquarters, and needed to have a better system for communicating with the UPAR we were assigned to," Collins said.<sup>115</sup>

Product expectations were also formalized. Each section – print and broadcast – was expected to generate a minimum of one product each day on a state emergency

mission. Added emphasis was placed on photographs and b-roll, both of which tend to be picked up by news outlets and Defense Department agencies.

These issues came up for discussion at the annual state joint public affairs conference held that April as well. At the conference uniformed members from the Army and Air National Guard were able to identify shortfalls and offer solutions. The additional input from public affairs personnel outside the MPAD was implemented into the new standard operating procedure.

With flooding quickly approaching Missouri, Collins found the detachment to be much more prepared. According to Collins:

There were a lot more personnel in the unit that had a much better idea of what the expectation was going out the door and what they needed to do to be successful with that expectation when they got where they were going. The awareness was there. I think that lead to the remaining three (state emergency missions) being much more successful.<sup>116</sup>

While the soldiers of the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD are traditional Guardsmen, meaning they drill one weekend a month and do a two-week annual training each year, the civilian UPARs work as fulltime support in their areas. As a result, they are usually much more familiar with the local area, command, and media markets. This meant that the UPARs were already laying the groundwork while the MPAD teams were en route.

In addition to their media coordination duties, the UPARs were very successful with ensuring the MPAD teams were able to get immediately to work in the area of operations. In past operations, particularly when the MPAD had been deployed to Kosovo, UPARs had been responsible for gathering news stories as well. By getting mobile, uniformed members to handle the gathering process, the public affairs team had more reach and flexibility than ever before.

The blizzard marked the first major state emergency mission since the Missouri National Guard began utilizing social media as a public affairs tool. Prior to 2009, because of a number of factors including network access, the Missouri National Guard had not used social media as an outreach tool. When Maj. Gen. Stephen L. Danner was appointed adjutant general by Gov. Jay Nixon, one of his first directives to the public affairs office was to utilize social media.

First Sgt. Mary Williams said that the state office not only had to continue to work to make sure information was getting out, but also that erroneous information that appeared on social media sites received a quick response.

Information was so perishable, if it didn't get out right then, you had something new that was changing the information. You basically had to be pushing out consistent information regularly, or you might lose the number of people that were coming to your site versus another site. Also, people were going to be putting out information contrary to what you were pushing out, possibly, so you had to be consistent and had to be putting out information fairly fast.<sup>117</sup>

Deployed public affairs teams were also tracking upstart sites or sites run by fellow government agencies. During Operation Show Me Bitter Rain those sites were often county emergency operations centers. By monitoring the information those areas were putting out, the Missouri National Guard could get a better idea of the area of operations. Additionally, these sites served as a resource to which soldiers and airmen could quickly direct public inquiries.

“I remember being in the office and having people who were in the field call back and say, ‘Hey, make sure we connect with the social media sites that were created specifically relating to the state emergency duties.’” Williams said. “We linked to all those sites as well.”<sup>118</sup>

The blizzard offered a clear indication to the Missouri National Guard public affairs team that social media would play a key role in future disasters. During the blizzard the public affairs office scratched the surface of what was possible by working with other agencies, interacting with the public, and posting photos, videos, and real-time updates. At state headquarters there was an almost immediate recognition that the news cycle had changed not only in terms of how quickly information needed to be released, but also through the emergence of new competition in the form of an energized rumor mill. During the next disaster, a flood on the Mississippi River, social media sites were among the most important weapons in the public affairs arsenal.

## Operation Show Me Rising Tide: Southeast Flooding

The Missouri National Guard was mobilized on April 25, 2011, [insert comma] as water in the Mississippi River put a strain on levees throughout the southeast of the state. The affected region sat in the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys where the rivers converge along the shores of Mississippi County near the federally controlled Birds Point Levee.

The flooding was largely the result of a wet winter and higher-than-usual rainfall. The *Southeast Missourian* reported that Cape Girardeau had received 10.81 inches of water – almost three times the average rainfall for April. Rain continued to fall,<sup>119</sup> but rainfall was not the only issue.

The situation was exacerbated by failing levees. Early in the operation a levee along County Road 607 breached, threatening the area around Poplar Bluff.<sup>120</sup> By the morning of April 26, approximately 400 Missouri National Guard soldiers had arrived in southeast Missouri to support local response efforts.<sup>121</sup> More than 1,000 homes were evacuated and residents were taking shelter in the Black River Coliseum in Poplar Bluff due to flooding along the Black River, a tributary of the Mississippi River.<sup>122</sup> The stakes were high: a levee breach would mean 6,000 homes would have to be evacuated.<sup>123</sup>

On April 26, the *Dexter Daily Statesman* reported that the Mississippi was expected to crest at 43 feet -11 feet above flood stage - with more rain expected.<sup>124</sup> Heavy rains continued to fall in the region. Over a four-day period in late April, more than 15 inches of rain fell in Poplar Bluff.<sup>125</sup> By April 27, conditions in Poplar Bluff had stabilized and the Missouri National Guard turned its focus eastward toward Mississippi County.<sup>126</sup>

Exacerbating an already tense situation for the people of southeast Missouri, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that it was considering intentionally breaching the Birds Point Levee to decrease the levels of the Mississippi River. On April 25, the day Gov. Nixon activated the Missouri National Guard, he released a statement voicing his “serious concerns” about the intentional breaching. He stated that it would affect, “Hundreds of Missouri families and pour a tremendous amount of water into 130,000 acres of prime farmland.” He further called the intentional breaching a “harmful and inappropriate action.”<sup>127</sup>

On April 26, the *Associated Press* called the potential action an, “extraordinary step.”<sup>128</sup> The report stated that Gov. Nixon “objected to the idea,” which would result in flooding 130,000 acres of prime farmland and cause significant and perhaps permanent damage to the region’s agribusiness-based economy. Farmers in the area were particularly concerned about the personal and economic impact a breach would have. The *Dexter Daily Statesman* reported that insurance would not cover a man-made breach and that the Corps would remove sand and gravel from fields only if the property owner was to file a claim.<sup>129</sup>

Meanwhile across the river, the town of Cairo, Ill., [need comma] was threatened with flooding if the levee was not breached. The mayor of Cairo, Judson Childs, said the intentional breach was necessary to save his town. In an *Associated Press* article, Childs compared potential flooding of the 2,800-person town to Hurricane Katrina. “What is most important, farmland or 3,000 lives? Do they want it to be like the Ninth Ward in New Orleans?”<sup>130</sup> Before Hurricane Katrina, 15,000 people lived in New Orleans’ Ninth Ward.<sup>131</sup> The area became a symbol of government negligence and a mismanaged

emergency response. The Corps of Engineers had borne a significant amount of blame for the failure of levees around New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Childs' comment strongly implied that the Corps was willing to allowing history to repeat itself in Cairo.

The Corps' justification for an intentional breach was a law that dated back to the 1920s that allowed for demolition of the levee if gauges reached a certain point.<sup>132</sup> The result was a political battle between the state and federal governments, in which the Missouri National Guard found itself in the middle. On April 27, Gov. Nixon told the *Southeast Missourian*, "I don't want anybody blowing up any levees in my state."<sup>133</sup> In the meantime, the Corps had dispatched a barge full of explosives from Memphis, with an expected arrival date of April 27.<sup>134</sup> Gov. Nixon had Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster file a federal lawsuit to prevent the Corps from blowing the levee.<sup>135</sup>

The Corps stated publicly that the lawsuit would have no effect on its operations. Instead, the Corps was operating solely, "by what the river is doing."<sup>136</sup> The economic price for a demolition was high for Missouri. The *Southeast Missourian* reported that water would cover 130,000 acres – a 30 mile expanse from north to south, in places 10 miles wide. In addition to causing more than 100 homes to be evacuated in the county, the effect of the silt that would be deposited on the farmland would cause significant damage to the area, "for years to come."<sup>137</sup> Attorney General Koster said the layers of silt deposited by the intentional flooding would cause destruction and leave a layer of silt that, "could take as much as a generation to clear."<sup>138</sup>

Gov. Nixon was not alone in opposing the Corps' plan. Sens. Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt, along with U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, of Missouri's 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, opposed the measure. In a joint statement, they wrote,



We are extremely concerned about the consequences of this action and strongly urge that alternative measures be identified. The known and unknown risks of blowing the levee and releasing over one-half million cubic feet per second are sufficient to demand the highest level of attention and accountability.<sup>139</sup>

The congressional members took their grievances directly to the White House but received no reply.

The situation on the ground remained heated. The *Southeast Missourian* reported that residents were increasingly nervous. While myriad local and state agencies opposed the potential breach, the paper reported the decision ultimately fell on the shoulders of one man – Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh of the Corps of Engineers.<sup>140</sup>

Meanwhile, the Corps of Engineers, which was in a no-win situation, had largely alienated the local population. On April 26, the Corps was supposed to make a decision on whether to breach the levee. That decision would take the better part of a week. In the meantime the Corps continued to reiterate to the public that the move was necessary to “ease pressure along the Mississippi” because many areas were still at or near flood stage.<sup>141</sup>

On April 29, the U.S District Judge Stephen Limbaugh ruled that the Corps could blow the levee, “deeming it appropriate to ensure navigation and flood-control along the still-rising Mississippi.”<sup>142</sup> Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster immediately appealed the decision to the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis.<sup>143</sup>

On Saturday, April 30, the court of appeals upheld Judge Limbaugh’s decision. In response, Gov. Nixon mobilized an additional 100 Guardsmen to help evacuate 230 residents and urge more than 800 others to leave the area.<sup>144</sup> The next day, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case.<sup>145</sup> With the law on the side of the Corps of Engineers, the

decision effectively ended the debate about the legality of intentionally breaching the levee.

Meanwhile, the river continued to rise. By May 1, it had already exceeded the record set in 1937 and was expected to crest two feet higher. The Corps of Engineers, despite saying they had not reached a decision on blowing the levee, stressed that the water was adding pressure to the Cairo floodwall.<sup>146</sup>

On May 2, with all of Missouri's legal options exhausted, the Corps of Engineers blew the levee. The Missouri National Guard would remain on duty until May 26. Missions largely stabilized after the Birds Point Levee was blown, and national media interest already greatly subsided, particularly because of the death of Osama bin Laden and the devastating tornado that hit Alabama on April 27. Even outlets that were covering flooding extensively had moved further south.

### **Public Affairs Response:**

Michelle Queiser, the UPAR in Cape Girardeau, had worked on two previous extended state emergency missions, a flood and a hurricane both in 2008. Since then, she had not been called up. As the water rose, she was aware that was going to change.

“We knew it was coming,” Queiser said. “It had been raining for a week. It was just a matter of getting the official word. The guys around here had been getting warnings that this could happen.”<sup>147</sup>

Queiser first went to Poplar Bluff, where levees were threatening to overtop. At first, the mission seemed like a repeat of the 2008 flood.

“In 2008, not only did I have to do the media relations part, but I was still writing stuff at the same time,” Queiser said. “I did stuff for the flood in Poplar Bluff with (fellow UPAR) Ann Keyes, but by the time I got to Sikeston, it had grown so big my focus was taken by coordinating where people needed to go.”<sup>148</sup>

On April 25, a three-person team from the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD was sent to Sikeston. Led by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Quin, the team included a broadcast journalist, Spc. Adam Winters, and a print journalist, Pfc. Elise Higgins. Because all three lived in the Jefferson City area and two worked fulltime in the public affairs office, getting the team mobile was a relatively quick and painless process. The process was expedited by the implementation of a new standard operating procedure aimed at mobilizing teams quickly.

“Going out the door, the team was a lot more prepared,” said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins, the detachment’s readiness noncommissioned officer. “The gear was already ready, they just needed to get it packed up and get going.”<sup>149</sup>

Although there had been major improvements made since the blizzard three months earlier, there was still room for improvement. One key area was Humvee licensing. Although some effort had been made to get licenses for members of the MPAD, Quin and Winters did not yet have theirs. The two had already passed the written test, but Collins needed to have them do the road test before they could leave. That added additional time to a departure process that further slowed when the Humvee broke down and had to be replaced.<sup>150</sup>

The resulting delay meant the team did not reach Sikeston until after midnight. Winters, who had only recently graduated from advanced individual training at Fort Meade, realized the scale of the impending operation even that first night.

We got into Sikeston pretty late at night. Everybody was sleeping in one large gymnasium – it was literally filled with cots from one side to the other side. People were up on stages. Everyone was just sleeping wherever they could. Going in there, seeing that atmosphere, seeing what the living conditions were like, it was like...it almost looked like a refugee camp to be honest with you.<sup>151</sup>

After making contact with Queiser and getting a quick briefing on the situation, the team found places to sleep and an area that would suffice as a work space. With nothing left to be done that evening, they called it a night.

Meanwhile, the state office had already put out an initial news release. The release told the public that the Missouri National Guard was mobilized, working in support of the governor, and had units in the affected area.<sup>152</sup>

During the blizzard mission, the MPAD realized that there was a decided lack of urgency in getting products back to the state headquarters. The team immediately set out to remedy that. Before leaving, they had already received orders to get one story finished each day. According to Winters:

That first day we were trying to push that first story out - the ‘who what when where why’ - to give our general audience a basic idea of why the Missouri National Guard was there helping and assisting the local law enforcement, the local emergency responders.<sup>153</sup>

After the initial interviews, though, Winters still needed b-roll and Higgins needed to get photos and quotes from the soldiers doing the work on the ground. After spending the day with a group of military police, the team returned to the armory only to find there was no way to get product back to the state headquarters. This problem required an innovative solution, Winters said.

“At that time, there wasn’t really a solid internet base set up at the armory, so we ended up going to a McDonalds and using their free wifi to get a product out,” Winters said. “You run into those sort of things, but there’s always a work-around for us.”<sup>154</sup>

Meanwhile, Queiser found herself in a much different position than she had been in during the 2008 floods. At that time, the MPAD was deployed and the UPARs were responsible for both media coordination and putting together products. Building from the lessons learned during the blizzard, Quin told her to remain in the Sikeston armory and work as a liaison with the tactical operations center and on-site media coordinator. In addition to coordinating and doing interviews, Queiser was also responsible for linking media with units that were going into flooded areas.

“I lost track of how many times I put media stations on a (Light Medium Tactical Vehicle) if they wanted to go out into the flood area, because no other vehicles could make it out there,” Queiser said.<sup>155</sup>

Although Spc. Winters was not the first broadcaster called up to state emergency duty for the Missouri National Guard, he was the first one to have the one-product-per-day expectation put on him. In addition to technological and connectivity issues, there were a number of other potential roadblocks.

First was distance. The Sikeston armory was centrally located during the disaster, but the overall area of operations was huge. To drive from the Sikeston armory to the Birds Point Levee was a 30-mile trip – roughly 45-60 minutes in a Humvee. The southern tip of operations, Caruthersville, was nearly 60 miles away. That meant each mission took a minimum of two hours just of travelling.

Additionally, there were serious equipment problems. As Collins and Lupescu had discovered during the blizzard, the MPAD Humvees had their own weather systems. The one the MPAD team used during the flood had a leaky turret. Because of near constant rain, the inside of the vehicle was soaking wet and at times freezing during the mission. Although those impediments slowed the mission down and meant long hours, Winters was still able to meet his daily quota.

Due to severe space limitations in the armory, the team set up at a table in the hallway. Often, the same soldiers who had been working in the flood-zone during the day would stop by to see the photos and video the MPAD team had taken that day. Winters remembered:

We were working in a hallway at that point because we didn't have any place else to go. They'd walk by and they'd see themselves on the computer screen, on film, and they really got excited about that and that their family members could actually see what they were doing. That was an invaluable experience for me. It made me realize that my job is to tell their story. Their job is to live it. If I can show them that I'm making an effort to tell their story correctly, it's worth it.<sup>156</sup>

In telling that story, Winters and Higgins made sure to put in the necessary command messages. These included the specific missions the soldiers were doing, that they were working for civil authorities, and that they would remain on duty. Winters said:

The more that I said it, the more repetitive it got, that message was actually very important message for us to put out there to let our audience base and the local southeast Missourians know that the Missouri National Guard, backed by Gov. Jay Nixon, is going to be here for the long haul. We're going to go through whatever we need to make sure they're in a good position and going to come out of this alright.<sup>157</sup>

The public affairs effort grew into the largest on-site responses in Missouri National Guard history. Six civilian unit public affairs representatives were ultimately called in to

support flood response efforts. Two more, including Winters, were mobilized as part of the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD.

Rachel Knight spent much of the flood stationed in Caruthersville, a town with a population of 6,178.<sup>158</sup> She focused on the impact the flood was having in Caruthersville as water threatened to overtop the seawall. Coming off of the Kansas City blizzard where she was fielding continuous calls from national outlets, it was a welcomed change. Because of the type of event and size of the community involved, Knight found her Caruthersville assignment to be much easier.

During the flooding in southeast Missouri, I really liked being stationed in a small town where things were simple and smooth. I could control the media coming in and out and make sure everything was correct. I established really good working relationships with the town government and media.<sup>159</sup>

As the UPARs focused their efforts on media coordination, the uniformed soldiers of the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD focused on putting together products. Between April 25 and May 18, the staff put together 39 news releases in 23 days. The broadcast team put together 12 products beginning April 25.

As the decision on whether to blow the Birds Point Levee intensified, additional public affairs assets were mobilized. A second three-man team from the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD was deployed to the area of operations. Maj. Spicer also accompanied adjutant general Maj. Gen. Stephen L Danner to the flood zone.

As Spicer and the state leadership journeyed to southeast Missouri, the state public affairs office found itself inundated with calls on another news story. The night before, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had been killed. After 10 years of war, many Missouri media outlets were looking for a local angle on the story and saw the National

Guard, which had deployed more than 17,000 Soldiers and Airmen since 9/11, as a natural one.

Due to ongoing events in southeast Missouri and short manning in the state public affairs office, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Williams crafted a release that would address the bin Laden situation while pointing attention back towards the ongoing flood response efforts.

Williams said:

We were being inundated with a lot of phone calls from media. They wanted our opinion, they wanted to talk about how we felt about what had transpired. We initially contact National Guard Bureau. At the same time, National Guard Bureau was sending us information, but their information came fairly slow.<sup>160</sup>

With no strong guidance from Washington and no real insight into the issue at home, Williams' release acknowledged the importance of the event as a major victory, but reemphasized the importance of the situation facing Mississippi County.

"There was nothing we could say about the bin Laden thing," Williams said. "I remember when media called, they weren't really interested. But they had to take what we gave them."<sup>161</sup>

Although Williams remembered many reporters being understandably dissatisfied with the Missouri National Guard's response, most outlets did run the statement either in part or in full. Although the reporters may not have been happy, the Guard succeeded in managing to acknowledge their story while at the same time pushing the importance of the ongoing flood fight.

With the political and legal argument on blowing the levee settled, state and federal agencies were able to work more closely. The Missouri National Guard and Highway Patrol helped the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by providing media support for the demolition of Birds Point Levee.



Between blowing the Birds Point Levee, the killing of bin Laden, and the extensive damage caused by tornados in Alabama, the national media had already begun to move on from the story. The main media support missions ended the night the levee was blown. Following that, unit public affairs representatives began to return back to their areas. The 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD remained on duty for another week providing media support and doing wrap-up stories.

### **Social Media Analysis**

Throughout the flood the main social media outlets used were Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Attempts were made to upload photos to Flickr, but due to connectivity problems in the overcrowded, under-wired armory, media were ultimately directed to Facebook for pictures. They were instructed to request higher-res versions directly from the state public affairs office if needed.

#### **Twitter**

For many soldiers the flood marked their first chance to use social media outside of a training environment. In addition to giving broadcasters a place to market their products and print journalists an outlet to post more pictures, it also meant instant feedback from the public.

Like many members of the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Sgt. Sarah Lupescu had served on a deployment to Kosovo in 2008. During the yearlong deployment, Lupescu said social media was used only sparingly. Since returning to Missouri and working for the Missouri National Guard fulltime as a contractor, Lupescu said she has seen a major shift in military communications. This is particularly evident in

the interaction between the National Guard and individuals who post to social media sites. The Missouri National Guard's policy is to respond to all civil posts quickly.

That was the course of action Sgt. Joshua Breig's team took after a photograph received negative feedback. A former combat engineer, Breig began serving with the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD in 2007. Since then, the broadcaster said he has seen a change not only in the way packages are put together and disseminated, but also in how they are perceived.

The outlet was very different. You do have instant feedback, and something that you don't expect to raise eyebrows will raise eyebrows. And the feedback that you get can come positively very quickly and very negatively very quickly. When things go negative – when you're the voice of the National Guard and the voice is heard in a poor light, it comes down quick. And you've got to take it off quick. You've got to figure out what sort of things to watch for when you're going into a product. It's alright for people to talk about what your products are showing. But if it provides the wrong impression for the National Guard, you're missing your command message. I think that's the hardest part – making sure you're delivering that command message and not triggering something that you never saw coming.<sup>162</sup>

In Breig's case, the surprise reaction was to a photo taken by fellow soldier Spc. Antony Lee. Lee and Breig had been out with members of the 1438<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company and 1175<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company who were patrolling in the area flooded by the destruction of the Birds Point Levee. While out, one of the boats came across a group of deer swimming.

"I took some pictures of some deer that were, unfortunately, stuck on an island," Lee said. "They were trying to swim to another island...I don't know exactly what they were doing. Posting that showed me the immediacy of social media and how that's changing the game."<sup>163</sup>

A poster named Tammie Freeland posted, "Are you not allowed to save the deer or was it left to drown?" Another posted simply, "dislike."<sup>164</sup>

“I didn’t expect anyone to look at that and be like, ‘that’s a humane issue with animals,’” Lee said. “There was someone who commented on it, and yeah, it’s just a Facebook comment, but as public affairs specialists, we have to take that into consideration. So we did. We responded in a way that would not make it seem like we were doing anything to hurt animals, because we weren’t.”<sup>165</sup>

The Guard’s response was to post a sentence clarifying that the deer was among a group of 10-12 swimming near an island. Because the patrol boats quickly moved on, giving context to the shot was the best the staffers could do.

Shortly thereafter the original poster, Tammie Freeland, wrote, “Thank you for your response. I know with all of the water, I’m sure there was allot (sic) of wild animals lost. You have a tough job. Thank you for your service.”<sup>166</sup> For the public affairs staff, the lesson was learned, Lee said.

It definitely showed me that you have to be careful,” Lee said. “There’s operational security and knowing that some things are tasteless, or not...we don’t want (readers) to take things out of context. It helped me realize we have to put things in context and take pictures and write cut lines that make sense and shed light on what’s really going on.”<sup>167</sup>

In addition to enabling direct communication with the public, social media gave the Missouri National Guard a means to get video out to a wide audience.

On May 3, 2011, the Missouri National Guard obtained video of two Guardsmen, Spc. Junior Bombard and Sgt. Tim Bridges, both of the 1138th Military Police Company, rescuing a 93-year old woman from flood waters.<sup>168</sup> The video, which was taken by Butler County Deputy Sheriff Bob Larkins, was uploaded to the Missouri National Guard’s social media sites and DVIDS raw.<sup>169</sup>

First Sergeant Mary Williams said the rescue was the first time she had video released by the Missouri National Guard video go viral. Williams remembered:

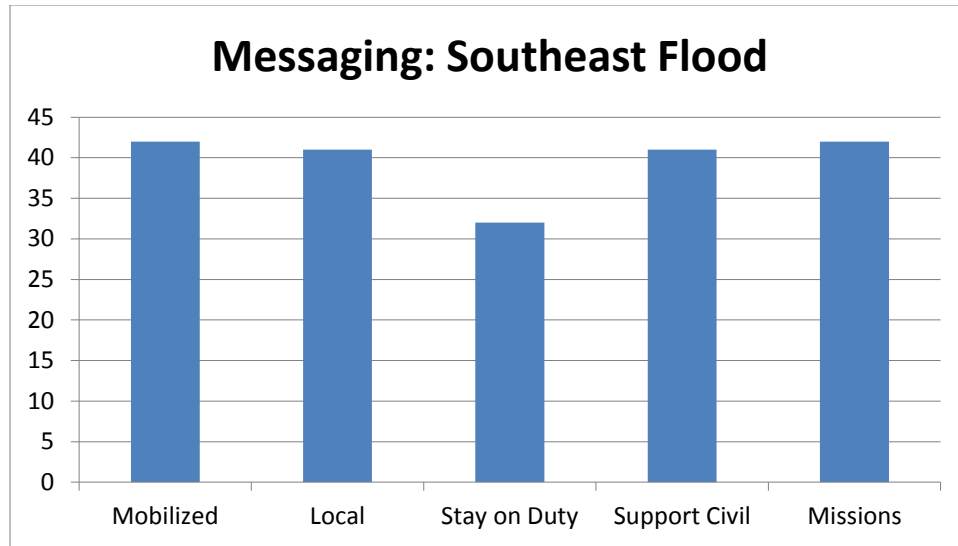
I remember Maj. Spicer calling, not even knowing if I was still in the office, saying, ‘Hey, can we get this out?’ It just went everywhere. It’s also important that you have somebody back who can push that information out if necessary. That made a big difference – it really showed how important video is today.<sup>170</sup>

Internally, the video received 77 ‘likes’ on the Guard’s Facebook page and 35 comments – including one from one of the soldiers’ wives who was a follower. Nationally, the story was picked up on major media outlets including Fox News and CNN.

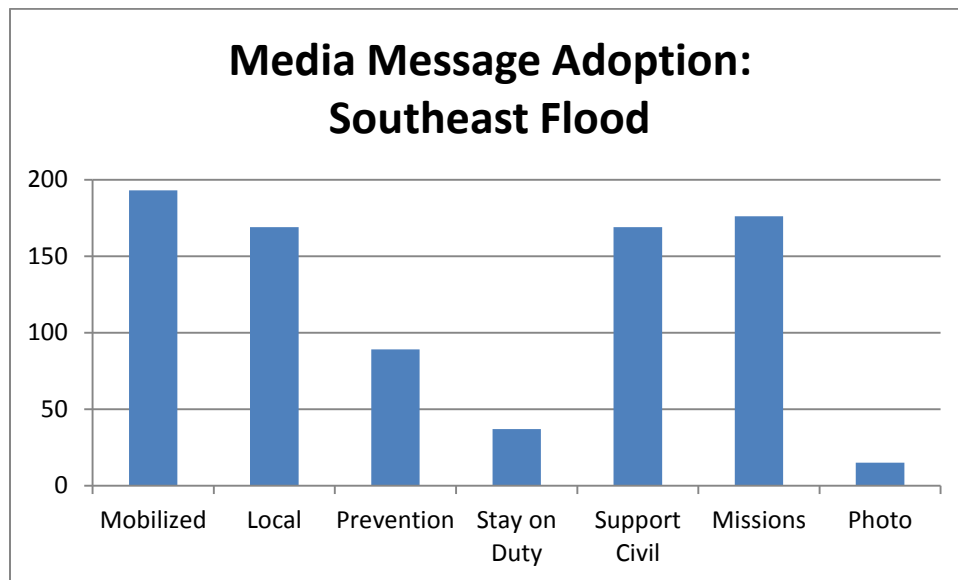
Ann Keyes, who worked with the 1138<sup>th</sup> during the flood, said she wasn’t surprised by the video’s popularity. “it’s a great video,” Keyes said. “And it was spontaneous and even elementary, so I think that helped it go viral. It truly showed what the flood was like - rushing, dirty, dangerous -, so it gave people an up-close view of something they wouldn’t normally see.”<sup>171</sup>

### **News analysis:**

The news coverage of the Missouri National Guard was overwhelmingly positive. In addition to the five messages and photo utilized in the blizzard response, a message of prevention was added to the flood messages. This new message was aimed at keeping citizens in the area away from potentially dangerous floodwaters



**Figure 2.4 – The Guard was successful in getting its messages to the public, with the exception of the one that was least put out in the Guard’s releases.**



**Figure 2.5 – The Guard was successful in getting its messages to the public, with the exception of the one that was least put out in the Guard’s releases.**

Because of the complicated political situation, the Missouri National Guard faced the additional challenge of distinguishing itself from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during the flood. Despite wearing the same uniforms, there was little apparent confusion between Guardsmen and engineers. Special attention was given to placing branding

decals on vehicles and briefing soldiers throughout the area of operations and on how to explain the Guard's mission.

Although the Missouri National Guard remained successful in getting out its messages, the flood was not without incident. In one instance, the National Guard made a mistake that it immediately owned up to. Soldiers in Anniston, Mo. began evacuating a town due to what task force commander Col. Wendul G. Hagler called "an improperly drawn graphic."<sup>172</sup> Col. Hagler addressed the issue at a town hall meeting on April 28, publically apologizing for the error.

Throughout the flood, the public affairs office concentrated on keeping the lines of communication open with the public so that updated information was always available, Williams said.

There was so much information coming in, so many different releases, we tried to push out one release, specific, every morning that would say what we're currently doing, where we're located, how many units are out there. Then we would try to push out another general release in the afternoon and a lot of times those would be pushed to the side if there was something else that made for a release that needed to go out or we'd wait and put more information in the general release.<sup>173</sup>

The one message that was least picked up by the media – that the Guard would remain on duty – was also the one that was conspicuously absent from the most releases. Of 42 releases put out during the flood, 32 did not include the message about remaining on duty. In the next flood, that would be among the most important and consistent messages the Guard put out.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Vast improvements had been made to the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD's deployment capabilities. Equipment and vehicles were staged and ready to go, allowing team members to be on

the road within hours of notification. Using unit Humvees instead of having to rely on supported units also helped the MPAD achieve its goal of gathering information quickly and getting it out as soon as possible.<sup>174</sup>

Social media played a much more dominant role in the flood than it had in previous emergencies. Whereas in the past the Guard had been limited in how many pictures it could send to the public, Facebook in particular allowed for the posting of hundreds of photographs. Furthermore, the ability to post video made the broadcast soldiers among the detachment's most valuable assets.

Technological issues continued to plague that MPAD. Early in the flood, there were serious internet connectivity problems in the Sikeston armory. Access to printers was also limited, and it became clear that in future missions things like air cards and printers should be brought along.<sup>175</sup>

A far more serious shortfall - identified during the flood was that of the outdated equipment being used by MPAD broadcasters. Although the first team used a MacBook Pro system, the second team was using a five-year old system that had major flaws. While the MPAD was still able to meet its mission, the Joplin tornado happened soon after the flood ended and saw the same problems reemerge with much more serious consequences.<sup>176</sup>

After a disappointing blizzard response, the flood response allowed the public affairs team to fix a number of gaps. Using the UPARs as media coordination and the uniformed MPAD members as quick, mobile news-gathering or media-escort teams made the response much more effective.<sup>177</sup>

Of course, whereas that flood was spread over hundreds of square miles and was a dynamic situation, shortly thereafter the Guard would face one of the deadliest disasters in Missouri history. Localized in six and a half square miles, the Joplin tornado would be over before the National Guard could get to the area but would present a series of challenges far different from what the public affairs team had experienced.



## **Operation Show Me Southwest Twister: The Joplin Tornado**

Roughly one week after the final Missouri National Guard public affairs personnel left southeast Missouri, tragedy struck across the state. On May 22, 2011, an F-5 (did you use EF-5 in the introl?) tornado struck the towns of Joplin and Duquesne, Mo. The storm tore a swatch of destruction through a six-square-mile area of Joplin, destroying 30 percent of the city,<sup>178</sup> and ultimately resulting in 161 deaths.<sup>179</sup>

For the Missouri National Guard, the tornado meant an immediate mobilization. Within hours, 140 Guardsmen with the 117th Engineer Team were on site, conducting search-and-extraction operations.<sup>180</sup> Additional engineers, military police, infantry, and others would be mobilized to support rescue, relief, and recovery efforts. At the height of operations, 275 soldiers and airmen were on duty.<sup>181</sup>

Although the Guard had already carried out two emergency missions in 2011, the Joplin mission was different, said Spicer.

“Joplin was a much more instant and deadly emergency duty than we had experienced in the past,” Spicer said. “In the initial meeting we knew it was deadly, we didn’t know the exact count of victims for several days.”<sup>182</sup>

Unlike the blizzard, there was no foretelling that the tornado would hit. Unlike the flood, the tornado hit quickly. It was an emergency that came with no warning and was in no way preventable. For the National Guard and the first responders it mobilized to support, the only possible way to help was to dig through the rubble and help the survivors.

Due to the influx of first responders from around the nation, the Guard’s missions quickly transitioned from search and rescue to logistical and law enforcement support.<sup>183</sup>

As firefighters and search-and-rescue teams assumed more of the responsibility for the search, the National Guard took on support roles in the towns, which largely included conducting joint-presence patrols with law enforcement and manning traffic-control points in the damaged area.

Within days of the tornado, the Guard was given another unusual task. The town wanted to plan a memorial service for the dead. The service was set to coincide with a presidential visit. The Guard would be tasked not only with planning the memorial, but with providing security for the event as well. <sup>184</sup>

Later, as the town moved into rebuilding mode, Gov. Nixon would name the National Guard as the lead state agency in the effort. The Guard's Task Force Phoenix, run by the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, would be responsible for providing state oversight for the federal cleanup effort being run by FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. <sup>185</sup>

The Missouri National Guard's presence in Joplin would last more than a year, and as of this writing more than a dozen Guardsmen remain on duty in the town. The Guard has continued to play a critical role in efforts there, moving into new territory and new missions including Gov. Nixon's Disaster Recovery Jobs Program. <sup>186</sup>

Since the first night of the tornado, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs community has been engaged in efforts in Joplin. As with the larger Missouri National Guard, that mission has evolved past a normal state emergency response. Soldiers, airmen, and civilians who were used to gathering information, writing news releases, coordinating media interviews, and telling the Guard's story suddenly found themselves part of a much larger team than they could have anticipated.

## **Public Affairs Response**

For the Missouri National Guard, the public affairs response began immediately on the night of May 22. That evening, Maj. Tamara Spicer, the state public affairs officer, sent out an initial news release.

“The initial release was put out within six hours of the tornado hitting Joplin,” Spicer said. “The most important initial information was simply that Gov. Jay Nixon has mobilized the Missouri National Guard.”

She also began mobilizing her public affairs team. Three soldiers from the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD were mobilized, and two unit public affairs representatives were sent to the area. The amount of public affairs support deployed is determined by the amount of Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen who were mobilized, Spicer said.<sup>187</sup>

During the first day, the public affairs team’s focus was divided between responding to media inquiries, preparing information for distribution, and supporting public affairs soldiers and civilians supporting the task force. For the Missouri National Guard’s fulltime broadcaster, Spc. Adam Winters, that meant putting together a video product as quickly as possible. After realizing the importance of getting products out quickly during the blizzard, efforts were made to get video out immediately during the southeast flood. Because nobody knew how bad the infrastructure in Joplin was, there was no guarantee the broadcasters would have the resources necessary to get video back quickly. By putting together a broadcast package outlining the Guard’s anticipated missions, Winters would be fulfilling the office’s goal of informing the public and supporting the mobilized team.

I think I put it together in 30 minutes. It was just a quick interview of him saying, ‘listen, this tornado happened, the Missouri National Guard is responding, we’ve

been called up by Gov. Jay Nixon to assist local first responders in any way we possibly can. Getting that who-what-when-where-why out there as quickly as possible was key to a successful campaign.<sup>188</sup>

It would be days before more video would be produced. Winters' video, although it contained no footage of the tornado and nobody on site, effectively outlined the Guard's mission, goal, and command messages.

As Winters put together his video, other UPARs were already at work in Joplin. Ann Keyes had arrived the previous night within hours of the storm. Although she had been involved in a number of previous state emergencies, Joplin was different, Keyes said.

It was way worse, of course, what with so many people being killed And I think it was more dangerous for me personally, what with all the death and destruction at every turn. It was pitch black the first night and I couldn't see more than a foot in front of me. If not for Soldiers guiding me, I'd have probably fallen into something or been cut in some way. I was more familiar with emergencies in general so being in a weird place with destruction in itself wasn't bad. But there was just a different 'feeling' about it, sort of like overwhelming doom. Professionally, it was fine. Personally, strange.<sup>189</sup>

Keyes accompanied Guardsmen conducting search and rescues throughout the first night.

The situation in the town was dire.

It was dark, smoky and it smelled oddly. Natural gas fumes permeated the air that also reeked of plastic and other odors I wasn't familiar with. Insulation was floating around and was everywhere in clumps on the ground. Cars and busses sat smashed and empty. It was unsettling. At one point, a woman approached me and cried as she was searching for her husband.<sup>190</sup>

Because of darkness, she was unable to take any photographs. That changed early in the morning.

I learned in the spring flood that year that everyone wants photos as soon as possible. It was during the southeast Missouri flooding that I realized how much more quickly I could get photos out with my phone. By using my traditional

digital camera, I would have to wait to get back to a computer and upload. The iPhone allowed me to shoot a pic and send with a cutline instantly. So, getting the photo and getting it out was key. As I like to say, "I was at the wrong place at the wrong time," which basically means I was in a horrible place I'd rather have never been. I was just "lucky."<sup>191</sup>

That photo, of five soldiers working in the rubble of a destroyed Walmart, was one of the most picked-up images the Missouri National Guard sent out to the media. It was even used as the cover of *Reserve and National Guard Magazine*. Spicer said she was not surprised the photograph was used so widely.

I was not surprised at the viral nature of the photograph, the entire world was watching Joplin and the image captured the damage and the response. Information is instantaneous and the public affairs community must be prepared to support that environment.<sup>192</sup>

For Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins, the fact that Keyes' photograph was taken on a phone and of a good enough quality to be picked up as the cover to a national magazine showed how far technology had come and how important it was to get good images quickly.

Given that it was taken with an iPhone – sometimes, I think one of the great things about an iPhone and its ability to capture and send right away is that if you do all the other things you can to compensate for the technical limitations – with Ann's picture, it captured what was going on really well and told the story in that moment by itself. If you can capture your images that do that and send them off, people are really willing to overlook the technical limitations that image had. They will find a way to make it work.<sup>193</sup>

By morning, Keyes was no longer alone in Joplin. UPAR Matthew Wilson had arrived in Joplin early the day after the tornado. Overnight, the area had filled up with media from across the country. Wilson said he spent his first day coordinating interviews with local, state and national outlets.

“I want to do everything I can to support and promote what the Guard was doing down there,” Wilson said. “That’s your first thought. But we were getting media requests, and I had to find people to fill them.”<sup>194</sup>

Wilson worked closely with the state public affairs office in coordinating interviews. During the first part of the operation, he was able to link soldiers up with reporters to explain the Guard’s mission. That would change later in the day as the scope of the disaster became clearer.

Wilson would soon be joined by a team from the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. The team, which consisted of Capt. Sandy Stover, Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Parrish Taggart, and Sgt. Jon Dougherty, did not know what to expect. For Dougherty, who had returned from a deployment to Afghanistan a few months earlier, the sight was shocking.

If I had to pick a word, I would say “overwhelming.” The level of damage, the level of carnage that had taken place in Joplin was almost indescribable, which is pretty hard for a journalist to say. It was on such a level that I’d just never seen before. It was an incredible thing to behold. I couldn’t imagine having lived through it. It was the most terribly awesome thing I’ve ever seen in my life.<sup>195</sup>

Taggart, a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, agreed. “It was such a large amount of damage and things were closed down,” Taggart said. “We were there within eight hours after the tornado hit. Streets were still not open, the streets weren’t even cleared off. It was still raining an incredible amount. It rained that first day, throughout.”<sup>196</sup>

With the unit public affairs representatives and state public affairs office covering media inquiries, the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD team’s mission was largely collecting information, video, and photographs for release. Having seen what previous teams had accomplished during the blizzard and flooding, Dougherty said they did not anticipate any major process issues. He and Taggart immediately began taking pictures of the area. During the

first week of operations, the team worked with the state public affairs office and unit public affairs representatives to put together 10 news releases.

Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Taggart said there was a lot of activity as teams and agencies worked to make sense out of the devastation. Nonetheless, there was not necessarily an opportunity for a solid product.

“The expectation was hoping to produce products every day – full videos,” Taggart said. “That initial shock once you got down there was completely different. Finding and establishing yourself first, finding the people so you can start getting the stories is one of the hardest parts when you’re first on the ground.”<sup>197</sup>

One of the first groups with a defined mission that the team found were engineers from the 203<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion who had been tasked with finding soldiers who had been unaccounted for. The results were frustrating, Taggart said.

As soon as we hit, we were talking to some soldiers and they were leaving to do home checks. We followed a group to do a home check. They found out he didn’t live there anymore – that’s why he wasn’t answering. It seemed like it would’ve been a good quality story. We get to the house, people answer the door and said he hasn’t lived here in six months.<sup>198</sup>

Ultimately the soldier was located at another address by another team. The experience left Taggart without a story.

If losing a gamble on finding a story was not bad enough, the team would also have major problems with its video equipment, Taggart said. During previous missions the detachment had supplemented its equipment with a more modern camera set from the state public affairs office. They did so because on both previous emergencies fulltime Guard employees had deployed with the first teams and used equipment they felt most comfortable with.

Taggart did not have that luxury. Instead, he was stuck with an editing system that constantly crashed. Other soldiers had experienced the same frustrations. Sgt. Joshua Breig struggled with antiquated MPAD equipment throughout the flood in the weeks before, but there had not been time between the two emergencies to remedy the problem.<sup>199</sup> As a result, no video products were produced from the field until days into the emergency when a second team arrived and brought a newer system.

“Dysfunctional equipment’s just dysfunctional equipment,” Taggart said. “I’ve commended the MPAD before – in a time whenever news is very time sensitive, you find a way to do it.”<sup>200</sup>

In Taggart’s case, that meant improvising an editing system using his personal laptop. Because so many media outlets were on-site, there were plenty of opportunities for the Guard to explain its mission. Still, the MPAD’s broadcast team was well behind their previous productivity level, putting out only six packages and one role of aerial b-roll in the 16 days after the tornado. The unit’s equipment problems, which had been a back-burner issue for months, quickly rose to the top of the MPAD’s priority list.

As the team struggled, the public affairs effort ramped up. A second team, consisting of Maj. Tamara Spicer, the state public affairs officer and MPAD commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Quin, the deputy state public affairs officer and a team leader on the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD, and Spc. Adam Winters, a broadcast specialist with the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD, were mobilized. Additional UPARs including Rachel Knight, Nancy Lane, and Jennifer Archdekin joined Ann Keyes on site.



Capt. Alan Brown, the Missouri National Guard's state command historian, was also brought in to help. Brown had been on annual training with his unit, the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, when he got word that he was being mobilized.

“As a historian, we do have some similar goals and missions,” Brown said. “With that, my boss, Maj. Spicer, believed I had some abilities to assist with public affairs. Under the circumstances, we needed to beef up public affairs so I couldn't say no.”<sup>201</sup>

Brown would spend his mobilization working as the public affairs liaison to the task force's tactical operations center at Camp Crowder and assisting with the joint visitors bureau. Because of limitations on manpower, having a dedicated representative in the operations center was a key element in the public affairs mission. Brown served not only as an information gatherer and tip-giver, but aided the team with logistics as well.

With the scope of the damage becoming clear, rumors began swirling. The city was overwhelmed and had no good system for accounting for the missing. The 'official' number that was being given to the media included repeated names, nicknames, and people who had actually been accounted for. Gov. Nixon stepped in and tasked the Highway Patrol and Department of Public Safety with accounting for the missing and the dead.

The potential for misinformation from sources that appeared official was a major concern. Whereas in the past and in operations since then the governor's office had a *laissez faire* attitude towards the National Guard's public affairs response, in Joplin Gov. Nixon wanted information tightly controlled. The only representatives from the National Guard who were authorized to speak to the media were Maj. Gen. Stephen Danner, the adjutant general, and Maj. Spicer, the state public affairs officer.<sup>202</sup>

Matthew Wilson found out about the policy change the day after the tornado. He and Maj. Spicer had worked with the governor's office to line up a series of interviews with CNN.

I had set up three interviews for that night that first day I was down there. We were going to have someone on the 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock and 9 o'clock programs and at about 6:45, we got the plug pulled on that as the governor decided only he, the adjutant general or Maj. Spicer would speak to the media. That kind of changed things.<sup>203</sup>

The system wasn't foolproof. The fact is, with hundreds of Guardsmen spread throughout an area saturated by hundreds of reporters, there were going to be soldiers and airmen who did not get the message. That was the case with the 1139th Military Police Company. The company's first sergeant gave an interview to a reporter in which he said the company was being mobilized to stop looters.<sup>204</sup> This interview directly contradicted a release the Missouri Highway Patrol had sent out earlier stating there had been no significant looting in the area.<sup>205</sup>

Rumor control became a major part of the Guard's response. Both the public affairs office and operations center began monitoring government, nongovernmental, and event-specific sites for potential misinformation, said Jennifer Archdekin, the unit public affairs representative who was the main monitor Joplin. It was a daunting task.

There was so much being said, it was difficult to keep up with it. I was tasked with the daily monitoring of social media as well as mainstream media hits to give the task force commander a feel for what was being said about the Missouri National Guard, be it positive or negative, and the mood of the community in general. If there was an issue brewing with the public, leadership wanted to get ahead of it before it became a problem.<sup>206</sup>

The monitoring program was important for gauging the mood of the people in the area, Archdekin said. "This allowed leadership to get ahead of and divert any potential

problems that were brewing,” Archdekin said.<sup>207</sup> Spc. Adam Winters, who helped Archdekin, with monitoring, agreed.

We could make sure that our message was being received by the audience and the way we wanted to tell it. One of the great things about our office and the rest of the public affairs in the army is that our commander and all of our leadership preaches transparency. We want to make sure we represent the Missouri National Guard and the way the Missouri National Guard is acting. That social media monitoring really allowed us to evaluate whether we were doing a good job at that or not.<sup>208</sup>

Even so, Winters recognized the potential for negative feedback.

“You’re always going to get those people who say ‘big brother is watching,’” Winters said. “Whenever they see Department of Homeland Security is monitoring, they’re going to think Big Brother.”<sup>209</sup>

The Missouri National Guard was upfront about the social media monitoring program. During the southeast flood, although the program was not as extensive or refined as it would become, the Missouri National Guard even put out a news release about the effort on April 28.<sup>210</sup> The story received no negative reaction.

As the public affairs team monitored the social media scene, it still needed to make sure the Guard’s messages were getting out to the public. Although Guardsmen were not authorized to speak with external media, the UPARs and MPAD still had a job to do. In some ways, the order not to speak to the media made life easier and harder for the public affairs team, Wilson said.

It made it easier in the fact that you didn’t have to look too hard for finding the soldiers who could speak. At the same time, we couldn’t fulfill every request. One advantage we had is that we could interview our soldiers, so that didn’t really impact what we were able to do as far as putting out products. As far as working with external media, it made it easier and far more difficult.<sup>211</sup>

After a few days Archdekin handed the monitoring program over to Keyes, the local UPAR. Keyes continued to refine the program.

I used tools - socialmention.com, for example - to assess the messages that were coming in and going out. I could find out if information being relayed was accurate or not and point out to others where misinformation might need addressed. As it related to our own work, our own mission, we could gauge the public perception of what the Guard was doing. It helped to have a sense of how people felt about recovery in Joplin and what pitfalls we might avoid.<sup>212</sup>

The only downside to the program was that the size of the disaster meant there was an overwhelming amount of material. Keyes' efforts continued daily for six months following the tornado, then gradually reduced to bi-weekly before the task force leadership determined the monitoring program was no longer needed.

As other public affairs assets were re-directed to help plan the memorial service and prepare for the debris removal program, Dougherty continued to interview Missouri Guardsmen about their ongoing missions. "I was more focused on continuing to do products for the Guard; I felt that was my better role for the Guard at the time," Dougherty said.<sup>213</sup>

Dougherty's most widely-read piece was about Spc. Jeffrey Price, a Guardsman who had saved several people in Walmart on the night of the storm. The store had been torn apart, but Price and a co-worker, a former Marine, remained calm and got people out after the worst of the storm had passed.<sup>214</sup>

"That was the Guard's story," Dougherty said. "Even though he was in a civilian capacity, being a Guardsman only added to his ability to pull it off with the training and mindset – wanting to help people out and that kind of thing."<sup>215</sup>

Ironically, although one of the most positive stories to come out of the tornado would occur at the Walmart, the worst happened there as well. On May 23, the day after the tornado, three soldiers from the 203<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion were accused of taking items from the Walmart. The unit immediately offered to turn the soldiers over the civil authorities, but were in turn told to punish them in-house. The 203<sup>rd</sup> conducted an investigation, found all three guilty, and gave them administrative punishments.<sup>216</sup>

No news release was ever put out about the soldiers. Almost a year after the tornado, a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* contacted the Guard about the allegations. Because the soldiers were subject to an administrative rather than legal action, the information was not released. The *Post-Dispatch*, which had run several articles about Guard investigations, ran a story saying Guardsmen had looted and that the Guard was hiding behind an exemption to the Sunshine Law.<sup>217</sup> The result was a storm of negative editorials aimed at the Guard. Gov. Nixon immediately ordered the release of the investigation, albeit with the soldiers names redacted.<sup>218</sup>

At the same time the investigation was being conducted, the state's public affairs assets had two key tasks in front of them. The first was planning the memorial service. The second was preparing for the federal debris-removal process. Sgt 1<sup>st</sup> Class Taggart, who had started the mission as a broadcaster, now found himself in a much different role.

I basically became a mediator. I was helping with the White House press corps. By that time, we had I think five UPARs down there. We were pumping product as far as print journalism. We had two videographers. My role changed. It wasn't so much a product as much as management.<sup>219</sup>

Most of the team found themselves working to support the memorial doing a wide range of tasks including writing the memorial program, figuring out the logistics of the

auditorium, finding media parking areas, devising a credentialing system, and working with the White House to ensure the program went off smoothly.

“Joplin’s resources has been stretched to the max, so when President Obama made the decision to travel to Joplin, it was only natural the Missouri National Guard was called in to support that mission,” Spicer said.<sup>220</sup>

Before the program, media had to be moved from the parking lot where they had been camped out since shortly after the tornado. Many outlets had set up on Southwest Missouri State’s campus because that is where the Missouri Department of Public Safety had conducted its daily briefings, which largely updated the media on the status of the accountability effort. The Secret Service needed the trucks moved. The alternative was a side street by the auditorium.

Meanwhile, every effort was being made to ensure that as many media outlets as possible could get into the service.

The eyes of the world were on Joplin and there were hundreds of news media in the area. Of course they all wanted to be at the service, but as always, space was limited. Space was the largest factor, followed by supporting the local media, then working with the Governor’s team to ensure the state and nation could share in the emotion of the day.<sup>221</sup>

Once it was decided that the president would attend and address the memorial service, the White House took over the main credentialing effort with the Missouri National Guard providing personnel to do the physical credentialing on site.

Dozens of media outlets showed up, remembered UPAR Matthew Wilson. Because of the scale of the event, Wilson said his focus was on crowd control more than a normal public affairs event. Although many of the media had been drawn to the

ceremony because of the presidential portion, the event was ultimately a memorial service.

That's the biggest thing I've ever been a part of in roughly 15 years in the media. It was different because I wasn't really doing a media role – I was there as a security support person, really. My job was to kind of wrangle the media in one area and make sure they stayed there, because again, this was a memorial service. It wasn't any kind of celebration where you could run around and let people do whatever they wanted. There were certain times when I was allowed to bring media closer to get better photos.<sup>222</sup>

Two designated media areas were established. One was on the lower level on a rafter. At designated times, Missouri Guard personnel escorted photographers closer to the podium for improved vantage points for photographs. A second area was established upstairs, primarily for outlets who had been credentialed late. In their case, they had to stay in place.

Although the service went smoothly, Taggart said some reporters and cameramen were frustrated by the system.

The media want the perfect shot - they're getting the opportunity to take a picture of the president of the United States. They don't want to be stuck with 30 people in a 10'x10' square because they want the perfect shot. Tensions can get kind of high, but the Secret Service made that determination.<sup>223</sup>

Two reporters did receive a bit of preferential treatment, Spicer said.

Two Joplin High School students had been located by the Secret Service with their camera in the audience - they were being asked to leave as they were not credentialed media. Once we were aware of the situation, we got them media credentials and gave them special access in the media section. Everyone, including the civilian media, were happy to support them.<sup>224</sup>

All in all, there were no issues at the memorial service and media left happy, Spicer said.

Jennifer Archdekin had a unique role during the memorial service. While the rest of the team was busy credentialing and managing media, Archdekin was covering the event through the Missouri National Guard's social media sites.

I was a Tweeting machine. During the president's speech, and for the entire memorial service, I Tweeted key statements and followed along as the eyes and ears of those following on Twitter. Instead of just one or two Tweets, I told the story of what was happening in the auditorium from start to finish.<sup>225</sup>

Following the memorial service, media interest subsided. The next morning, most of the national outlets had moved on to the next story. This would lead into a third phase of operations for the public affairs staff: the cleanup effort.

Following the tornado, Gov. Nixon designated the National Guard as the lead agency to provide state oversight for the federal cleanup effort. The Joplin cleanup effort was the second time something like that had been attempted. The first time, in Huntsville, Ala., was fraught with problems, many of which were communications glitches that should have been identified and resolved before the program was implemented.

The debris removal program required FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ask residents to sign right-of-entry forms allowing the Corps to clear debris from properties. Without the forms, the government could not clear the land which meant that if it was not done within a short window, either the expense would fall on the city and homeowners or the courts would have to intervene because of public health concerns.

In Huntsville widespread confusion arose from the fact that many people believed the Right of Entry forms handed property rights over to the government. In order to avoid a repeat of the same issue, an extensive joint public information campaign was launched. The goal of the program was to get word out through any means possible. That meant using traditional media such as newspapers and television, using new media such as social media sites, setting up town hall events to explain the program and answer



questions, and even giving Guardsmen packets of information to distribute to tornado victims staying in shelters.

It seemed like everyone was working hand-in-hand trying to get these messages out and trying to get the healing process started. My biggest takeaway from Joplin is that things go a lot smoother if you're working with these other agencies and putting out the same messages and have the same goals.<sup>226</sup>

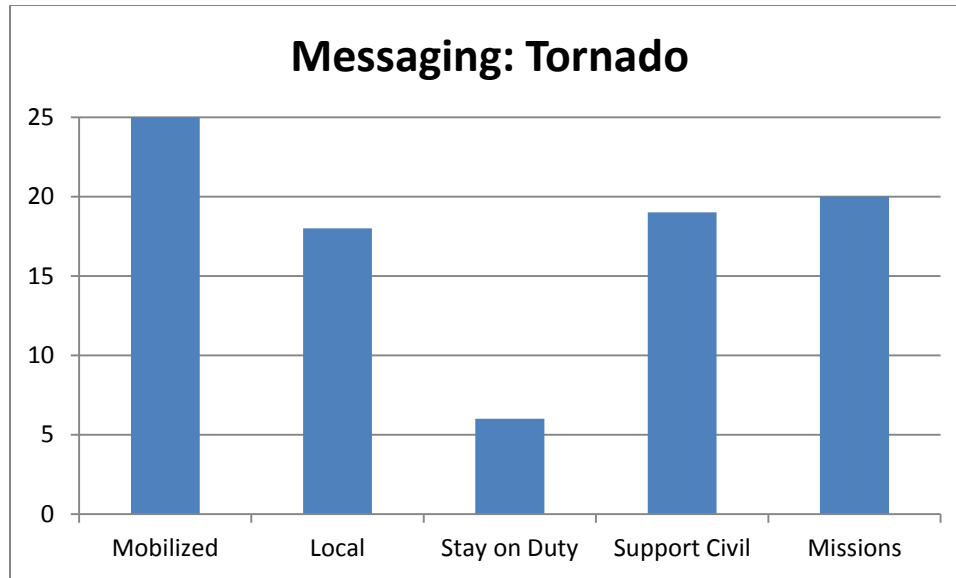
In no small part because of the attention given to the public affairs portion of the program, the debris removal was able start and finish on time.

As volunteers began to depart and the federal debris program reached its conclusion, the Missouri National Guard remained on mission in Joplin. Following the initial disaster and cleanup efforts, extended programs were launched to help the area recover physically and economically. The Guard has played a key role in running the Disaster Recovery Jobs Program and remains a major part of the Joplin community.

### **Messaging analysis**

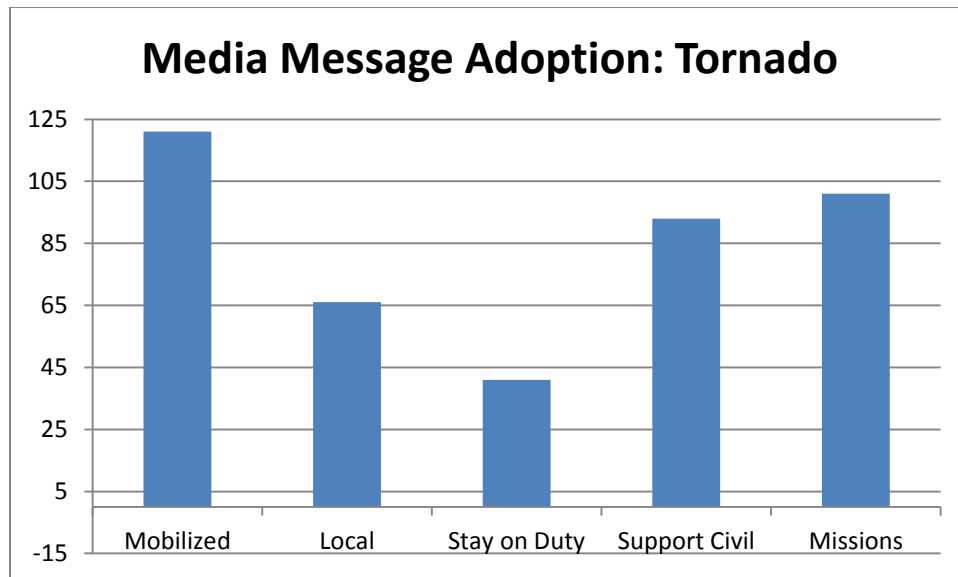
The Joplin tornado differed most from the other state emergency call-ups in that there were so many fewer releases going out. Between May 23 and June 9, the public affairs community put out 15 news releases, six complete broadcast packages, and b-roll of Joplin shot aboard a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. During the parallel period relative to the flood, 33 news releases were put out, along with 13 broadcast products. During the parallel period relative to the blizzard, which had only four days of major activity, the Guard put out 13 news releases and two video packages.

Between the state's decision to limit media interviews, recurring equipment problems, and the addition of the memorial service mission, messages were not going out in as much frequency and volume as they had in earlier missions. Still, the releases that were put out included the main five themes from previous releases.



**Figure 2.6 – Of the five messages put out in Missouri National Guard news releases, the one that was sent out the least was about the Guard remaining on duty.**

Percentagewise, the media’s inclusion of those messages was close to what the Missouri National Guard was putting out.



**Figure 2.7 – Newspaper coverage reflected many of the Guard’s key messages, again with the exception of the Guard staying on duty as long as needed.**

Almost all newspapers noted that the Missouri National Guard was mobilized – of the articles analyzed, that was 99.18 percent. Another 54 percent included a local Guard angle, while 87.79 percent included specific Guard missions, and 76.25 percent included the message that the Guard was working in support of civil authorities.

The least successful message, that the Guard would stay on duty as long as needed, was not well-reflected in either newspaper articles or the Guard's media releases. The Guard included the message in only five of its 15 releases. In the media, the message appeared in 33.16 percent of articles, a ratio virtually identical to that of inclusion of this message in Guard releases. The reason that message was not included in the releases as it had been during previous disasters was the scope of the destruction.

“I believe it was blatantly obvious to everyone there was long term recovery necessary in the community,” Spicer said.

The coverage of the Missouri National Guard was largely positive following the tornado. Of 122 newspaper articles analyzed, only three could be construed as negative. As previously mentioned, all three were related to the comments made by a mobilized military policeman saying that he and his unit were mobilized to stop looting.

Although no major scandal unfolded during the mission, a year later the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* would run a story about soldiers allegedly ‘looting’ after the storm. On May 23, 2012, the *Post-Dispatch* ran an article titled, “Secrecy hampers inquiry into Missouri guard actions.” In it, reporter Phil O’Connor wrote, “after a massive tornado tore through Joplin last May, some Missouri National Guard members sent in to secure the city instead looted it.”<sup>227</sup> O’Connor, who had done two previous articles about

ongoing Guard investigations, had filed an open records request. Because the soldiers were subjected to non-judicial punishment, the Guard did not release the records.

The article itself was more interested in whether the Guard was subject to the Sunshine Law. The only other mention of the Joplin incident came towards the end of the article when a Missouri National Guard officer acknowledged that the soldiers in question had been punished but gave no specifics. Following the article, the *Post-Dispatch* followed up with an editorial and cartoon criticizing the Guard's exemption.<sup>228</sup>

The story was widely picked up, including in Joplin where reporters asked the police about the incident. While the *Post-Dispatch* had reported the event as if there had been a cover-up, the Joplin Police acknowledged they had been involved and made the decision to release the soldiers to the Guard to punish the soldiers.

The *Joplin Globe* reported:

“We made the decision to let them handle it,” Roberts said. He said the Joplin Police Department was extremely busy at the time, organizing search and rescue, and other recovery efforts. No police report was made. He said the decision to let the Guard handle the matter internally was not intended to give anyone a break. “In my view, they probably were more harsh than the civilian courts would have been anyway,” Roberts said.<sup>229</sup>

Following the string of negative articles and editorials, Gov. Nixon ordered the release of the investigation. The report was made public by a number of outlets and revealed a textbook investigation. Because the punishments were administrative in nature, the names of the guilty soldiers were not released.

In a year marked by an otherwise effective public affairs effort, the incident was a black eye for the Missouri National Guard. The better course of action would have been

to release the information immediately, Spicer said. “Bad news is like a dead fish, you can wrap it up in newspaper and hide it under the bed, but is only going to smell worse when you pull it out,” Spicer said.<sup>230</sup>

### **Lessons learned**

Because of the unique nature of operations in Joplin, the public affairs staff was in new territory. Working with the White House was a first, but within the year visits by President Obama, Michelle Obama, and Jill Biden would allow the staff to draw on the lessons they learned from working with the White House.

The restriction on interviews proved another new experience. During previous and subsequent emergencies, the National Guard had much greater autonomy. Although major releases were sent to the governor’s office, Joplin was a much more restricted environment. Briefing soldiers and airmen on where to direct the media, as well as working with the media in such conditions, were both new and valuable experiences. Ultimately, the tightly controlled flow of information guaranteed that agencies were speaking with one voice during an event that caused a major loss of life.

A greater utilization of social media as a mood-measuring tool and a way of gauging the traditional media marked a shift in the way the public affairs office operated. Each day, the public affairs office put together a report detailing any major issues found on social media and the tone and content of traditional media coverage. That model would be adopted in future disasters as well, and became the basis for a weekly public affairs update that the public affairs office began sending to key leadership.

The tornado response was also the most integrated inter-agency response the Missouri National Guard staff has been a part of. Working with local, state, and federal agencies, including the city of Joplin, Joplin Police, Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Governor's Office, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, SEMA, FEMA, and the White House, showed the importance of cooperation in coordinating clear, coherent, consistent messages. The cooperation did not begin on the ground; instead, it was the result of joint training, Spicer said.

Lt. John Quin and I had just attended a major FEMA training event gathering public information officers from our region. That experience, in addition to a Missouri National Guard retiree being the US Army Corps of Engineers public information officer, made for as smooth of a path as possible.<sup>231</sup>

Perhaps the most striking lesson of Joplin for the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD was the importance of constant preparation. Although the Guard's presence had steadily wound down in southeast Missouri, the flood mission officially ended two days after the tornado. Although off-mission for more than a week by that point, many of the MPAD's soldiers had participated in a long-planned national level exercise. The tornado occurred two days after that exercise ended. With operations ongoing in Joplin, the MPAD would be mobilized for a fourth time in 2011, this time for a prolonged flood in northwest Missouri.

The unit's leadership had worked to secure new broadcast equipment to replace the antiquated sets that had been brought to Joplin. New vehicles had also been procured to replace two Humvees damaged during flood operations. Because the impending flood was the result of water being released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Gavins

Point Dam, the unit knew the flood was going to last much longer than the previous one.

A support plan to cover both Joplin and northwest Missouri was put in place.

## Operation Show Me Northern Tide: Northwest Missouri Flood

With ongoing operations in Joplin dominating the headlines and the Guard's response efforts, a new threat emerged in the northwest part of the state. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced plans to release record amounts of water from the Gavins Point Dam in South Dakota. According to the *Oregon Times*, [are all titles italicized?] "heavy snowmelt, snow pack that has yet to melt and rainfall from Montana through South Dakota" had left a record amount of water at the dam.<sup>232</sup> As of May 27, 2011 the Corps was releasing 63,000 cubic feet per second. That amount was set to increase to 100,000 cubic feet per second by June 17.<sup>233</sup> Gov. Nixon visited the area in early June to pledge support for the region.<sup>234</sup>

By June 8, the Missouri National Guard was back on duty, monitoring 26 counties for potential flooding.<sup>235</sup> In addition to protecting communities in the area, the Guard also had to watch over one of its most important facilities, Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph. The base, which is the home of the 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing and host to the Air Force's Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Center, brings more than \$72 million into the local economy.<sup>236</sup> The base had flooded during the 1993 flood, and its airmen were focused on making sure that a repeat did not occur. Missouri's local, state, and national legislators swore their support for the wing.<sup>237</sup>

Although widespread flooding was not occurring in early June, the Guard and local county emergency operations centers were busy preparing. As Gov. Nixon predicted "unprecedented flooding," Holt County ordered more than 75,000 sandbags.<sup>238</sup> In St. Joseph<sup>239</sup> 47,000 sandbags and pumps were ordered. The Corps of Engineers also increased its forecast for the release to more than 150,000 cubic feet per second of water,



more than 60 cubic feet per second greater than the normal release.<sup>240</sup> *The St. Joseph News Press* reported flooding could last through August.<sup>241</sup>

With more than 3,000 Guardsmen on duty in the Dakotas, there was no predicting how bad the flooding might get in Missouri. On June 8, Nixon signed Executive Order 11-18, which ordered the Guard to coordinate and supervise flood preparations along the Missouri River.<sup>242</sup> The Guard set up task forces in eastern and western Missouri, as well as a third task force specifically focused on monitoring and saving Rosecrans.<sup>243</sup> Meanwhile, the Corps of Engineers found itself in another political controversy as legislators along the river questioned the Corps' actions.<sup>244</sup>

As the Missouri River continued to rise, the Missouri National Guard increased its footprint in the region. Early on, the operation consisted primarily of liaison officers who worked with local communities on levee monitoring and identifying potential needs.<sup>245</sup> Forces gradually increased, but isolated levees that could not be accessed by the heavy equipment needed to transport sandbags meant the Guard would have to employ innovative new techniques like helicopter sandbagging.<sup>246</sup> Because there was no central area in any particular danger, but instead a wide, geographic area that was threatened, the Guard implemented a quick-reaction-force model, similar to what is used to protect forward operating bases during overseas contingency operations.<sup>247</sup>

By mid-July, flood response efforts included sandbagging, levee monitoring, and sandbag transportation. The National Guard was looking at the possibility of conducting operations on the eastern half of the state, but the farthest east Guard flood operations ever got was Wooldridge, 21 miles west of Columbia. With the crisis abating, the region's governors turned their attention from combatting the flood to preventing future

ones through reexamining the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' priorities in water management.<sup>248</sup>

As the flow from Gavins Point decreased, flood operations scaled down. Although the drawdown was not publicized, soldiers began returning from duty. On July 25, a group of soldiers returning from flood duty were involved in an auto accident that left one dead.

By the end of August, major flood operations had ended.<sup>249</sup> The Guard continued to monitor the area, but the river was no longer considered an active threat. Although roughly a dozen Guardsmen remained on duty in Joplin, the end of flooding along the Missouri River marked the end of major state emergency missions for the Missouri National Guard's public affairs team.

### **Public Affairs Response**

As with previous emergencies, the northwest flood included a prevention component. Because the release of water was happening, flooding was a certainty in some areas and a strong possibility in others. Jennifer Archdekin, the area UPAR, said the Guard response was in place before serious flooding even became an issue.

Honestly, at first, it was painfully slow. There wasn't immediate action on the ground such as rescuing people, reinforcing levees, et cetera. Media were hungry to break the next big story and that lead story didn't exist for a long time. The first few weeks were simply sandbagging stories in preparation for a future levee break.<sup>250</sup>

On June 8, the first flood-specific release was sent out. Unlike previous releases explaining the Guard had been mobilized, the release focused on the Guard's preventative efforts and efforts to support civil authorities in the area. Although the Guard had set up task forces in St. Joseph, largely to protect Rosecrans Air National

Guard Base, and in western and eastern Missouri, there was little activity outside levee monitoring.

Despite limited activity in northwest Missouri, a public affairs team was deployed to the area.

The mobilization of the Missouri National Guard precipitated the dispatch of the public affairs team to the area. Our public affairs team on the ground was experienced and did a great job of promoting the readiness of the Missouri National Guard.<sup>251</sup>

Following the January blizzard, newly-promoted Sgt. Sarah Lupescu went to Fort Meade, Md., to reclassify as a 46Q print journalist. Lupescu, who had been a broadcaster since enlisting in the National Guard and worked in that capacity at the state public affairs office, returned to Missouri suspecting her stay in Jefferson City would likely be a short one.

“I knew that two days before my graduation the Joplin tornado happened,” Lupescu said. “I was expecting to have to go on duty as soon as I got home. And then flooding happened.”<sup>252</sup>

Due to strain on the MPAD’s members from what had basically been two months of continuous state emergency missions and because the flood was not occurring on the scale of previous missions, a smaller team consisting of Lupescu and Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins was dispatched. The team, which had worked together in southwest Missouri during the blizzard, found the experience much different from their previous one.

When we arrived in Springfield, they had their hands full with trying to figure out what the county wanted them to do and a lot of other stuff going on. They weren’t concerned with the PA aspect of what was going on. By the time we got to Maryville, they were looking forward to us. We feed them photos for their reports and kept them updated with how many news releases we were putting together and sending to the public affairs shop. If there were certain topics we were covering, Lt. Col. Mast wanted to take a look.<sup>253</sup>

It helped that Collins and Lupescu had deployed to Kosovo as part of the Kosovo Forces-10 mission with many of the task force's soldiers, including Lt. Col. Ronnie Mast, the area commander.

In the time period between the floods, Collins said the public affairs team and processes were "vastly improved" in the five months since the flood.<sup>254</sup> Another noticeable change was the integration of the public affairs team into the task force.

"They helped us to complete the mission," Collins said. "Looking back on that now, if we would've had that kind of understanding of what we needed to do and that kind of task force coordination, I think what we would've gotten out of the blizzard would have been phenomenal as far as coverage goes."<sup>255</sup>

As the first team, the pair's mission was more about anticipating what might happen than it was about reacting to what had happened. Stationed at the Maryville armory, the pair stayed in constant contact with task force leadership – liaison officers working with county emergency operations centers -- and kept an eye on social media sites that featured information about the flood.

"We felt like we were pretty knowledgeable about what might happen, we just didn't know how soon," Lupescu said. "It was mainly just that we were prepared and ready and waiting."<sup>256</sup>

At that point the scale of operations was still relatively small, Collins said. "There weren't hundreds of soldiers activated, but there were, I believe, around 30-34 soldiers who were actually leaving the armory and going out and doing things, but what they were doing was key," Collins said. "Although it was a slow pace, I'm glad we were there to cover it."

Although there were not many soldiers or airmen mobilized, those that mobilized were spread over hundreds of square miles, Archdekin said. While Collins and Lupescu worked the northern areas, Archdekin was in Kansas City and St. Joseph. The rural area also presented challenges in the form of its less developed infrastructure.

“The area we covered was so large, it was hard to be in two places at once,” she said. “A lot of the areas we were sent to were extremely rural and connectivity for phone calls, e-mails, texts and of course updating social media was non-existent.”<sup>257</sup>

Collins and Lupescu focused their efforts on highlighting Guard readiness and the importance of working with local authorities. Although the missions were not as visible to the general public as the large-scale sand bagging and military police missions had been in previous state emergency missions, Collins said they had a big impact.

I hope it underscored the importance of the Guard working with local authorities to be prepared and to get the lines of communications open and how much better the emergency gets managed when those lines of communications are open early enough and the communication is set up. The actual and perceived value of the Guard is about the same. Essentially, from what I witnessed, the liaisons that were going out were checking water levels at pre-coordinated points for these government officials so they didn't have to use their resources to do it.<sup>258</sup>

After Collins and Lupescu had spent two weeks in the flood zone, a second team was assembled to relieve them.

“Our Missouri National Guard public affairs force is limited, and had already been supporting State Emergency Duty for several months with earlier flooding and the Joplin tornado,” Spicer said. “Our force was tired.”<sup>259</sup>

For a relief team, Spicer deployed 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. John Quin, Sgt. Joshua Breig, and Cpl. Antony Lee. All three had supported southeast flood a month earlier, and Quin and Lee had deployed to Joplin. For the first few days, the new team encountered many of the

same frustrations as Collins and Lupescu had, Lee said. “It was definitely frustrating because a lot of it was hurry up and wait – [dash?] Wait for the river to rise, wait for the flooding,” Lee said. “There was one day where I was just thinking, ‘What am I doing here?’”

Augmenting the public affairs team was Capt. Alan Brown. Brown, who works fulltime as the Missouri National Guard’s command historian, had supported public affairs efforts in Joplin. In northwest Missouri, he had been mobilized to serve as the *aide de camp* for Task Force Northwest commander, Brig. Gen. Greg Mason. By the time the public affairs team transitioned, Brown was once again filling a public affairs role.

The Missouri National Guard had recognized that social media was an invaluable tool during emergency response, not only for public affairs but for the task force in general. Even so, it was not without its pitfalls, Brown said. On one occasion, there was a false report about a breach. The report reached state headquarters before it reached the task force operations center. When the rumor came to the task force, the situation was tense.

“It was not positive because of the way it came down to the unit,” Collins said. “There were guys out there. They had eyes on. That levee was not doing what was being put out on the social media. The more eyes you have on something, the better.”

Although the emergency was fake, the lesson was real. The task force had to keep up with what was transpiring on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, Brown said. In addition to his duties as aide, Brown became the task force’s *de facto* social media guru.

We actually beefed up – I took an NCO, a sergeant, and he assisted me in keeping an eye out on any reports. We’d also gotten a handle on the social

media outlets that the citizens were using on a regular basis in that area. We were keeping an eye on those to make sure that it didn't create any chaos, that making sure if there was a problem, we could react in kind and in a fast enough manner to put the citizens at ease in that area.<sup>260</sup>

During the northwest flood stories were focused more on preparation than on actual missions. The missions themselves were usually day-long endeavors including helicopter-sandbagging and levee monitoring. The institution of a quick reaction force, a team that could deploy quickly where needed, also led to additional opportunities for public affairs. Between June 8 and August 9, the teams produced 39 news releases. These stood in addition to 11 written during that same timeframe around the ongoing response in Joplin.

An additional mission set the public affairs team had become accustomed to by this point was supporting Gov. Nixon and Maj. Gen. Danner when they conducted site visits. While the team leaders provided media escorts as needed, the broadcast and print soldiers produced updated articles and news releases from the information gathered. It was also a good opportunity to show Guardsmen and their families the level of support and thanks they were getting from the governor, Breig said.

When I'm tasked with covering the chief executive of the state, it's still a National Guard story. He is the commander in chief. This commander in chief – if he's showing appreciation for the hard work the Guardsmen are doing, then that's the part I'm going to play. I want people to see that our commander in chief understands our role and understands what is necessary to get this mess fixed. He's an easy source for that. He does it on his own. It's just a matter of me showing it.<sup>261</sup>

The importance of messaging was not lost on Lee, who had been a relatively inexperienced public affairs soldier when he was first mobilized in April. Throughout operations, Lee learned how to support the commander's intent and the Guard's mission by focusing on the organization's most important messages when writing releases.

“By the end of my time in northwest Missouri, I had that pretty much engrained in my head,” Lee said. “In every story, you have to come back to those talking points – that’s our mission. That’s what public affairs is doing - that’s what the Missouri Guard is doing.”<sup>262</sup>

After more than two weeks on duty, the second team was relieved by a third. Because operations had already begun to slow, the third and final team was made up of an officer, Capt. Michelle Matthews, and a print journalist, Cpl. Jacqueline Courtney. For Matthews, who had not served on a state emergency mission since Hurricane Gustav in 2009, the landscape had changed drastically.

“In 2011, we put out as many products that were required,” Matthews said. “I think you’ll find that lots and lots of data went out and lots of messages went out and it was a very successful mission.”

The use of social media also changed how the public affairs mission was perceived internally and how the overall mission was perceived by the public. Whereas in the past soldiers would see coverage of their missions in a newspaper only if they were lucky, social media meant all the photos, broadcast products, and articles being put together by the public affairs staff were accessible. According to Matthews, social media also encouraged a culture of openness between the military and the public.

It’s definitely a morale booster when a soldier is able to go on Facebook and see his or her photo. It makes them feel good and it validates them and their work. But for me, I think that a lot of times when the military does business, people think that we are a secretive organization, like we hold everything secret and aren’t going to tell people stuff. I really think that getting out there and doing social media creates an environment for our external folks, our constituents, the people that pay us – you know, those things – a way to see us as well. It works both ways.<sup>263</sup>



Although record flooding was anticipated due to the high volume of water being released from Gavins Point, the final state emergency mission of 2011 never reached the heights of previous missions. After Capt. Matthews and Cpl. Courtney returned to headquarters in late July, no team was sent to replace them. UPAR Jennifer Archdekin remained on duty, but for the 70<sup>th</sup> MPAD, the mission was over.

As the mission wound down, soldiers and airmen were pulled from duty. While three soldiers were driving back to out-process at the Kansas City armory, they were involved in a car accident. One soldier, Pfc. Jordan House, was killed. It was the first time in living memory a Missouri National Guard had lost a soldier on state emergency duty.

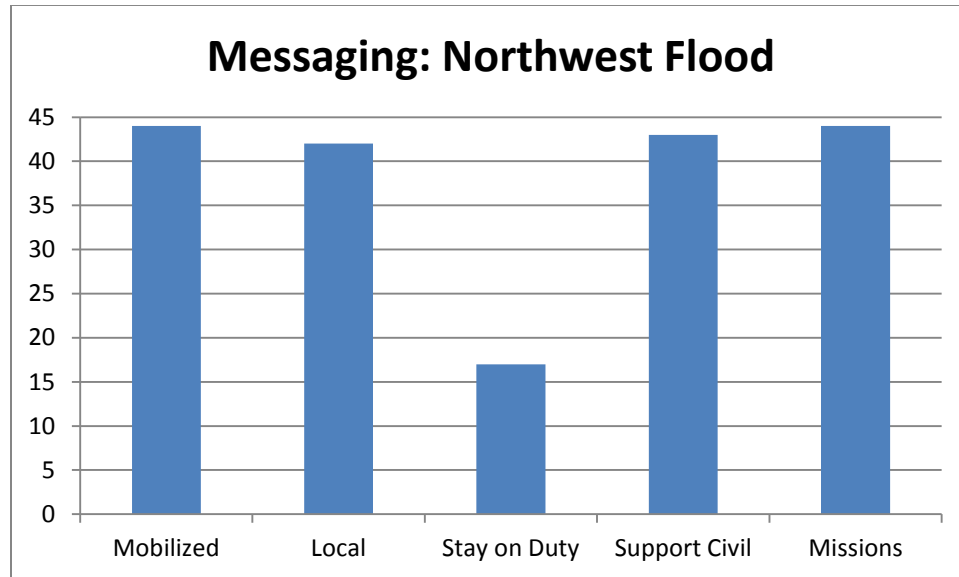
After 10 years of overseas missions, the state office already had a standard operating procedure in place for line of duty deaths. Although this was the first time the Guard had experienced a death during a state mission, the same protocol was followed. The Guard released the service member's name and releasable information 24-hours after the next of kin had been notified.

By mid-August operations had slowed back to a levee monitoring mission. The Kansas City UPAR returned to her normal duties. Soldiers remained on duty in Joplin and northwest Missouri, but for all intents and purposes the public affairs mission had scaled back to a normal state.

### **Messaging analysis:**

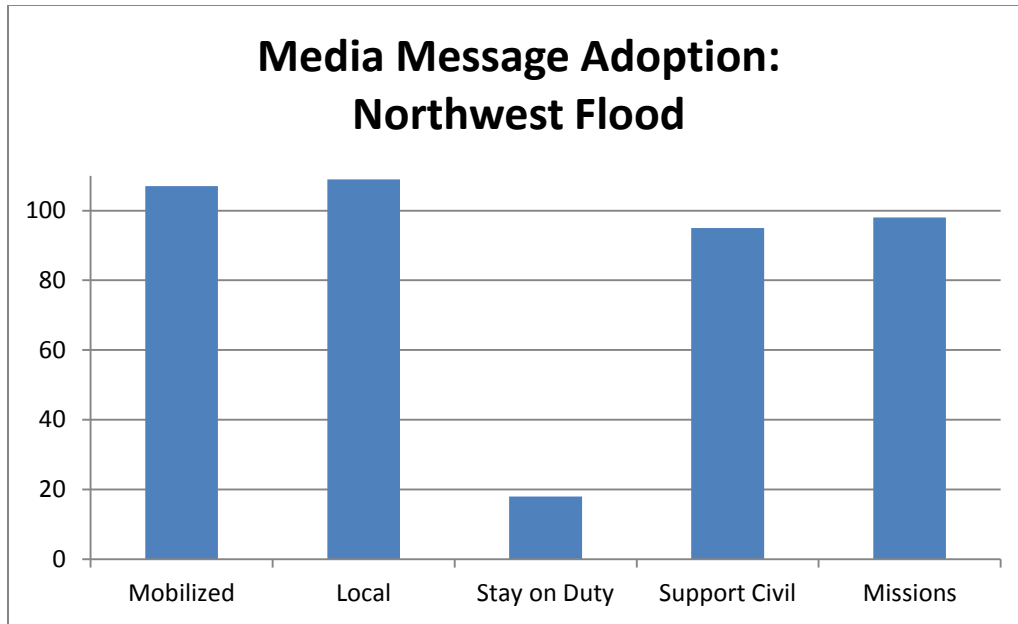
The Missouri National Guard sent out 43 news releases over the course of the final flood. Again, the core messages were of mobilization, support to civil authorities,

the types of missions, local connections, and that the Guard would stay on duty until released by the governor.



**Figure 2.8 – Guard messaging remained consistent throughout the flood. At the height of the flood.**

The message about staying on duty was pushed as flood operations began and again when they were winding down. Although it remained a key talking point during press conferences and interviews, it was neglected at the height of the flood for the same reason Maj. Spicer said it was omitted during Joplin: common sense.



**Figure 2.9 - Media adoption of Guard messages roughly reflected the messages being put out by the Missouri National Guard.**

For the National Guard, the coverage was overwhelmingly neutral to positive. There were no negative stories or major miscommunications. Even in areas where evacuations occurred, the state response as a whole and the Guard in particular were viewed making a positive impact. When the accident occurred that resulted in one soldier’s death and injuries to others, the coverage was respectful and focused on the soldier’s volunteering to see the mission through.

As with the southeast flood earlier in 2011, there was a danger of the Guard being confused with the less-than-popular U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Just as in the previous flood, the Guard worked hard to distinguish its state mission from the federal mission. Newspapers in the northwest part of the state did not appear to have any trouble distinguishing the two.

This was perhaps helped by the fact that, unlike in previous disasters, the units conducting the majority of operations were local. In places like Maryville, the 1-129<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery had the lead. In Kansas City, the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade was the senior command. In St. Joseph, the 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing was responsible for protecting both the city and Rosecrans Air National Guard Base.

One of the significant developments during the flood was an increased reliance on Twitter. The site had been used in previous state emergency missions, but largely to echo messages originating in other media. Much of the credit to the increased Twitter usage belonged with the local UPAR, Jennifer Archdekin. Archdekin had first used the medium during the Joplin memorial service. Due to the large geographic area being covered during the flood, Archdekin said Twitter was the most efficient and reliable way to tell the Guard's story in a way that was not old news by the time it was filed.

"It...enabled me to cover events in a larger geographic area by utilizing others in the field and having them send a quick snapshot on their phone and description of what's happening," Archdekin said.<sup>264</sup>

A key example of that was helicopter-sandbagging. The areas where sandbagging was taking place were difficult, if not impossible, to access without a Humvee or heavy-duty truck. The area was also not particularly safe. Media were able to get shots of civilian volunteers filling sandbags and the helicopters taking off with them, but there was no feasible way to see where they were going or what they were doing. By having uniformed personnel take pictures of the helicopters dropping sandbags and publish those photos on Twitter, Archdekin was able to ensure the most high-profile mission the Guard was conducting was available for public consumption.

In the course of two months, the northwest flood response sent out 94 tweets. Despite a dearth of missions during much of the flood and ongoing operations in Joplin, Twitter proved to be a reliable means of getting out information to the Guard's audience without saturating the market.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Of the four state emergency missions, the northwest flood was the longest lasting and slowest moving. It was also an excellent place to put into practice the lessons of the previous disasters.

The team model that had been developed after the first blizzard was refined, as team size and goals were determined to be situational. With a task force set up but no real missions, a team consisting of a senior NCO and an experienced soldier working in concert with a UPAR was deemed sufficient to cover the early part of the emergency. When missions picked up and relief was necessary, the three-uniformed model of an officer, print soldier, and broadcast soldier was implemented. As operations quieted down, the two-soldier model was again adopted.

Social media monitoring was formally adopted by the task force command during the northwest flood, as well. Although public affairs had done the initial monitoring in Joplin and during the southeast flood, the northwest task force also assigned personnel in its tactical operations center to keep track of public sites. Following the flood, the Missouri National Guard has continued to explore social media monitoring and is working to refine monitoring public pages in the Guard's Joint Operations Center.

It was also an opportunity to remember that not all social media sites are created equal. Although the Missouri National Guard was using Facebook and Twitter effectively, it was not until the northwest flood that the public affairs team got a good handle on Twitter. Since the flood there has been a concerted effort on the part of the public affairs team to differentiate what is going out on social media sites, and choose the best way to present information.

It is also worth noting that equipment issues that had plagued public affairs responses since the blizzard were also refined. During the second rotation, new camera equipment arrived. The broadcaster on duty, Sgt. Joshua Breig, was able to learn the new system. Six months elapsed between identifying the new equipment and obtaining it. Poor equipment had hindered all the previous missions, particularly the Joplin mission.

Finally, the northwest flood was a reminder that no two state emergency missions are alike. The blizzard had been quick and full of action. The southeast flood had gone roughly three weeks and had been equally packed with activity. Joplin had the biggest media response and unique mission sets. Although soldiers arriving in northwest Missouri wanted to treat it like the previous disasters, that was not necessary. Smaller teams and more sustainable rest/work cycles were implemented.

### **Chapter 3: Evaluation**

This has been the most enlightening and useful project I have ever worked on. Long before I was close to having a finished product, the lessons learned through research and interviews conducted for this project have been used in planning for both operations and exercises. There have been several additional missions where the subject matter explored in this project have been key to success.

The first was the evaluation of the Homeland Response Force. The Homeland Response Force is a 566-member organization augmenting Missouri's existing Chemical, Biological, Explosive, Radiological and Nuclear Enhanced Response Force Packages with a brigade level headquarters and a security forces element.<sup>265</sup> In simpler terms, the team's mission is to command military forces during a chemical or explosive event.

During the evaluation, I was part of a three-person public affairs team travelled to Muscatatuck Urban Training Site in Butlerville, Ind. Using early lessons learned through interviews and an early draft of the standard operating procedure included at the end of this project, we were successful during the evaluation. Key messages, including support to civil authorities, staying on duty, and mission sets, were included in initial releases. Talking points during the exercise stressed that the Guard was functioning under the command and control of civil authorities.

It did not hurt that many of the military police who were functioning as the security forces element had served on state emergency missions in 2011 and been exposed to public affairs. The military police were actively engaged in information dissemination, posting information that had been given to them by public affairs to

bulletin boards outside their checkpoints. The bulletin board included public affairs numbers and information about simulated shelters.

The second major event where this information was used was a presidential visit during the Joplin High School graduation ceremony. The Homeland Response Force was used to provide security at the event to coincide with a scheduled training exercise. A public affairs team was again called to assist, working under the governor's office and coordinating with the White House.

Although not an emergency, the information gathered on what went right and wrong during the memorial service was used extensively in planning. Finding a way of effectively credentialing media, as well as ensuring as many television and radio stations as possible – especially local – were allowed access to the arena was key. Identifying escort areas that would allow for as little disruption as possible was also an early priority. Perhaps most important, a parking plan for satellite trucks was key. Working from previous experience in Joplin, the Guard public affairs staff was able to estimate correctly the number of satellite trucks that were actually on hand. That number was much higher than the two or three the White House expected.

In August, a public affairs team was sent to Panama as part of a subject matter exchange through Missouri's state partnership program. The exchange focused on media relations, with a particular emphasis on emergency response. The importance of focusing on the five key messages discussed in this paper was repeatedly emphasized.

The successes and, more importantly, failures of the 2011 disasters were also discussed. The additional missions the Missouri National Guard as a whole, and the public affairs team in particular, took on after Joplin were featured. One of the great



success stories of the exchange was encouraging Panamanian agencies to train together so they could identify and coordinate their key messages in a major catastrophe.

An extensive discussion was held on the release of information issues around the theft investigation in Joplin. The Missouri team's hope was that by showing how withholding information from the media, the situation was made much worse. At the same time, the discussion was an opportunity to discuss institutional, legal, and cultural differences between the various agencies and two nations.

The greatest test for this project came in November 2012. That month, the Missouri National Guard hosted Vigilant Guard 2013. The training exercise, which was one of the largest in Missouri National Guard history, involved assets across the state responding to a simulated earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone.

By this time, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) included in the final section of this project had been fully developed. It included timetables, messages, and goals. It also gave a brief outline of how to use social media sites. The SOP outlines clear goals, but is less precise in how those goals need to be met. This is because the personnel and emergency response will vary with every case. The purpose of the SOP is to give guidance, not to micromanage.

Vigilant Guard 2013 was a particularly good test run because it involved many soldiers and airmen who had no previous state emergency duty experience. Those who did had largely been promoted and had a much higher level of responsibility. Further complicating things, the state public affairs officer, Maj. Tamara Spicer, was off site on assignment with the 835<sup>th</sup> Brigade Support Battalion, the unit she drills with. Lt. John

Quin, the deputy state public affairs officer, was also out of play because he was the exercise's observer/controller for public affairs.

A month before the exercise, soldiers from the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment were briefed on their role and expectations. While not giving away the specifics of the exercise, it was an opportunity to lay out the team's mission, messages, and timetables they were expected to hit. The soldiers, along with airmen from the 131<sup>st</sup> Bomb Wing public affairs shop, would have to put together a morning news release, field media calls, arrange interviews with simulated media (played by airmen from Hill Air Force Base), and run press conferences.

Late in the planning phase, a new wrinkle was added to the exercise. NorthCom was interested in testing out a new tool called SimDeck. SimDeck is a social media monitoring tool. During exercises, controllers act as individuals posting on organizational social media sites. Sometimes, the controllers are asking legitimate questions or posting information that needs to be forwarded to another source. Other times, they simply act like trolls or disturbed individuals who invariably surface during state emergencies.

Using the SOP developed here and briefings based on the lessons learned from previous state emergency missions, the soldiers were overwhelmingly successful. By this time, the five key messages measured in each section had been identified and were used in all releases. They were also provided to leadership during press conferences and phone interviews.

Although all three cases were training events, they at least point towards messaging going in the right directions. The lessons of 2011 have been integrated into the public affairs community's mindset.

The information collected through this project has also been used by historical services. Maj. Alan Brown is currently working on a state emergency duty history project for the Missouri National Guard. The newspaper analysis, along with the public affairs mission, overall Guard taskings, and the sequence of events outlined in this paper are being incorporated into the Missouri National Guard's official history.

Perhaps the key finding that has not been mentioned is the importance of newspapers. Social media is a great tool to get information to an audience, but that audience is a limited one that is largely already supportive of the Guard mission. As of December 2012, the Missouri National Guard's Facebook page has just over 11,300 fans. On Twitter, there are more than 3,700 followers.

Through newspapers, the articles gathered through the clipping service had a potential audience of 9,476,124 in Missouri alone. Newspapers remain most effective tool to reach communities in the state. While it is important to post photos and videos to social media sites, the great lesson of 2011 is that civilian media remains the most reliable outlet to reach the general public. Ultimately, those are the people whom the Missouri National Guard serves and to whom the Missouri National Guard is accountable.

Finally, I strongly believe the paper included in the analysis is a worthy addition to the ongoing dialogue within the Department of Defense about the usefulness of social media. Too often, leadership is concerned with being in control of every facet of an operation. Participating in social media means relinquishing some of that control. Although a lot of focus has been put on how the military uses social media in garrison and overseas, using social media during emergency operations is equally, if not more,

important for National Guard units. By emphasizing the importance of engaging in social media during periods of relative calm and building an audience, leaders and public affairs officers will not only be more comfortable during emergencies, but will already have established themselves and their pages as reliable resources for the news media and public.

Finally, I appreciate the patient of the committee during this process. I did not fully appreciate the scope of this project when I started. It involved analyzing more than 700 news articles and releases, developing criteria for evaluating them, and finding a way to utilize that research within this paper. Furthermore, finding the time to interview my subjects was not as easy as I'd anticipated. I could not do any of those interviews during working hours, and many of the individuals I had to interview are traditional Guardsmen and live in other parts of the state.

The greatest challenge of this project was making it make sense for a civilian audience. Although the goal of the analysis is to promote discourse among military public affairs officers and leaders, I had a secondary goal of de-mystifying military public affairs to the civilian student audience. It was my hope to present the individuals interviewed in this report as people not so different from journalists. We may have shorter hair and wear different clothes, but ultimately our goals are the same: to inform the American people and promote freedom of information and expression.

## **Chapter 4: Abundant Physical Evidence**

In addition to the included analysis and article, this section includes the end product I put together for the Missouri National Guard. This product is a revised standard operating procedure for state emergency missions. Although some efforts had been made on the unit-level (ie, within the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment), the state headquarters standard operating procedure needed badly to be updated.

This document is designed for a worst-case scenario event. This means that if the public affairs leadership is incapacitated or off-site, any public affairs soldier or airman should be able to complete the public affairs mission. Previous standard operating procedures were missing information like timelines, how to put together talking points, what to include in initial releases, and what the battle-rhythm should be. This document corrects that by giving guidance that is firm enough to get the mission completed successfully, but still leaves flexibility for the realities on the ground.

Names and contact information have been removed from this document, not only for privacy but because many of turnover.

Additionally, this document includes a public affairs annex which can be sent out by the Missouri National Guard's Joint Operations Center. This document includes, for the first time, social media guidance that leadership can use to guide their soldiers and airmen during operations.

# **Missouri National Guard Public Affairs**

## **State Emergency Duty**

### **Standard Operating Procedure**

**Missouri National Guard Public Affairs Office  
January 2013**

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## **NOTIFICATION OF MISSOURI NATIONAL GUARD MOBILIZATION:**

*The Missouri National Guard will receive notification of mobilization from the governor's office. This information will come to the Guard through the Joint Operations Center, currently located in the J-3 area.*

Notification of a state emergency mission will come from the Joint Operations Center (JOC)

- a. The JOC will immediately send out a fragmentary order (FRAGO) sent via internal distribution systems will have specifics on current mission state, including unit assignments and numbers
- b. Check in with the battle captain at the JOC for latest details on which counties/cities were are conducting operations in, which senior command is in charge, which units have been activated, and what strength we're operating at.
- c. The public affairs annex is Annex F and is included in the operations order. It may be amended as needed.
- d. **Exception to Sourcing Procedure:** In the event of an earthquake of a magnitude of greater than 6.0 along the New Madrid Seismic Zone in southeast Missouri, all Missouri National Guard personnel, including civilian UPARs, are required to report to their armory of assignment or nearest armory.

## **INITIAL COORDINATION/INFORMATION GATHERING:**

- a. State public affairs officer will coordinate talking points and messages for approval by J-3 and the adjutant general (TAG)
- b. Depending on scale of emergency, talking points may be sent to the Governor's office for approval
- c. For base talking points, see Annex F (Examples on p. 132 and 135)
- d. Create specific additional talking points as mission develops. Talking points should include:
  - a. The Guard is mobilized
  - b. Hometowns of units mobilized and areas of operations
  - c. The Guard will remain on duty until released by governor
  - d. The Guard is working in support of civil authorities
  - e. Specific missions the Guard is working
- e. Begin draft of initial release including the most basic information available

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS ANNEX:**

- a. Public affairs uses a pre-existing state emergency duty (SED) annex
- b. Annex may be updated and amended for specific operations
- c. Initial changes will likely occur with section 3, talking points
- d. Work with JOC to ensure annex is included in operations order or immediately sent out to the field as an updated annex



## **TALKING POINTS:**

- a. Core talking points can be found in section 3 of the public affairs annex
- b. The most important point to emphasis throughout operations are:
  1. The Guard is mobilized
  2. Hometowns of units mobilized and areas of operations
  3. The Guard will remain on duty until relieved by governor
  4. The Guard is working in support of civil authorities
  5. Specific missions the Guard is working
- c. Additional talking points, including safety messages, may be added as needed
- d. Talking points should be included in any battle update briefing
- e. All PA assets working in the area of operations should have copies of talking points for task force leadership and soldiers who may encounter media
- f. Senior leaders should be apprised of any additions/changes to talking points

## **INITIAL NEWS RELEASE:**

### **Writing**

- 1) The public affairs office will write the first release. The first release should include:
  - a. Nature of emergency mission
  - b. Scope of mission and types of mission
  - c. Approximately how many Soldiers/Airmen are on duty
  - d. Where supporting units/senior command are based
  - e. When sent for approval, TAG is encouraged to add a quote
  - f. When sent for approval, Governor's office is encouraged to add quote
  - g. Core information to include is:
    - i. The Guard is mobilized
    - ii. Hometowns of units mobilized and areas of operations
    - iii. The Guard will remain on duty until relieved by governor
    - iv. The Guard is working in support of civil authorities
    - v. Specific or anticipated Guard missions
  - h. Command message includes:
    - i. These Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen serve at the Governor's request
    - ii. Communities needing support should request support through SEMA
    - iii. Troops will stay on duty as long as needed
    - iv. Troops bring experience from overseas deployments and more than a dozen SEDs in the past 10 years
    - v. Additional troops can be brought in through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact if needed

### **Coordination**

- 1) All information needs to be verified by the JOC/J-3
- 2) Pass to TAG's office for approval/quote
- 3) After approved by J-3, Chief of Staff (COS) and TAG, send to governor's office. Governor's office will determine whether Guard will release or Governor will release:
  - a. Governor's Press Contacts
    - i. Press Secretary contact information
  - b. If governor adds quote, that quote goes first in the release, followed immediately by TAG quote.
  - c. Send all subsequent releases to Governor's office and ask if they would like to add a quote. Governor's office may not want releases after a certain point.

### **Distribution**

- 1) Before public distribution, send to the Missouri Department of Public Safety (DPS) and National Guard Bureau (NGB) Public Affairs:
  - a. DPS PIO contact information
  - b. NGB public affairs chief contact information
- 2) ALL state emergency releases should be sent out on the statewide distribution media list. The most current list can be found on the private drive at:
  - a. Public Affairs Internal Private Drive Address

### **Social Media/Web**

- 1) Photos with cut lines and verified updates or important messages may be sent out via social media sites if approved by state PAO
- 2) Social media are tools and should be used to achieve the same tactical and strategic goals as traditional media
- 3) All social media messages should mirror the talking points established for the operation
- 4) Initial release should be posted to Missouri National Guard social media and Web sites
- 5) Be prepared to answer public's questions on social media sites

### **INITIAL BROADCAST RELEASE:**

- 1) Upon notification, broadcasters should put together a release on the Guard's involvement and/or anticipated response
- 2) Product should be less than one (1) minute and include who/what of mission
- 3) If B-Roll is not be available, but interviews alone will suffice

- 4) Interview subject should be knowledgeable of operations and response. If possible, interview TAG, COS, state senior enlisted advisors, or, if in area of operations, task force commander

**STAFFING:**

- a. Staffing will be determined by the state public affairs officer
- b. Unit Public Affairs Representatives (UPARs) will serve as lead media coordinator in their areas. Other UPARs may be called in for support by the state public affairs officer.
- c. Uniformed assets must be requested through their chain of command.  
These assets include:
  - a. 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
  - b. 131<sup>st</sup> Bomb Wing public affairs
  - c. 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing public affairs
  - d. 135<sup>th</sup> Military History Detachment
  - e. 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade public affairs noncommissioned officer
  - f. 35<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade public affairs noncommissioned officer
  - g. Joint Force Headquarters-Missouri, Headquarters Detachment, public affairs noncommissioned officer
- e. All public affairs assets are under the command and control of the state public affairs officer. Administrative needs will be met by units of assignment.
- f. Accountability: Each section is accountable for the whereabouts and availability of its public affairs personnel.

**BATTLE UPDATE BRIEF**

- 1) The Battle Update Brief is usually conducted each morning during a state emergency mission. The Public Affairs Office is required to put together 1-3 slides on a template provided by the JOC.
- 2) Slides should include:
  - a. Public affairs personnel who have been activated and where they are
  - b. Pick the best 2-3 photos for slides – these should be cut down in size
  - c. Any significant broadcast or print coverage should be included
  - d. Any big issues PA has encountered
- 3) If there are any issues/problems PA has encountered. In the past, these have included issues like GSA use for UPARs
- 4) Take notes on any new issues/facts.
- 5) Send battle update brief to UPARs/PA staff when it is sent out

### **RESPONDING TO MEDIA QUERIES:**

- 1) All media inquiries should receive quick, accurate responses
- 2) Always have initial release, latest release and talking points printed on desk
- 3) Write down reporter's name/outlet/deadline
- 4) **IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THE ANSWER, TELL THEM YOU CAN FIND THE INFORMATION AND GET BACK TO THEM**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA USE:**

- 1) Distro all releases and broadcast products with traditional media distro
- 2) Respond to questions in timely, accurate manner with correct information
- 3) Monitor social media sites for any potential issues or incorrect rumors
  - a. Alert task force leadership/JOC of any recurring trends
- 4) Update frequently during SED
  - a. Facebook should be updated twice daily
  - b. Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube may be updated as needed
- 5) Have UPARs/PAOs on ground send Twitter updates – quotes from Soldiers and Airmen can be used as Tweets
- 6) Photos are especially important during SED – constantly updates albums on social media sites, and refer to them during BUBs

### **SUBSEQUENT NEWS RELEASES**

- 1) Establish a battle rhythm appropriate to the operation. For large-scale operations, it may be prudent to establish twice-daily news releases
- 2) All information must be verified with the JOC
- 3) Until notified otherwise, J-3, COS and TAG must approve releases
- 4) Governor's office may restrict release of information depending on the severity of operations, and my pool Guard info with larger statewide news releases.
- 5) Information for subsequent news releases should be pulled from the JOC as well as PA assets in the field.

### **SUBSEQUENT BROADCAST RELEASES/RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 1) Battle rhythm is usually one broadcast product per day depending on scale of operations and communications ability
- 2) Subsequent releases should focus on individual missions, Guard's purpose, interagency response, community impact, etc.
- 3) SMEs should include officer/senior NCO and junior enlisted, preferably from the area where operations are taking place
- 4) Broadcaster may also receive requests for specific b-roll that civilian media cannot obtain – should be prepared to upload b-roll to DVIDS and DIMOC

## **NATIONAL GUARD ASSETS**

- 1) If the SED involves the Air National Guard, coverage should be coordinated with the Wing Executive Officers.
  - a. 139<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing: **Executive Officer Contact Information**
  - b. 131<sup>st</sup> Bomb Wing: **Executive Officer Contact Information**
  - c. 157<sup>th</sup> Air Ops. Group: **Executive Officer Contact Information**
- 2) If the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment is activated, coordinate with:
  - a. MPAD Commander: **Contact Information**
  - b. MPAD NCOIC: **Contact Information**
- 3) If the 135<sup>th</sup> Military History Detachment is activated, coordinate with:
  - a. MHD Commander: **Contact Information**
  - b. MHD NCOIC: **Contact Information**

## **UNIT PUBLIC AFFAIRS REPRESENTATIVES:**

- 1) Determine the UPAR by the units responding and affected area.
  - a. If a UPAR lives in the affected area, it may be more effective to call in a UPAR from another area since the local UPAR will likely have family/home issues to deal with
  - b. Assign UPARs based on responding units
- 2) Activating UPARs
  - a. All dual status UPARs should be immediately brought on SED orders and off their contract. This will ensure that they can work longer hours without violating the terms of their fulltime contract.
  - b. For other UPARs, emergency authorization for overtime hours must be requested IMMEDIATELY. Contact:
    - i. **Contract agency's contact information**
    - ii. **MONG Contracting office's contact information**
- 3) UPAR Travel
  - a. UPAR should get GSA vehicle for travel. Contract authorizes use.
  - b. If no GSA is available, POVs may be authorized.
  - c. Travelling in military vehicles with Soldiers/Airmen will make UPAR less effective since it will confine them to that area
- 4) UPAR Equipment
  - a. UPARs should bring:
    - i. Pens/notebooks/cameras/recorder, etc.
    - ii. Laptops with air cards
    - iii. Copy of most current annual report
    - iv. Print and Broadcast media lists
    - v. Copies of the COOP disk with release templates

## 5) UPAR Support

- a. Once on the ground, the UPARs are our lifeline to the units. They are the first, best source of on-the-ground information. After tasking them, our job becomes to support them. They may not have access to internet and phone service may be spotty.
  - i. If no internet access, have the UPAR read their article and transcribe it
  - ii. If no computer access, write the UPARs notes and quotes and write the article
  - iii. Field media calls and give UPARs specific direction on who to interview. Begin with company commanders, senior NCOs and Soldiers local to that media outlet.
  - iv. As missions carry on and OPTEMPO stabilizes, may coordinate hometown news releases about individual troops in response

### **CONTINUING OPERATIONS PAST 72 HOURS:**

- 1) Depending on scope of emergency, institute rest/work cycle and team relief model immediately
- 2) Continue to send out releases at least once each day
- 3) Be active on social media sites; respond quickly and accurately to legitimate questions
- 4) If bad news occurs, get out in front of it, following Defense Department procedures
- 5) Ensure teams are supporting task forces, and that task forces are supporting teams
- 6) If the mission winds down, ensure support remains at an appropriate level
- 7) Do NOT distro a release saying the Guard's mission is complete and the emergency is over. The end of the Guard's mission often simply means that local agencies or more appropriate state agencies have the situation under control.

1.SITUATION: See Base Plan

2.MISSION: See Base Plan

3.EXECUTION:

3.A. Concept of the Operation:

3.A.1. State Emergency Duty is an opportunity to remind media and general public of the value of the Hometown Guard.

3.A.2. SED Leadership will ensure the National Guard Bureau Branding Logo Decals and Magnets are prominently displayed to the civilian population during state emergency duty.

3.A.3. Commanders, Soldiers and Airmen should engage the media and keep them aware of Guard missions.

3.B Messages for state emergency duty should include:

3.B.1. We are mobilized under the authority of the Governor and report to local civil authorities.

We will remain on duty until released by the Governor and local civil authorities.

3.B.2. The Missouri National Guard has the personnel and equipment necessary to help the citizens of Missouri through this emergency. Additional resources from other states may be obtained through the Emergency Management Assistance.

3.B.3. This mobilization is an example of the dual federal/state mission of the National Guard.

3.B.4. There have been many lessons learned from recent state emergency duty call ups. The Missouri National Guard has supported dozens of emergency duty call ups since 2005. We will apply everything we have learned to better support our local communities.

3.B.5. Any communities needing help from the Missouri National Guard should have their local civil authorities request assistance through the State Emergency Management Agency.

3.B.6. The Missouri National Guard has a force of nearly 11,500 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen in the stat and we are ready to support the needs of the citizens of Missouri.

3.B.7. The Missouri National Guard is well equipped to deal with a wide range of emergencies, and has capabilities including emergency route clearance, sandbagging, communications, and supporting civil authorities as needed.

3.B.8. After more than a decade of overseas deployments and dozens of state emergency missions in the same timeframe, the Missouri National Guard has thousands of seasoned, battle-tested leaders who stand ready to protect the state at home and abroad.

3.C Coordinating Instructions:

3.C.1. General Tips for Meeting the Media

3.C.1.A. Know who you are talking to - Ask for a business card

3.C.1.B. Listen to the entire question. If the question is vague or unclear, ask them to repeat or clarify it. Think about your answer before speaking

3.C.1.C. Be honest; there is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know"

- 3.C.1.D. Relax and be yourself. Media are interviewing you because of who you are; don't try to be someone else
- 3.C.1.E. Stay within your area of responsibility or expertise. If you own, command, or did it, then talk about it. Don't speculate.
- 3.C.1.F. Be brief and to the point. Radio and TV media will edit your answer into a single short sound byte.
- 3.C.1.G. Never discuss classified or sensitive information with the media
- 3.C.1.H. THINK OPSEC!
- 3.C.1.I. REMEMBER: Everything you say or do is on the record. Assume everything you say or do will appear in print or on the air.

### 3.D. Social Media Guidance

- 3.D.1. Guardsmen should treat social media the same as traditional media when it comes to OPSEC, interaction with the public, and propriety.
- 3.D.2. The State PAO realizes that many members use social media in their capacity as a private citizen and recommends they follow these three guidelines for successful not interfering with organization membership:
  - 3.D.2a. Maintain the proper security settings in your social media accounts.
  - 3.D.2b. Don't associate your page with the MONG unless you are certain your page meets the organizations policies.
  - 3.D.2c. Don't conduct conversations that do not meet MONG policies.
  - 3.D.2d. Guardsmen must always identify themselves as Guardsmen when using social media in an official capacity.
- 3.D.3. Command Social Media Guidance
  - 3.D.3a. Commanders must recognize that Soldiers and Airmen are active on social media, and that social media may, under appropriate circumstances, be effective outreach tools.
  - 3.D.3b. Members or units using social media as a tool to meet the mission, vision, and values of the Missouri National Guard must have the social media presence approved by the State Public Affairs Office
  - 3.D.3d. During emergencies, public Social Media can be an excellent source of information in a disaster area
  - 3.D.3e: Units may wish to monitor public pages that grow during disasters to gather information that could be useful in responses or to gain feedback on MONG activities.

### 4. SERVICE SUPPORT: See Base Plan

### 5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:

- 5.A. If approached by civilian media, coordinate with your chain of command and the State Public Affairs Office. The State Public Affairs Office is reachable at 573-638-9846, email to [ngmo.pao@us.army.mil](mailto:ngmo.pao@us.army.mil).
- 5.B. If media has contacted you let the public affairs office know at the earliest possible convenience.
- 5.C. Share PAO contact info with media.



5.D. "Tips for Meeting the Media" cards are available upon request from the State Public Affairs Office.

ACKNOWLEDGE:

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**EXAMPLE: HOMELAND RESPONSE FORCE EXERCISE TALKING POINTS**

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The Missouri National Guard is mobilized under the authority of the Governor and report to local civil authorities. We will remain on duty until released by the Governor and local civil authorities.

The Missouri National Guard has the personnel and equipment necessary to help the citizens of Missouri through this emergency. Additional resources needed may be requested from other states through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

The Missouri National Guard has one of only 10 Homeland Response Forces in the nation. This team brings advanced capabilities to make the state and its citizens better prepared to deal with emergencies including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-explosive incidents.

The Homeland Response Force is a joint Army and Air National Guard force made up of more than 560 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen. In addition to its inherent capabilities, the force is designed to accommodate and provide command and control for additional assets if needed.

The Homeland Response Force is well equipped to deal with a wide range of emergencies, and has capabilities including communications, decontamination, establishing hazardous waste sites, and providing medical treatment.

This mobilization is an example of the dual federal/state mission of the National Guard.

After more than a decade of overseas deployments and dozens of state emergency missions in the same timeframe, the Missouri National Guard has thousands of seasoned, battle-tested leaders who stand ready to protect the state at home and abroad.

Any communities needing help from the Missouri National Guard should have their local civil authorities request assistance through the State Emergency Management Agency.

The Missouri National Guard has a force of nearly 11,500 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen in the state who are ready to support the needs of the citizens of Missouri. Approximately 1,000 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen are currently mobilized in support of overseas contingency operations, leaving a robust force able to respond to the citizens of Missouri.

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**Initial Release Example: 2012 Branson Tornado**

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**Missouri National Guard mobilized to assist in storm response effort**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Gov. Jay Nixon has mobilized the Missouri National Guard to assist civil authorities in Branson following a night of severe storms.

“These storms have caused extensive damage across Missouri, and widespread damage and debris continue to pose significant risk to lives and property,” Nixon said. “As a result, I have ordered the Missouri National Guard to deploy Citizen-Soldiers and assets to support local law enforcement agencies with emergency coordination and recovery. Missouri’s Citizen-Soldiers performed tremendously during disaster response efforts throughout 2011, and I know that they will help ensure public safety.”

Approximately 50 Citizen-Soldiers will provide additional security in support of local authorities in the area, said Maj. Gen. Stephen L. Danner, adjutant general of the Missouri National Guard.

“Our Soldiers and Airmen are ready to assist their fellow Missourians,” Danner said. “We served extensive state missions in 2011 and have seasoned leaders, Soldiers and Airmen who bring years of experience to their mission.”

In addition to the Guard members mobilized, the Missouri National Guard has a total force of more than 11,500 Soldiers and Airmen ready to respond, Danner said.

Missouri’s Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen will continue working in support of local authorities until released by the governor.

For more information about the Missouri National Guard, please visit [www.moguard.com](http://www.moguard.com) and our social media sites: [www.facebook.com/Missouri.National.Guard](http://www.facebook.com/Missouri.National.Guard); [www.twitter.com/Missouri\\_NG](http://www.twitter.com/Missouri_NG); [www.youtube.com/MoNationalGuard](http://www.youtube.com/MoNationalGuard); [www.myspace.com/missouri\\_ng](http://www.myspace.com/missouri_ng); [www.flickr.com/photos/missouriguard](http://www.flickr.com/photos/missouriguard); [www.moguard.com/blog](http://www.moguard.com/blog); [www.pinterest.com/monationalguard/](http://www.pinterest.com/monationalguard/)

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For more information about this release, please contact the Missouri National Guard public affairs office at [ngmo.pao@us.army.mil](mailto:ngmo.pao@us.army.mil) or 573 638-9846.

## Chapter 5

### **“Building a Network: The Benefits of Social Media in State Emergency Missions”**

*This section includes a paper analyzing that analyzes the importance of social media in state emergency operations. By examining the potential dangers of social media and weighing them against the potential benefits, this paper makes the case that leaders and public affairs officers need to be active and engaged in social media as part of their daily operations. Only by cultivating an audience and building trust can social media sites be used as effective communications tools. Furthermore, it is imperative that public affairs officers grow beyond their traditional role as organizational gatekeepers participating in one-way conversations, and embrace their roles as representatives of their commands in an ongoing dialogue with both internal and external audiences.*

*This paper also demonstrates the potential benefits of using social media during emergency operations. Those include the ability to upload video, interact with concerned citizens, transmit products quickly, and monitor public sites for potential issues that may become problems. This paper will be submitted to a professional military publication following approval by the committee and my chain of command.*

## **Building a Network: The Benefits of Social Media in State Emergency Missions**

*By 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John Quin  
Public Affairs Officer, Missouri National Guard*

On May 23, 2011, a Missouri National Guard public affairs specialist photographed soldiers searching through rubble following a devastating tornado in Joplin, Mo., with her iPhone. She e-mailed the picture to the state public affairs office, which forwarded it to the media. The photo appeared in dozens of Defense Department and civilian publications.

That photograph - and the fact that it would have been impossible to take and transmit so quickly and effectively three years earlier - is viewed as both a great danger and a great opportunity within the military. The rise of smart phones and social media sites has forced the military to adapt quickly to a new information environment. That change was neither instantaneous nor painless. Instead, it was the result of more than 10 years of Defense Department policy changes, evolutions in attitude, and leaders willing to change with the times.

When four back-to-back emergencies hit Missouri in 2011, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs team's mission was to tell the Guard's story and keep the public informed with timely, accurate information. These emergencies marked the first time the Missouri Guard had used social media during state emergency operations. Whereas previous emergencies had been monologues, social media transformed that communication into a dialogue. A study of some of the challenges the Missouri National Guard public affairs faced during four major disasters in 2011 offers insight into how other agencies can adapt to the constantly changing information environment and navigate it effectively to their missions.

## **Adapting to the Social Media Environment**

In the past 10 years, the 24-hour, television news cycle has given way to a 24-hour online information cycle. Now, public affairs officers who formerly acted as organizational gatekeepers find themselves communicating directly with the public on sites like Facebook and Twitter. To be effective in this new environment, public affairs staff require buy-in from all levels of leadership, from the platoon sergeant to the policy makers in the Pentagon. To their credit, many of these leaders have accepted that social media are not going away

. This relatively quick adoption of social media is an aberration from how the military has traditionally viewed new communications technology. The U.S. military has an unimpressive track record with new communications technology, especially during wartime. From seizing the telegraph lines during the Civil War to pooling efforts during the invasions of Panama and Grenada, the military has traditionally favored restricting information. While the embedding program allowed civilian media access to American troops at war they hadn't enjoyed in decades, the military was slower adapting to social media used by their own personnel.

Soldiers on remote outposts now use e-mail, blogs, Facebook and Skype to speak directly with their families in ways that were unimaginable when the war began. While better communications may be good for morale, many within the military view it as bad for operations security. Troops have unprecedented access to social media outlets and video and file sharing sites like Flickr and YouTube. Throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the photos and videos that have resulted in the most negative stories have come from military members. Instant communications have allowed

unedited, un-vetted footage to travel directly from theater to America's living rooms.

These include:

- In 2003-2004, Abu Ghraib came to public attention after photographs taken by members of the 372<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company.<sup>266</sup>
- In 2007, a group of U.S. Marines filmed themselves throwing a puppy off a cliff.<sup>267</sup>
- In 2010-2011, the so-called 'Kill Team,' a group of four soldiers from 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division took pictures of themselves allegedly committing war crimes.<sup>268</sup>
- In 2012, a video of Marines urinating on the corpses of what appear to be dead insurgents was most likely taken by another Marine.<sup>269</sup>

Ultimately, a handful of troops are responsible for publicizing the war's most damaging stories.

While the 'easy' answer may be limiting troops' access to such sites and technology, to do so would be yielding the major battlefield of the information war to the enemy. In 2006, Jarret M. Brachman published an article titled "High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda's Use of New Technology." Brachman argues that by effective use of internet resources, Al-Qaeda was able to evolve into an "organic social movement, making its virulent ideology accessible to anyone with a computer."<sup>270</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also recognized the enemy's advantage in social media. In an editorial published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Rumsfeld recognized that while the U.S. military struggled to find a coherent policy and viable use for new media, "the vacuum will be

filled by the enemy and by hostile news sources who most assuredly will not paint an accurate picture of what is actually taking place.”<sup>271</sup>

It is not enough simply not to limit the access individual service members have to social media – units and commands must be engaged themselves. In 2009, the Joint Public Affairs Support Element of U.S. Joint Forces Command published, “Social Media and Department of Defense Communication.” The paper recognized that as traditional print outlets continued to decline, social media sites like Twitter were exploding.<sup>272</sup> Although all branches were experimenting with social media, there was no consistency of effort.<sup>273</sup>

Although the service branches have begun to adopt social media, there are still major security concerns. Just as the military had to kowtow to the idea of losing control of its messages by engaging in two-way, uncontrolled conversations on social media sites, it has also had to adopt prioritizing transparency over security in some situations. That is not to say that the military is encouraging security violations. Instead, there is an organization-wide understanding that holds the potential benefits of social media are worth the risks, and that the way to mitigate those risks is through education and personal accountability. In the U.S. Army Social Media Handbook, soldiers are given guidance to ensure personal and unit security.<sup>274</sup>

### **Using Social Media During Emergency Operations**

While much of the policy discussions appear based around overseas missions, how new media can be leveraged by the National Guard during state emergencies has



emerged as a topic worthy of further study. Simply put, social media have not just become a part of the public affairs culture, but have *become* the public affairs culture. Heather Blanchard, co-founder of Crisis Commons USA, told the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence in 2011, “Now more than ever, using social media during a disaster or crisis is a must do, rather than a nice to do. If you don’t listen to and communicate with the community you are putting yourself at a huge disadvantage. The conversation is happening around you; ignore it at your peril.”<sup>275</sup>

How social media were used to tell the National Guard’s story and relay emergency information during Missouri’s 2011 crises came as a direct result of the policies the Defense Department has pursued during the past decade and through years of building the Missouri Guard’s social media presence. The time to start participating in social media is not when an emergency begins. Organizations must be engaged and have been cultivating an audience before a disaster. These day-to-day interactions not only build an audience, but build trust. When disaster strikes, a site with several thousand followers will immediately be viewed as more trustworthy than one with only a handful of followers.

For the future of military public affairs policy and practice, understanding the benefits and possible dangers of social media during a state emergency is the key to finding a way forward that completes the military’s mission. What follows is an examination of some of the challenges the Missouri National Guard faced in social media during the 2011 disaster season, and some of the capabilities available to the Missouri Guard because of social media. By reviewing the steps taken by the Missouri National

Guard throughout 2011, other military agencies might better understand how to use social media as a tool to expand upon and improve their existing outreach capabilities.

### **It's a dialogue, not a monologue**

The cost of doing business in the 24-hour information environment is control. Before 2011, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs team acted as gatekeepers and communicated largely by sending out news releases and coordinating interviews with civilian media. By engaging directly with the public on social media, that monologue became a dialogue. In some instances, that meant receiving negative feedback from the audience.

On the morning of Feb 2, Spc. Sarah Lupescu, of the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, posted a 55-second broadcast story about National Guard missions during the blizzard of 2011. The video received almost immediate negative feedback on the Missouri National Guard's Facebook site. A woman named Samantha claimed she had seen Guard vehicles pass a person who needed help posted what she had seen. Rather than remove the post, the Guard's response was to alert the Joint Operations Center of the potential issue, and to post a response saying, "Samantha - very sorry to hear that, if you want to send us details and we can look into it, please send to [ngmo.pao@us.army.mil](mailto:ngmo.pao@us.army.mil)."<sup>276</sup>

"Negative posts are difficult," said Maj. Tamara Spicer, the state public affairs officer. "Over the years, we have grown to accept them and leave them in place. This allows the poster to have shared their concerns. We can also use that information to improve our response."<sup>277</sup>

Almost immediately, however, the comment began to receive negative feedback from other posters. The initial post was taken down by the poster, who then posted that it was “not a big deal” and that the poster herself had a friend who had served in the National Guard.

Although it is a cause of consternation for some, the ability for the public to communicate with the Guard directly is a positive development, even when those comments are negative, said 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Mary Williams. Williams gained extensive state emergency duty experience with the Florida National Guard and remembered when grievances were more likely to be aired on the 6 o’clock news than on social media. By giving the public a direct means of communicating publicly with the Guard, social media is actually enhancing the Guard’s response capabilities as well as its ability to communicate directly with the public on specific concerns, Williams said.

“I enjoy knowing that a person is going to be able to go to our social media site and say, ‘Hey, I haven’t seen the Guard in this area, but they need to be there,’ and we being able to say or post a picture within five minutes and say, ‘They’re actually there, you just didn’t see them,’ versus hearing about it on the nightly news,” Williams said.<sup>278</sup>

### **Show, don’t tell**

Although most of the videos were produced by Guard members, the most-viewed video of the 2011 emergencies was shot on a cell phone by a first responder. The public affairs office put the video Spc. Junior Bombard and Sgt. Tim Bridges, both of the 1138th Military Police Company, rescuing a 93-year old woman from flood waters.<sup>279</sup> The video,

which was taken by Butler County Deputy Sheriff Bob Larkins, was uploaded to the Missouri National Guard's social media sites and DVIDS.<sup>280</sup> Internally, the video received 77 'likes' on the Guard's Facebook page and 35 comments – including one from one of the soldiers' wives who was a follower. Nationally, the story was picked up on major media outlets including Fox and CNN.

Ann Keyes, who worked with the 1138<sup>th</sup> during the flood, said she wasn't surprised by the video's popularity. "it's a great video," Keyes said. "And it was spontaneous and even elementary, so I think that helped it go viral. It truly showed what the flood was like - rushing, dirty, dangerous -, so it gave people an up-close view of something they wouldn't normally see."<sup>281</sup>

It is exceedingly rare to get that type of video during an operation, but when such video becomes available, it is important to have not only the connections with the traditional media to push the video out, but a means to getting that video the public. Although DVIDS is an outstanding resource, having a YouTube, Flickr or Facebook site where it can be echoed through social media gives you a much better way to get your product out.

### **Be first with the facts**

When Newton and Duquesne counties were hit by a devastating tornado on May 22, 2011, the Missouri Guard was mobilized immediately. For the Missouri National Guard's public affairs staff, the top priority was explaining to the Guard's role to the public. Thanks to social media, the Guard could record a video of Maj. Gen. Steve

Danner, the adjutant general, explaining the Guard's role and anticipated missions.

Putting the product together and getting it to the public was a relatively quick process, said Spc. Adam Winters, the broadcaster.

“I think I put it together in 30 minutes,” Winters said. “It was just a quick interview of him saying, ‘listen, this tornado happened, the Missouri National Guard is responding, we’ve been called up by Gov. Jay Nixon to assist local first responders in any way we possibly can. Getting that who-what-when-where-why out there as quickly as possible was key to a successful campaign.’”<sup>282</sup>

Due to equipment issues and communications issues in southwest Missouri, it would be days before more video would be produced. Winters' video, although it contained no footage of the tornado and nobody on site, effectively outlined the Guard's mission, goal, and command messages.

### **New technology means new opportunities**

In the early morning hours of May 23, 2011, unit public affairs representative Ann Keyes had no photographs of the ongoing search and rescue missions. The affected area was “pitch black,” Keyes said, so taking a picture was a fruitless endeavor. That changed with the sunrise. In still-limited light, Keyes began taking pictures of the Guard's search and rescue efforts.

“It was during the southeast Missouri flooding that I realized how much more quickly I could get photos out with my phone,” Keyes said. “By using my traditional

digital camera, I would have to wait to get back to a computer and upload. The iPhone allowed me to shoot a pic and send with a cutline instantly.”<sup>283</sup>

That photo, of five soldiers working in the rubble of a destroyed Walmart, was one of the most picked-up images the Missouri National Guard sent out to the media. For Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins, the fact that Keyes’ photograph was taken on a phone and of a good enough quality to be picked up as the cover to a national magazine showed how far technology had come and how important it was to get good images quickly.

“It captured what was going on really well and told the story in that moment by itself,” Collins said. “If you can capture your images that do that and send them off, people are really willing to overlook the technical limitations that image had. They will find a way to make it work.”<sup>284</sup>

### **Stop rumors at their source**

Early in emergency operations, the Missouri National Guard developed a social media monitoring system. The monitoring program was important for gauging the mood of the people in the area, seeing if and how Guard messages were being picked up, and identifying any possible issues before they became problems. Missouri was very transparent about monitoring activities from the beginning. On April 28, during the first flood operation, the Guard put out a release on its use of social media and received no negative reaction.

Quickly, the Missouri National Guard as a whole had recognized that social media was an invaluable tool not only for public affairs, but for the task force in general.

Even so, it was not without its pitfalls, said Maj. Alan Brown of the 110<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. On one occasion, there was a false report about a levee breach. Thanks to social media, the report reached state headquarters before it reached the task force operations center.

“There were guys out there,” said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins, who was on-site. “They had eyes on. That levee was not doing what was being put out on the social media. The more eyes you have on something, the better.”

Although the emergency was fake, the lesson was real. The task force had to keep up with what was transpiring on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, Brown said. In addition to his regular duties, Brown became the task force’s *de facto* social media guru.

“We actually beefed up – I took an NCO, a sergeant, and he assisted me in keeping an eye out on any reports,” Brown said. “We’d also gotten a handle on the social media outlets that the citizens were using on a regular basis in that area. We were keeping an eye on those to make sure that it didn’t create any chaos, that making sure if there was a problem, we could react in kind and in a fast enough manner to put the citizens at ease in that area.”<sup>285</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While traditional civilian news media remain the best conduit for military organizations to communicate with the public, social media offer new outreach opportunities that leaders and organizations need to embrace. The key to successfully using social media during emergency operations is being familiar with them and cultivating an audience well ahead of an emergency. By knowing how to communicate

most effectively, agencies can ensure their messages are getting to the public quickly and accurately. By building an audience during day-to-day operations, agencies and units can build trust with that audience.

Organizations need to recognize that interactions will not always be positive. During emergencies, people are often scared and tempers can run hot. It is the job of the public affairs officer to speak with a calm, professional, authoritative voice during such times. Do not ignore negative posts and do not erase them – remember, the public has a right not know how their resources are being used and what their government is doing to help them in times of crisis. Share these negative comments with your leadership; they can only lead to improvements in how operations are being carried out.

The dawn of social media marks a drastic change with how public affairs officers have traditionally done business. No longer are they simply gatekeepers who communicate with the public through the media. Now, in addition to public affairs' the crucial media support function, leaders and public affairs officers have the opportunity to communicate directly with the public they serve. Although this new, direct communication can be frightening, it will ultimately lead to improved responses and a greater connection with the public we serve.



# **Missouri National Guard Crisis Response in the Age of Instant Communication**

Professional Project Proposal  
MISSOURI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM  
Winter 2012

By  
1st Lt. John T. Quin

Committee  
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Dr. Larry Godsey

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## Missouri National Guard Crisis Response in the Age of Instant Communication

*Between 2008 and 2011, the Missouri National Guard's public affairs office saw a major shift in the way it supports state emergency missions. The Missouri National Guard's 2011 responses reflect the evolution of the global information environment in that period. Thanks to the popularity of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter and file sharing sites like Flickr, there is now a 24-hour communications cycle with both the media and the public. This project will be an in-depth analysis of the way crisis communications have changed and the way military journalism/public affairs has evolved in its correspondence with internal and external audiences.*

### **Introduction**

When I entered the Missouri School of Journalism in August 2005, my goal was to become a war correspondent. I took courses that I believed would help me attain that goal and worked two semesters on the public safety beat at *The Missourian*. During my fourth semester, as I looked for a professional project, I got an internship with the Missouri National Guard's public affairs office.

Working as an intern for the Missouri National Guard was an eye-opening experience. As an assistant editor for the Guard's monthly magazine, *Bear Facts*, I saw the kind of work the National Guard does and how it was presented. Even at the time, the lag in the publishing schedule made the magazine seem out of date even before it was printed. Still, I found the day-to-day work valuable and admired the transparency of the National Guard and the speed with which the staff worked to support media requests, regardless of the size of the outlet or content of the question.

Despite the experience I had gained at the University of Missouri, I still felt I lacked the credibility to do the type of project I wanted to. In August 2007, I took a full-time job as a unit public affairs representative at Fort Leonard Wood with the Missouri

National Guard. My goal was to increase my expertise and find a project that would allow me to finish my degree.

I definitely accomplished the first of those two goals. I was commissioned as an Air Force officer on Nov. 13, 2009, and am now a first lieutenant and the deputy director of public affairs for the Missouri National Guard. I have gained significant joint experience, serving in both in an Air Force slot with Joint Force Headquarters and as a team leader detailed to Missouri Army National Guard's 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. After officer training at Maxwell Air Force Base, I completed technical training as a public affairs officer at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md. I am sourced to deploy to Afghanistan as part of the 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment in August 2013, and will likely receive another, shorter assignment in support of overseas contingency operations before then.

During the past five years, I have gained extensive experience in crisis communication. I have worked at both the field and headquarters level on incidents including the 2008 Mississippi River floods, the southeast Missouri ice storm in 2010, the 2011 blizzard, the 2011 Missouri and Mississippi River floods, and the 2011 Joplin tornado. I have worked closely with local, state and national agencies including FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, SEMA, the Missouri Department of Public Safety and the Missouri governor's office. I have earned public affairs certifications through the National Incident Management System. In other words, I did not drop out of school four years ago – instead, I spent those four years furthering my experience and education so that I could complete my degree with a credible product worthy of the program.

As I approach my overseas deployment, I am interested in creating a product that can help with the National Guard's mission. The National Guard is the oldest component of the nation's armed services, and the only one with a dual state and federal mission. In addition to its federal role supporting operations overseas, the National Guard serves as the state militia, supporting the governor with trained personnel and equipment during state emergencies.

My project will be outside the scope of my normal duties but serve an important purpose for myself, the Missouri National Guard, and all Defense Department communicators. It will give insight into how military public affairs and journalism are evolving. More important, professionally, my project will focus on the role new media have had in re-defining the way Missouri National Guard public affairs does business on both the strategic and tactical levels, and how public affairs officers, soldiers and airmen can use those tools most effectively.

As far as professional goals go, I would like to stay in the military at least until I attain the rank of major. To get there, I will have to fill a number of positions including serving as a wing public affairs officer and a staff officer. As mentioned, I will be going to Afghanistan in 2013 and want to be as well-prepared as possible. Through this project, I will gain a better understanding of the current media environment and how to utilize new technology most effectively.

## **Professional Skills Component**

While completing my project, I will continue to work at the Missouri National Guard. Because it is a fulltime, paid position, I realize that while my work will be closely coordinated with my commanding officer, I will not be working on my project during duty hours. Instead, I will block out time during the week and on weekends to ensure that I am maintaining that 30-hour per week schedule. After years of attending military training schools and working disaster support, effective time management skills are second nature.

My role as a public affairs officer most closely parallels an editor in the civilian journalism world. During day-to-day operations and crises, my job is to give the soldiers and airmen under my command assignments, edit those assignments, and ensure they are in a format readily digestible by the public. Like civilian news outlets, we work on constant deadlines and encounter the same challenges they do.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have a long list of skills and experiences that make me extremely well-qualified to work on this project. First, I have two years of experience at the University of Missouri Journalism School, learning the academic skills I will need to complete this project effectively. Second, I have four years' experience working as a civilian and airman in military public affairs. I have completed officer training at Maxwell Air Force Base, Al., and technical training at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md. I am also certified through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Incident Management System for Emergency Support Function 15, external affairs.

What makes me most qualified for this project is my extensive public affairs experience during disaster responses. I have worked in the field and at the headquarters level during some of the biggest disasters in state history. In 2011 alone, I was a part of the January/February blizzard response, the southeast Missouri floods in spring, the Joplin tornado response, and the northwest Missouri floods in summer and fall. During that time period, the Missouri National Guard produced 166 disaster-related news releases, 39 disaster-related broadcast packages, conducted hundreds of media interviews, had hundreds of interactions on social media sites, and amassed a digital photo library of more than 1,500 pictures.

Ideally I would like to work on this project from January 30-May 4. This will cover the 14-week requirement, however may require a little bit of pushback because I will still be working fulltime during this period. I would foresee myself working on this project 15 hours during the week and 15 hours on the weekends. The evening hours would be 5 p.m. -8 p.m. The weekend hours would be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Obviously one weekend a month I would have to adjust this schedule to account for monthly training drills.

During this period, I would analyze the techniques used to conduct a successful public affairs emergency operation. This analysis would focus on three areas – print journalism, broadcast journalism and social media. It will require a close analysis of the products the Missouri National Guard put out during state emergency response. Not only will I look back at the original products, but I will conduct interviews with the individuals who produced them. These interviews would include civilian public affairs representatives, soldiers and airmen who served as broadcasters and print journalists on

the ground, and the public affairs officers and senior noncommissioned officers who lead the teams.

I foresee this analysis being divided into the following sections:

1) **Introduction/mission overviews:** This section will give a brief explanation of the four emergency responses the Missouri National Guard conducted in 2011. These will include geographic areas, units involved, mission sets, and a timetable. This will also include an overview of the Missouri National Guard public affairs program and capabilities, as well as a brief introduction to the specific public affairs responses.

2) **Print/photo journalism:** This section will include an analysis of the print stories distributed to the media. Special attention will be given to why certain topics were covered, what information had to get out, and what standard information and messages were included. One soldier or airman will be interviewed for each operation. Some will be interviewed for more than one operations.

Operation Bitter Rain (Blizzard): Spc. Jacqueline Courtney

Operation Rising Tide (Southeast flood): Spc. Antony Lee

Operation Southwest Twister (Joplin tornado): Staff Sgt. Jon Dougherty

Operation Northern Tide (Northwest flood): Spc. Antony Lee

3) **Broadcast journalism:** Will include an analysis of both the broadcast packages and the additional products produced for internal and external use by broadcast correspondents. Like the print projects, information presented and messages will be analyzed. The difference in capabilities between 2008 and 2011 will also be discussed.

Operation Bitter Rain (Blizzard): Sgt. Sarah Lupescu

Operation Rising Tide (Southeast flood): Spc. Adam Winters



Operation Southwest Twister (Joplin tornado): Spc. Adam Winters

Operation Northern Tide (Northwest flood): Sgt. Joshua Breig

5) **New and social media use:** Since the last major, extended in-state emergency in 2008, social media evolved from something college students use to communicate to one of the most effective mass communication tools out there. The disasters of 2011 marked the first time the Missouri National Guard incorporated sites like Facebook and Twitter into its response. Because social media was coordinated through the state public affairs office in Jefferson City, interviews will be done spanning all operations with the state public affairs officer, Maj. Tamara Spicer, and the state's senior public affairs noncommissioned officer, Master Sgt. Mary Williams.

4) **Media coordination:** A significant effort was made through all responses to accommodate media in all areas of operations. The majority of media coordination was done by public affairs officers and senior noncommissioned officers, as well as civilian unit public affairs representatives. This section will analyze the challenges faced by each during each operation.

Operation Bitter Rain (Blizzard): Mr. Bill Phelan

Operation Rising Tide (Southeast flood): Ms. Michelle Queiser

Operation Southwest Twister (Joplin tornado): Ms. Ann Keyes

Operation Northern Tide (Northwest flood): Ms. Jennifer Archdekin

5) **Public Affairs Team Leaders:** Each team that was sent to an area of operations was headed by a public affairs officer or senior noncommissioned officer. In each case, team leaders met with significant challenges. This section will analyze what

these team leaders ran into, why they chose to cover certain topics, and what lessons they drew from the experience.

Operation Bitter Rain (Blizzard): Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Craig Collins

Operation Rising Tide (Southeast flood): Maj. Tamara Spicer

*(Note: I was the first team leader during southeast flooding and remained in command of public affairs assets in the area of operations with the exception of four days Maj. Spicer was on site. While a second team was dispatched, I remained the commanding officer. By the time the third team came to the area and I was relieved, operations were largely complete. Because I reported to Maj. Spicer, I believe she is the best interview. If it makes more sense to write a personal analysis of that mission, I can certainly do that.)*

Operation Southwest Twister (Joplin tornado): Capt. Sandy Stover

Operation Northern Tide (Northwest flood): Capt. Michelle Matthews

As far as abundant physical evidence goes, I will be including copies of news releases and broadcast products, as well as social media interactions where necessary. I will also include interview transcripts with my subject matter experts. Finally, I would like to produce a professional analysis that the Missouri National Guard could use in future responses and could be turned into an article to be submitted to professional military journals on the disaster response.

This project would satisfy the requirement of serving as a capstone to my journalism education at the University of Missouri, and serve an important practical purpose for my employer by providing a case study that could be used not only by Missouri, but by other states and agencies for how a modern public affairs response can be successfully conducted in a wide range of emergency conditions and situations. Too often, because the next emergency is right around the corner or strictly because of the

nature of the business we're in, public affairs professionals do not take time to step back and review what could have been done more effectively to prepare for future missions.

This project would be something that I could see presenting at a state, regional or even national public affairs conference. I would also like to produce professional analysis article that could be submitted to both the Missouri National Guard's public affairs community and professional military journals. There is a wide audience for this type of work. While the Defense Department has been increasingly forward-leaning when it comes to social media, individual practitioners are always looking for ways to better integrate it into their planning and responses.

My project supervisor will be my commanding officer, Maj. Tamara Spicer. Maj. Spicer will ensure that I am not working on the project during duty hours and will review products and timesheets each week. As a note, I will also need to interview Maj. Spicer extensively for this project. If this presents a problem or conflict of interest, I can ask another officer who is outside the public affairs realm to be my project supervisor.

### **Analysis Component:**

The primary research question I will analyze and answer is, “In the age of instant communication through the 24-hour news cycle and new/social media, how can a military public affairs office best leverage new and old techniques to complete its mission of bringing the public timely, accurate information during disaster response?”

In order to answer that question effectively, there are several sub-questions that must be answered and analyzed.

- 6) How has public affairs shifted in the past 10 years with the advent of online sites like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Flickr, etc.?
- 7) What is the most effective way of communicating through these sites?
- 8) What are the benefits of social media sites versus command publications or media distribution?
- 9) What are the drawbacks of social media sites versus command publications or media distribution?
- 10) How does being able to communicate directly with individuals change public affairs during crisis communication?

This topic and these questions are relevant to the military public affairs career field because it is in a period of flux. Before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, military public affairs had been reluctant to embrace new technologies. As will be discussed in the literature review, the military has a long-standing tradition of shunning or outright disrupting new communications technologies. Recently, the culture has shifted. Leaders including Gen. David Petraeus and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey have

embraced new media. With the senior leadership's seal of approval, there has been a trickle-down effect. Even so, many commanders and even public affairs office remain skeptical of the use of new media or, in some cases, view it as a danger to operations security.

By answering these questions, I hope to identify both the positive and negative impact of new media and constant communication over a wide range of platforms. These answers will aid fellow public affairs practitioners, but also offer cogent analysis to commanders and senior noncommissioned officers who, while still skeptical of new media, have to understand that it is not going away.

For public affairs practitioners specifically, answering these questions will shed some light on how the career field has changed so dramatically in such a short time. When Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in March 2003, the pinnacle of communications technology was satellite phones, which were often difficult to understand and came with a significant delay. Today, deployed troops can talk with their families back home on a standard laptop computer from a tent over Skype. Pictures and videos from cell phones can do anything from bring attention to potential war crimes like during the Abu Ghraib incident or promote positive news stories like the Missouri National Guard's Air Force Band, which enjoyed a viral video hit in August 2011.

This project will also be useful to civilian media. Understanding how military public affairs works, what the goals of military public affairs practitioners are, and understanding their strengths and limitations will allow journalists to use them more effectively in their own reporting.

The two most important mass communication theories to this project will be gate keeping and agenda setting. The question where social media is concerned is to what extent each is possible.

At the Defense Information School, officers are taught to view the civilian media as a communications tool. In other words, the media is not the end target of a message or information, but merely a means through which it is transmitted. In that sense, doing an interview with a reporter is only nominally different than sending out a news release.

Social media outlets present a new opportunity for military public affairs. Like a command publication, such as a base newspaper, public affairs practitioners can set the agenda by determining what stories they pursue and publish. They can also practice gatekeeping by selecting certain stories or missions over others. As with the civilian media, these decisions are made as much because of time considerations as anything else.

Part of the reluctance of some military leaders to embrace new media is that they are sacrificing the ability to set the agenda or gatekeep by participating in a two-way dialogue with the audience. On the Missouri National Guard's Facebook site, for example, anyone can post a question or comment as long as it stays within the parameters of the community guidelines. As long as they do not use profanity, violate operations security, or libel an individual, their comment will not only not be removed, it will be answered by the public affairs staff or the appropriate section.

The research and journalistic methods used in this project will include content analysis and in-depth interviews. The content analysis will focus on products put out by the Missouri National Guard during state emergency missions in 2011. This will include

the type of story, the information presented, and the target audience. It will also include social media interactions, both positive, negative and neutral, and how they were handled.

Finally, as far as publication possibilities are concerned, my goal is to write a professional analysis that can be used by the Missouri National Guard public affairs community and submitted to military journals. Social media and the increased role it has given public affairs in planning and executing operations is a topic that leadership at all levels is interested in. I am confident that a comprehensive article put together using this research would be something that a major professional journal would have great interest in publishing.

## **Literature Review:**

### **Introduction:**

In 2011, the Missouri National Guard took on four of the biggest emergency missions in its history. These missions touched almost every county in the state and varied greatly in the type of operations being conducted, the speed of those operations and the severity of the damage done.

For the Missouri National Guard public affairs community, the disasters meant putting new technologies, techniques and training to use. For the first time, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and file-sharing sites like Flickr, which either did not exist or were not at a point where they were deemed effective during the last great disaster in 2008, were integrated into the response for the first time.

The missions public affairs soldiers and airmen conducted in 2011 included both traditional skill sets and new ones. Uniformed print and broadcast journalists continued to practice their crafts. Public affairs officers and senior noncommissioned officers continued to lead teams and coordinate with media.

What had changed was the speed.

During the 2008 floods, the 24-hour news cycle was already a fact of life. Since then, a 24-hour information cycle and new ways to communicate directly with audiences online had emerged. How the Missouri National Guard public affairs community adapted its skill sets to these new challenges is the focus of my professional project.

The primary research question I will analyze and answer is, “In the age of instant communication through the 24-hour news cycle and new/social media, how can a military public affairs office best leverage new and old techniques to complete its mission of bringing the public timely, accurate information during disaster response?”



Although the project itself deals with National Guard public affairs during domestic emergency response operations, the documents and policies reviewed in this document deal primarily with the overseas mission. This is necessary for two reasons.

First, National Guard policy follows Army and Air Force policy, which is written at the Pentagon. This policy is the same as the active duty component. Unlike the active duty component and Army and Air Force Reserves, though, the Army and Air National Guard have a dual mission. This dual mission includes supporting the governor of the state during times of crisis. During these stateside mobilizations, the same, basic information sharing policies that would be used in an overseas deployment are followed.

Second, Policy and regulations drive the military culture. In the past 10 years, the National Guard and Reserves have become more integrated with the active component than any time since World War II. At any given time, roughly half the troops serving overseas are reservists. In the Missouri National Guard, a force of 11,500 Soldiers and Airmen, more than 11,000 have served overseas since 9/11. While that number includes Guardsmen who have retired, left service, or served multiple tours, it is still an extraordinary number. This is important because it reflects that the concerns of National Guard leaders are in line with those of the active duty.

In order to understand the concerns of those leaders, it is necessary to put them in context. This will be achieved in this literature review through a very brief exploration of the U.S. military's relationship with the media and new communications technology. The debate between transparency and the benefits of allowing open communication versus exercising tighter control in the name of operations security and mission accomplishment must also be discussed. Finally, this literature review will include an overview of the

policy adjustments and changes that the Defense Departments and various services have seen over the past 10 years.

The goal of this literature review is to give context to the climate the Missouri National Guard found itself in during the 2011 disasters and the policies that governed it. Analyzing the history, debate and controversy around ‘social media,’ the primary driving medium behind much of the response in the literature review will allow the project itself to focus on the implementation of those theories and the reality of those concerns during a mission setting.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The two most important mass communication theories to this project will be agenda setting and gatekeeping . The question where social media is concerned is to what extent each is possible. Because the Missouri National Guard communicates through a wide range of media, with the exception of command publications like MoGuard.com or social media sites, the Guard does not ever have final authority over what is published.

When Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw put forth their agenda setting theory, they stated that media have the ability to emphasize certain stories over others and pass that emphasis on to the public. The pair's seminal study, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," was completed during a time of transition in American politics when candidates were increasingly reaching out to the public through mass media rather than in person.<sup>286</sup> The availability of information about candidates and issues meant that more was available to the public through media. Even so, there was a great difference between how that information was digested by groups of people. They write that while educated and politically interested people actively seek information, most "seem to acquire it passively, if at all, without much effort."<sup>287</sup> Although social media have been added to traditional news sources like newspapers, radio and television, that remains true.

The type and amount of information individuals consume is based on personal preference and the sites they choose to visit. To ensure news is consumed by the widest possible audience on a variety of platforms, Smith writes for public relations practitioners, the goal is "to link organizational information with current news."<sup>288</sup> This is one area where military public affairs has an edge over other areas of the field. Because

of the commitment of large numbers of troops to emergency missions and the key role those troops play in supporting civil authorities, the organization often *is* the news.

In military circles, agenda setting is an area of some concern due largely to the abdication of control required by social media platforms versus traditional command information publications. A traditional publication like a base newspaper is a one-way conversation. Information is being put out to the public. While some interaction may occur on letter pages, which letters are printed are chosen by the editor or editorial staff. If nothing else, this process at least allows commanders and public affairs practitioners the security of knowing they are controlling the tenor of the conversation.

In *Essentials of Mass Communication Theory*, Arthur Asa Berger writes that media do not tell consumers how to think, but rather what to think about. He writes, “In determining the subjects we think about, the media set our agendas and ultimately shape our decision making on political and social issues.”<sup>289</sup> For internal audiences, military public affairs officers have the ability to do that. During state emergencies, publishing articles about ongoing missions, concerns, and issues informs audiences, while at the same time – where social media is concerned – encourages discussion.

When sending out a news release to another outlet, agenda setting is a bit more complicated. Articles may be published entirely, edited, be used as a starting point for a civilian piece, or ignored entirely. Unless the piece is ignored entirely, any resulting publication is considered a success by the public affairs office. In *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*, Dennis Wilcox and Glen Cameron writes, “even getting a subject on the media agenda is an accomplishment that advances organizational goals.”<sup>290</sup> By giving news editors more information to choose from, public affairs officers are

increasing the likelihood that it will be included in their publication as part of the agenda setting process.

The ability to set the agenda is ultimately determined by media gatekeepers. According to Ronald D. Smith in *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*, “The decision to call something news is made only by the media gatekeepers, those people who control the flow of information in their various publications, newscasts, or talk shows.”<sup>291</sup> Where military public affairs is concerned, gatekeepers are both internal and external.

Berger writes, “A number of factors affect the decision making of gatekeepers, such as the organizations they work for, the media in which they work (television news needs visual images), and their own socioeconomic status.”<sup>292</sup> This is true both for the civilian and military gatekeepers.

For the military, the amount of coverage on a given topic is determined precisely by the medium through which it is sent out. Take, for example, sandbagging missions run by the 35<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade during northwest flooding. Over the course of the missions, the public affairs office determined the frequency with which updates went out along with the type of coverage being done. Photos were immediately sent out over Twitter using cell phones. More pictures were put up hours later on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Broadcast stories were put together focusing on the strategic goal of the mission rather than their tactical usage. Finally, print stories were written focusing on the details of the specific missions, their purpose and their outcomes. Using this specific example, one sees that by adding new distribution methods and media to the public affairs arsenal, gatekeepers are able to decide which medium makes the most sense for which type of story.

The role of civilian media gatekeepers is also critical for military public affairs to acknowledge. At the Defense Information School, officers are taught to view the civilian media as a communications tool. In other words, the media is not the end target of a message or information, but merely a means through which it is transmitted. In that sense, doing an interview with a reporter is only nominally different than sending out a news release.

While that might be good advice to give a general or subject matter expert before an interview, it does not hold up in day-to-day military public affairs work. The reality is that media outlets do not exist to be ‘used’ by public affairs or public relations practitioners in any field. They have their own set of gatekeepers who determine what is fit to print and what is not. In the case of a major emergency like this project is looking into, civilian media have competition from a wide variety of sources.

In “Gatekeeping Theory: An Evolution,” Chris Roberts writes, “If the wires send 12 stories on a topic and all are bad, papers must decide either to not publish a story on the topic or to publish one they may not want to publish.”<sup>293</sup> During an emergency like the southeast Missouri floods, the wire service could easily be replaced by government agencies. In addition to the Missouri National Guard, local, state and national entities including the Missouri Highway Patrol, the Missouri Governor’s Office, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were fighting for space. In an oversaturated media environment, it was critical that each organization got its information to the press in a timely, accurate manner.

Beyond the public affairs sphere, gatekeeping and agenda setting are a critical part of military operations. Part of the reluctance of some military leaders to embrace new media is that they are sacrificing the ability to set the agenda or gatekeep by participating in a two-way dialogue with the audience. On the Missouri National Guard's Facebook site, for example, anyone can post a question or comment as long as it stays within the parameters of the community guidelines. As long as they do not use profanity, violate operations security, or libel an individual, their comment will not only not be removed, it will be answered by the public affairs staff or the appropriate section. Further information on how gatekeeping and agenda setting factory into this project can be found in the literature review in pages 18-23.

The current climate that governs military public affairs marks a new era of openness on the part of the U.S. military. This new openness was not easily gotten. Rather, it is part of a continuous struggle on the part of the military to balance its responsibility of getting timely, accurate information to the public with concerns about operations security. This history and the concerns which lead to current policy will be further explored in the next two sections of this literature review.

### **Historical Context:**

The U.S. military has a long, unimpressive history with new communications technology. From the Civil War through the invasion of Iraq, the military has sought to control new technology through a combination of disruption and access limitation.

On Feb. 15, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued an executive order seizing control of telegraph lines for military use during the Civil War. The telegraph was a great leap forward in transmitting information across a wide area quickly. While the order states that it “is not intended to interfere in any respect with the ordinary affairs of the companies or with private business,” it also includes limitations on newspapers publishing military news and threatens that any newspapers that violate that limitation will be, “excluded thereafter from receiving information by telegraph or from transmitting their papers by railroad.”<sup>294</sup>

The repercussions of that order have colored relations between the military and media ever since, and set a precedence of the military controlling new communications technology during wartime. Often, private sector technology moved faster than military technology, but there was an ebb and flow. Less than 40 years after the Union government had effectively seized the telegraph during the Civil War, private industry had achieved dominance over the medium. During the Spanish-American War, media outlets published the results of battles before the War Department - the predecessor of the Defense Department - knew them. This prompted President William McKinley to write, “The New York World apparently had the only information to be had on the subject, and it would be wise for the Navy Department to depend upon it for its information.”<sup>295</sup>



During the world wars that followed, the military and the media were working closely together to achieve the nation's goals. While it is noteworthy that broadcasters like Edward R. Murrow were able to transmit information back to the U.S. quickly through radio, there were no major clashes. That status quo would deteriorate during the Korean War and completely dissolve during Vietnam.

Following Vietnam was a period marked by quick conflicts with limited goals. The invasions of Panama and Grenada, along with Operation Desert Storm, used new concepts like media pools to control information flow. The early days of Operation Enduring Freedom, the invasion of Afghanistan, was largely a Special Operations Command endeavor, and media access was tightly controlled. When Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in 2003, a program was launched with it whereby media were able to embed with troops going into the country. Media continue to be embedded with units throughout Afghanistan.

## **Current Climate:**

In the 10 years since Operation Enduring Freedom was launched, technology has improved immensely. Where once hard-to-get satellite phones were the pinnacle of technology, soldiers on remote outposts are now often able to use e-mail, blogs, Facebook and Skype to speak directly with their families in ways that were unimaginable when overseas contingency operations began.

The result of that leap forward in technology and communication has been a center of debate for the military. For the first time, troops in the field have access to technology that allows them to communicate directly and in real-time with the home-front. Questions on the extent to which such media should be limited or embraced are at the center of an ongoing debate among military leaders and public affairs practitioners.

At the center of the debate are questions of operations security and the risk involved in allowing deployed troops access to a potentially globally audience. For combatant commanders and policy makers who set forth national and military objectives, allowing troops access to social media sites comes with inherent risks. To get to that point required nearly a decade of growing pains.

In 1998, the Defense Department released a new Website administration policy. The policy, which predated the social media explosion in the next decade, focused mainly on Defense Department websites and the dangers posed by hostile entities aggregating information through a wide variety of web-based resources.

The old threats have not gone away, but there is a new area of concern that (Operations Security) officers and planners must consider – the Internet. A disciplined approach to (Information Security) procedures in conjunction with the (Operations Security) process will ensure that sensitive but unclassified information is properly safeguarded.<sup>296</sup>

Although the proliferation of social media and file sharing websites could not have been foreseen, the concerns remain the same 13 years later.

Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, the chief of public affairs for the U.S. Army, commissioned an Army Social Media Handbook in 2011. In it, he stressed the importance of recognizing that information was moving more quickly than ever before and that public affairs practitioners must use all tools at their disposal to tell the Army's story. He specifically mentioned the positive use of social media by the military during natural disasters, including the Midwest floods and tornados of 2011, and the importance of being "the first with the truth, whether it's good or bad."<sup>297</sup> Lanza writes, "Social media can be a valuable tool for Army organizations. It helps Army organizations and Army commands establish credibility, accessibility and authenticity."<sup>298</sup>

Between the publication of the 1998 website administrative policy and the Army's Social Media Handbook, a debate that is far from settled raged throughout the armed forces and Defense Department. Service branches waivered between restricting access to social media sites to the current, more liberal policy that stresses personal responsibility for operations security.

Perhaps the driving force behind the military's movement towards attempting to cautiously-yet-enthusiastically embrace social media is the recognition that social media is not going away and that service members are already populating those areas. From 2005-2007, social media boomed in popularity. MySpace, one of the first popular social media sites, was sold to NewsCorps for \$580 million.<sup>299</sup> Facebook, which had once been restricted to college campuses, opened up to anyone with an e-mail address in September 2006.<sup>300</sup> A new site, Twitter, began to grow exponentially in 2007.<sup>301</sup>

Larry Clavette, director of Air Force Public Affairs Agency in Washington D.C., recognized that young Airmen were on social media sites, whether the leadership was or not.<sup>302</sup> In a presentation, Clavette cited a study that said more than 50 percent of Airmen used social media platforms in 2006. They were having conversations regardless of the Air Force's 'official' stance. That number was reflected in the other services and has grown with the expansion of social media platforms.

The same year Clavette's study was published, Jarret M. Brachman published an article titled "High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda's Use of New Technology." In it, Brachman traces the organization's use of the internet before 9/11 and heightened sophistication afterwards. Brachman argues that by effective use of internet resources, Al-Qaeda was able to evolve into an "organic social movement, making its virulent ideology accessible to anyone with a computer."<sup>303</sup>

In an editorial published in the Los Angeles Times earlier that year, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recognized that military public affairs was losing the information edge. At that time, public affairs was largely reactive, focusing much of its efforts on responding to information requests, while enemy forces were increasingly sophisticated. While the U.S. military struggled to find a coherent policy and viable use for new media, Rumsfeld said, "the vacuum will be filled by the enemy and by hostile news sources who most assuredly will not paint an accurate picture of what is actually taking place."<sup>304</sup> Despite mounting evidence that increasing enemy sophistication was causing major problems for U.S. forces in overseas contingency operations, change was slow in coming.

In May 2007, the Defense Department issued an order blocking a specific set of recreational websites. In a press briefing, Rear Adm. Elizabeth Hight, the vice director of the Defense Information Systems Agency, said the intent was “to preserve military bandwidth for operational missions and enhance DOD network security.”<sup>305</sup> At the time, Hight said the military was primarily concerned with MySpace and YouTube.

Hight stressed in her briefing that similar measures had already been taken two years earlier in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the policy change would affect only computers on the Defense Department network. Service members and their families could still access the sites at home. To drive home the point that it was a matter of bandwidth and security of the Defense Department network, Hight stressed that service members overseas could access the sites in Morale, Welfare and Recreation tents.

Hight’s minor concession indicated a major cultural shift.

Organizationally, the military began taking steps that reflected its understanding that while it could not control social media sites themselves, it could prescribe a code of conduct and guidelines for how service members could behave and what they could post on the sites. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell is currently the commander of the NATO training mission in Afghanistan. In 2008, he was the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth. On April 9, 2008, Caldwell issued a memo titled “Command Policy #19-08, Combined Arms Center (CAC) Interactive Internet Activities.” In the memo, Caldwell laid out basic guidelines for blogging that reflect those around the military. The memo stressed accuracy, attribution, propriety and, of course, operations security.

Across the military, there was increasing pressure find a compromise between operations security and social media sites. Some commanders and units had found social media sites to be effective tools. Others continued to see them as a very real threat to their troops.

On July 24, 2009, the Joint Public Affairs Support Element of U.S. Joint Forces Command issued a white paper titled, “Social Media and Department of Defense Communication.” The stated purpose of the paper was to inform leaders about social media, assess the current use of social media across the Department of Defense and other government agencies, examine the risks and benefits of social media, and, ultimately, recommend a way forward.<sup>306</sup> As Secretary Rumsfeld had recognized three years before the paper’s publication, the paper recognized that if military agencies were not communicating on social media, they were effectively abandoning a battlefield. That battlefield was even more critical in light of the changing media market. As traditional print outlets continued to decline, social media sites like Twitter were exploding.<sup>307</sup> Although all five military branches were experimenting with social media with varying success, an examination of sites and strategies quickly revealed there was no consistency of effort.<sup>308</sup>

On Aug. 27, 2009, Lt. Gen. Jeffrey A. Sorenson, chief information officer for the Department of the Army, released a memo defining social media tools and touching on the issue of operations security. Because many soldiers were operating on bases or networks under the jurisdiction of other services, Sorenson placed responsibility for correct and prudent behavior directly on the individual.<sup>309</sup>

In addition to individual soldiers have access to social media sites, they also have access to photographic and video technology that has grown leaps and bounds in the past 10 years. If social media sites are viewed as bullets, smart phones are the rifles from which they are fired. On an iPhone or Blackberry, service members can take photographs and videos and immediately upload them to social media sites or e-mail them to friends. Once again, this has been a source of trepidation for commanders.

Throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, instant communications have allowed unedited, un-vetted footage to travel directly from theater to America's living rooms. In some instances, these images have portrayed war crimes and resulted in criminal prosecutions and/or widespread public outrage. Amazingly, in every instance, the photographs and videos taken were not taken by outside media or civilians, but by service members themselves.

Four of the most prominent instances were:

- In 2003-2004, Abu Ghraib came to public attention after photographs taken by members of the 372<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company.<sup>310</sup>
- In 2007, a group of U.S. Marines filmed themselves throwing a puppy off a cliff.<sup>311</sup>
- In 2010-2011, the so-called 'Kill Team,' a group of four soldiers from 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division took pictures of themselves allegedly committing war crimes.<sup>312</sup>
- In 2012, a video of Marines urinating on the corpses of what appear to be dead insurgents was most likely taken by another Marine.<sup>313</sup>

In call cases, the footage and photographs resulted in investigations and, in the first three incidents, punishment. It is notable that the exposure of these crimes was not the result of journalism, but was more or less self-reported by the Soldiers and Marines involved.

Just as with social media platforms, the military has recognized that the technology is out there, and have chosen to stress responsible use to combat any possible negative effects. Through programs like the Army Capabilities Integration Center and the Connecting Soldiers to Digital Applications programs, the Army is taking a proactive approach to making sure its soldiers have access to new technology.

Matt MacLaughlin, who said the apps are part of his team's mission to increase training effectiveness, also encountered resistance in the form of firewalls and enhanced required security features.<sup>314</sup> The team was able to overcome those limitations and push forward. The Army is also helping them move forward by increasing soldiers' access to digital technology.

One way the Army is doing that is through an ambitious program to issue each soldier a smartphone. According to Lt. Gen. Michael Vane, director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center, a pilot program has already been launched.<sup>315</sup> While the program may seem forward-thinking on the surface, it is actually reactive. joint chief of staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey has gone on record saying that there is already a capability gap between the U.S. military and enemy forces where smartphones are concerned.<sup>316</sup>

Like social networking, the smart phone program also constitutes a security risk. Vane argues that the benefit of new information outweighs the risk associated with operating over an unsecure network. Vane echoed Dempsey, saying that both Afghan



National Army soldiers and Taliban insurgents use smartphones while the U.S. military continues to use less user-friendly radios.

In December 2010, soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Combined Arms Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division were issued smart phones during a field test. The goal of the test was to see how these soldiers would interact with their chain of command using text messages, applications, and other tools inherent to the technology.<sup>317</sup>

At Fort Lee, soldiers going through advanced individual training in the unit supply specialist course were issued smartphones as part of their curriculum. The program, which began in July 2010, is the first of its kind.<sup>318</sup> The program has been successful enough that it is being adopted in other schools, including the Explosive Ordnance Course at the Army's Ordnance School.

Despite the military's embrace of new technologies and media, there are still major operational security concerns. Just as the military had to kowtow to the idea of losing control of its messages by engaging in two-way, uncontrolled conversations on social media sites, it has also had to adopt prioritizing transparency over security in some situations. That is not to say that the military is encouraging security violations. Instead, there is an organization-wide covenant that holds the benefits of social media outweigh the negatives.

On Feb. 25, 2010, the office of the deputy secretary of defense issued Directive-Type Memorandum 09-026, Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-based Capabilities. The document is often sighted as having established the legitimacy of social media on Defense Department computers operating on the Non-Classified Internet Protocol Router

Network, or, NIPRNET. The vast majority of all Defense Department computers are on the NIPRNET, so allowing access to social media on them was a major step forward.

The document did leave some restrictions on the NIPRNET. Access to websites related to pornography, gambling and hate-crimes remained banned. Furthermore, commanders retained the right to take “immediate and commensurate actions, as required, to safeguard missions.”<sup>319</sup> These include limiting access to the Internet for the purposes of security or maintaining bandwidth.

The U.S. Army Social Media Handbook spells out personal and unit security concerns. In addition to reminding soldiers not to give out information that could be combined with other information to give the enemy a better understanding of U.S. forces and potential weaknesses, it provides a list of steps soldiers can take to ensure their own security.<sup>320</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The policies and procedures the Defense Department has pursued over the past 10 years reflect a growing belief that the secret to better operations security is better education. Public affairs and signal officers and noncommissioned officers routinely make presentations to service members about how to avoid endangering themselves, their units and their families. The military's stated goal is to increase transparency and understanding – it is not to endanger lives. In the Missouri National Guard, every deploying unit and their family members receive a public affairs briefing that explains both the benefits and potential drawbacks of social media sites and smart phones. Once again, personal responsibility is the key.

Because policy is malleable, it is impossible to say where the next major developments will come in this area of research. It is fully possible that in a larger-scale war or if there is another incident like Abu Ghraib, harsher regulations could be imposed on social networking.

As it stands right now from the literature, the military has been making genuine efforts to increase transparency and accessibility. The cost, of course, is control. That remains scary territory for the military, however, for the time being the military appears to be willing to take that risk. As the policy letters, presentations and guidance developed over the past 10 years, there is a clear movement towards greater transparency at the highest levels. With Gen. Dempsey as the Joint Chief of Staff, that trend looks to continue in the immediate future.

While the center of controversy remains fixed on overseas missions, how these new media can be and have been leveraged by the National Guard during state

emergencies has emerged as a new and vibrant topic, worthy of further study. Simply put, social media have not just become a part of the public affairs culture, but have become the public affairs culture. Heather Blanchard, co-founder of Crisis Commons USA, told the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence in 2011, ““Now more than ever, using social media during a disaster or crisis is a must do, rather than a nice to do. If you don’t listen to and communicate with the community you are putting yourself at a huge disadvantage. The conversation is happening around you; ignore it at your peril.”<sup>321</sup>

How social media were used to tell the National Guard’s story and relay emergency information during Missouri’s 2011 crises came as a direct result of the policies the Defense Department has pursued during the past decade. As noted by the inclusion of Missouri’s floods and tornado in Maj. Gen. Lanza’s introduction to the U.S. Army’s Social Media Handbook, the Missouri National Guard has also been influential through its response.

For the future of military public affairs policy and practice, understanding the benefits and possible dangers of social media during a state emergency is key to finding a way forward that completes the military’s mission while minimizing harm.

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Breig, Sgt. Joshua  
Broadcast journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Brown, Capt. Alan  
State Command Historian - Missouri National Guard

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Readiness Noncommissioned Officer, 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Dougherty, Sgt. Jon  
Print journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Keyes, Ann  
Unit Public Affairs Representative – Springfield Area

Knight, Rachel  
Unit Public Affairs Representative – Sedalia Area

Lee, Spc. Antony  
Print journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Lupescu, Spc. Sarah  
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Machon, Charles  
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Matthews, Capt. Michelle  
Team Leader - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Phelan, Bill  
Unit Public Affairs Representative – St. Louis Area

Queiser, Michelle  
Unit Public Affairs Representative – Cape Girardeau Area

Robertson, Staff Sgt. Christopher  
Broadcast journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Spicer, Maj. Tamara  
State Public Affairs Officer/Commander - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Stafford, Staff Sgt. Ty  
Print journalist – 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Taggart, Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Parrish  
Broadcast journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Williams, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Mary  
First Sergeant - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Wilson, Matthew  
Unit Public Affairs Representative – Fort Leonard Wood Area

Winters, Spc. Adam  
Broadcast journalist - 70<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



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