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PUBLIC AFFAIRS, PRIVATE LIVES:

A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF COMBAT EXPOSURE

ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS SOLDIERS

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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MAY 2015

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

PUBLIC AFFAIRS, PRIVATE LIVES: A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF COMBAT EXPOSURE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS SOLDIERS

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I have to thank the soldiers who voluntarily participated in this study. Their openness in discussing memories from their deployments and service to our nation is inspiring. I have the utmost admiration for them and all who give selflessly in support of the nation's defense.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members: Dr. Esther Thorson, Dr. Margaret Duffy, Dr. Glen Cameron and Dr. Jamie Arndt, who provided me invaluable guidance and perspective. I also want to thank Sarah Smith-Frigerio and my countless mentors at the University of Missouri School of Journalism who helped shape my final thesis idea along the way. Without their perspectives, I would have been totally lost.

A special thanks goes to my U.S. Army Special Operations Command family, who helped me get over a huge hump late into my studies. Ms. Bonita Riddley, my "third-party monitor," became an excellent sounding board throughout the final stages of my research. The USASOC Behavioral Health team provided outstanding support of my research project and provided people and resources without which would have drawn out this process indefinitely.

Finally, I have to thank my family and close friends, who have all provided encouragement to me along the way. There have been too many to name, but one stands out. Louise Eaton, first a mentor and forever a friend, truly inspired me to pursue advanced studies.

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ABSTRACT

This research probes into the attitudes and experiences of Army public affairs soldiers as they relate to combat exposure, looking at whether a spiral of silence inhibits them from reporting and seeking help for combat trauma. The research included interviews with both officers and enlisted soldiers serving in public affairs positions in the U.S. Army, both on active duty and on reserve status. Soldiers shared their personal experiences and opinions about deployment in support of combat and humanitarian missions and shared their perceptions about both the preparedness for their combat support roles and the stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder within the career field.

Chapter I: Introduction

Army combat journalists can end up covering war from the front lines within a matter of months of reporting to their first assignment after basic training. Are they ready?

These uniformed war correspondents, also known as public affairs soldiers, tend to have limited training compared to their civilian counterparts. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2012), civilian journalists are generally required to have a bachelor's degree. Enlisted combat journalists also tend to be younger than graduates of four-year journalism schools because many report to basic training directly upon graduation from high school. After nine weeks of basic training in combat skills and Army doctrine, soldiers assigned in public affairs specialties attend Advanced Individual Training, or AIT, at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Maryland. The training, on average, consists of 12 weeks of intense on-the-job training (Goarmy.com, 2013). After completion of this training, they are assigned to a unit where they can deploy to combat almost immediately. Civilian journalists, on the other hand, spend four or more years in college before putting their training into practice, often as interns first.

Army officers are slightly more experienced than enlisted soldiers. They generally are required to have college degrees and serve about five years in the Army on average before they are eligible for to transition from another Army career field into public affairs. They are required to complete the two-month Public Affairs Officer Qualification Course at the Defense Information School.

Although there is ample discussion about how civilian war correspondents are affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD (Feinstein, Owen & Blair, 2002;

Feinstein, 2003, 2004, 2006; Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2004; Newman, Simpson & Handschuh, 2003), no research exists specifically on how military journalists fare in covering combat. A study of Army combat journalists would provide key insights into this highly unique segment of journalists, which, in turn, could have a positive influence on better preparing these soldiers to succeed.

Research suggests that for civilian journalists, the impact of front-line access to the fight can be detrimental to the mental health of the reporter, often resulting in alcohol abuse, depression, risk-taking behaviors and post-traumatic stress disorder (Feinstein, Owen & Blair, 2002; Feinstein, 2003, 2004, 2006; Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2004; Newman, Simpson & Handschuh, 2003). Other researchers note that training may help identify some of the predictors of PTSD and help pinpoint proper training and treatments (Marias & Stewart, 2005; Castle, 1999; Dworznik & Grubb, 2007).

Some of preliminary research into PTSD and journalism suggests that journalists who do not get help for their psychological problems may do harm to themselves and the profession (Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Killeen, 2011; Greenberg, Gould, Langston & Brayne, 2009). It has been well documented that the Army has issues with stigma in soldiers reporting PTSD (Gould, Greenberg & Hetherton, 2007; Hoge, 2004). The problem was so widespread that in 2011, the Army began an extensive anti-stigma campaign to encourage help-seeking behavior. The Army also developed the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program to encourage acceptance of psychological problems and treatment for them.

Some studies indicate that journalists employ coping mechanisms or compartmentalize their emotional issues or keep their emotional issues silent in order to

avoid the stigma associated with revealing psychological issues (Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Greenberg, Gould, Langston & Brayne, 2009; Himmelstein & Faithhorn, 2002; Killeen, 2011). The theory, according to researchers, has been called the spiral of silence.

It is reasonable to assume that Army journalists experience similar, if not higher, rates of PTSD than their civilian counterparts due to their relative immaturity and inexperience, coupled with the attachment they may feel to the soldiers in the units they are assigned to cover. This research aims to explore PTSD among military combat journalists to help determine if their experiences warrant additional training, and if there is a tendency for them to keep their trauma secret.

Using a qualitative research approach that will include in-depth interviews the aim is to gain an understanding of how PTSD can affect public affairs soldiers. The goal is to explore traits that may make some more susceptible to PTSD. This will help in understanding if there is a stigma associated with these young journalists admitting to having PTSD and if a spiral of silence deters them from seeking help with their psychological trauma.

For the purpose of this study, specific terms will be used to avoid confusion and ensure that the reader fully understands the concepts. This list is not all-inclusive and additional terms will be added as research progresses. The following definitions will apply:

Combat Journalist is defined as a U.S. Army soldier who is currently assigned in a public affairs job, either on active duty or in the Army Reserve and will be used interchangeably with the term public affairs soldiers. These jobs include public affairs specialists, photo journalists and public affairs officers in the 46 series of military

occupational specialties. These soldiers will further be defined as having completed training for their military specialty at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md.

Deployment is defined as a term of duty to a foreign location for at least six months where soldiers are likely to be exposed to hostile fire from U.S. enemies or destruction caused by natural disaster. For this study, deployment will focus on both combat and humanitarian missions. The study will select participants based on their deployment experiences. Particular focus will be given to soldiers who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan in the past five years and assigned to support combat units.

Combat Arms is defined as military specialties that focus on fighting such as infantry, armor and field artillery. Soldiers in Combat Arms specialties are expected to carry arms and engage in battle in armored vehicles. Public affairs soldiers are generally classified as **Combat Support**, meaning they are not in direct combat roles, but rather assist Combat Arms soldiers with special functions. Other Combat Support specialties include supply, administration and communications.

Army public affairs soldiers are unique in that they have unparalleled access to the front lines, where they serve as both observer and combatant. An assumption is that their experiences are vastly different than civilian journalists on the battlefield – that they experience PTSD at higher rates than their civilian counterparts because they are naturally closer to their subjects and may be conflicted about their role compared to combat soldiers. This research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Army public affairs soldiers characterize their experiences covering war and their psychological well-being afterward?

RQ2: Is there evidence for a spiral of silence among Army public affairs soldiers that inhibits them from a. reporting and b. getting help for psychological trauma?

RQ3: Do Army public affairs soldiers exhibit characteristics that make them more susceptible to PTSD?

RQ4: Does training for Army public affairs adequately prepare them for what they will see from behind their lens in combat?

This paper will establish a framework for studying PTSD and combat journalism. First, it will address the Spiral of Silence theory that will be the theoretical framework for this research. Second, this paper will provide an overview of the substantive research into PTSD and journalism. Following the review of the literature, it will outline the research and method used for this investigation. Finally, this paper will offer a summary of the results of the study and some discussion on the topic.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

There's strong, and then there's Army Strong. The Army's slogan, Army Strong, inherently implies that soldiers are somehow stronger than other people, or at least expected to be. So when one has psychological illness related to war, how likely are they to get help? Not very (Hoge, 2004). The Army, in fact, initiated an anti-stigma campaign in 2009 to help convince soldiers to seek help (Haynie, 2011).

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory perhaps explains soldiers' unwillingness to seek help for a condition that may make them seem weak. When people perceive they are in the minority, Noelle-Neumann says they will be much less likely to speak out (1993). Now, add to that the perception that soldiers in support roles, among them Army public affairs soldiers, may be perceived to be "inferior" to soldiers who serve in direct combat.

Army public affairs soldiers, a category that includes combat journalists, are assigned to support combat units. A single combat journalist could be assigned with an entire infantry battalion with 300 to 1,200 infantrymen. While other minorities in nearly every other Army support role are assigned as a team, public affairs soldiers are often solo.

This research will provide insight to help determine if there is a stigma associated with these young journalists admitting to having post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological illnesses and whether a spiral of silence deters them from seeking help with their trauma. Spiral of silence theory has been applied to public opinion, notably perceptions and opinions expressed through mass media (Griffin, 2009; Harris, 2009). A

“public,” however, can be defined in narrower contexts – a family, a church, a community, a social group or even an organization such as the Army.

Noelle-Neumann first began studying this spiral of silence in the 1960s to help understand an extreme shift of public sentiment in a 1965 German election (Noelle-Newman, 1993). She noted a “last minute swing” in a neck-and-neck election that seemed to shift almost overnight as public opinion polls began to reveal a slight majority opinion (p. 2). Noelle-Neumann likens the last minute swing phenomenon in political elections as “running with the pack” or a “go-along” mentality. What drives that mentality, Noelle-Neumann explains, is fear of isolation. “The fear of isolation seems to be the force that sets the spiral of silence in motion (p. 6).”

Noelle-Neumann notes that her theory is rooted in historical documentation of the phenomenon – from Tocqueville’s 1856 history of the French revolution and the decline of the French church to transcripts from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, John Locke, Martin Luther and Machiavelli. Namely, Neumann points to obscure references throughout history that pointed to a pattern she wanted to explore further. “The topic never constituted a major theme; it was more often in the form of a marginal comment (p. 7).” As the theme continued to surface, she set about testing the theory in political contexts.

As Creswell (2009) suggests, the spiral of silence theory will be used in this research to help inform this study. It will provide both a broad explanation for the stigma associated with journalists seeking help for treatment of PTSD and the lens through which questions will be developed.

Spiral of silence theory is a "conceptual model," according to Greenberg and Salwen (1996). Rather than consisting of body of research on a subject, conceptual models attempt to classify research. "Models are shorthand attempts to capture the essence of a conceptual issue or question of interest (p. 69)." For comparison, other conceptual models include agenda setting, knowledge gap and cultivation analysis models.

Greenberg and Salwen outline five reasons models are effective, including being simple to express or illustrate and helping to link concepts and variables in research.

Much of the subsequent research and discussion around the spiral of silence theory revolves around political outcomes (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Pornsakulavanich, 2006). Some have attempted to explain how media coverage itself helps to sway the public opinion (Griffin, 2006; Liu & Fahmy, 2011; Gwamna & George, 2013).

Griffin suggests that the spiral of silence is founded in something almost more devious than agenda setting and shaping by the media. Spiral of silence is rooted in the "false consensus promoted by the media (p. 375)."

Liu and Fahmy note: "The media's influence in motivating the public to conform to the heavily covered 'public opinion' has been confirmed by previous research (p. 47)." While Gwamna and George say media portrayals of stereotypes of people with disabilities, for example, shape the public opinion of people with disabilities. "As the mass media, which play an important role in shaping public opinion, highlight the majority views of disability, those with a minority, but positive opinion of persons with disability are less likely to speak out (p. 153)."

Harris (2009) discusses the "four stages of minority portrayals": non-recognition, ridicule, regulation and respect. Non-recognition is when the group is excluded from the media. Ridicule happens when the majority shines an unflattering light on the minority. Regulation happens when the minority begins to emerge in a more balanced light. Finally, respect happens when the minority is accepted (p. 81).

Haynie (2012) notes that media currently perpetuate stereotypes of soldiers with PTSD as violent offenders with deadly weapons skills who are virtual "ticking time bombs" (p. 1). The media present a distortion of facts. One example Hayne provides is the veteran homicide rate. The media sensationalize cases of veterans who commit homicide, failing to put it into context that actually showed that veterans are less likely than non-veterans to commit murder. This puts soldiers with PTSD in the ridicule phase, according to Harris' stages of minority portrayals. They claim that the spiral of silence can only be broken when people are able to positively influence the media to begin articulating the minority opinion.

The theory has been applied in many other ways, too, including as an explanation for how the Germans could have participated in the extermination of Jews during World War II. They remained silent due to the fear of isolation or separation (Da-jeong, 2009).

Simpson and Boggs discuss how the spiral of silence theory might apply to journalists (1999). They describe the spiral of silence as an unwritten code that teaches them to do the job, regardless of psychological impact.

Simpson and Boggs discovered that journalists and their managers tend to deny mental health problems. Other workers exposed to trauma such as firefighters and police

take advantage of counseling, while journalists carry on their routine without regard for their psyche.

Keats and Buchanan (2009) observed journalists for several days during visits to newsrooms to determine the effects of stress assignments. They concluded that journalists have concerns about talking about their problems out of fear that they would lose respect or appear weak. Ward (2004) echoed the sentiment, saying that in addition to appearing weak, journalists believe that admitting to psychological illness can be a liability to their careers. A 2007 study by Gould, Greenberg and Hetherton focuses on the perceived stigma of reporting PTSD or other mental health problems by military personnel. Both military personnel and journalists are expected to be resilient and have similar attributes.

Greenberg followed up with a 2009 study on journalists' attitudes about post-traumatic stress disorder, focusing on whether journalists seek help dealing with trauma through their organizations. The results showed that journalists felt discomfort with talking to colleagues about their PTSD symptoms. The spiral of silence theory has generated some debate. Pornsakulvanich (2006) notes that critics argue that Noelle-Neumann's theory is flawed because she claims that fear of isolation is the greatest motivation for keeping silent..

Neuwirth, Frederick and Mayo (2007) suggest that part of the criticism comes from Noelle-Neuman's vagueness in what is meant by public opinion and how fear of isolation applies. They explain it this way:

> First, an opinion must be expressed to at least one other person for the notion of public to govern — an opinion held but never expressed would be considered

> private. The opinion must be about a topic for which there is a perception that unanimity is lacking — at least two people must disagree. Indeed, the very idea of public opinion would appear to suggest that the lack of agreement on a topic is a matter of necessity (p. 451).

Fear of isolation, they say, is not about being alone, but rather believing that speaking an opinion will have an "affectively aversive consequence" (p. 452).

Griffin (2009) raises questions, too, contending that Noelle-Neumann's research never adequately questioned whether those who kept silent did so due to fear of isolation and doesn't explain if there is a difference between "actual willingness to speak out as opposed to hypothetical willingness (p. 380)." Griffin also suggests that family, friends and colleagues have a much greater influence on people than the public perceptions related in the media and their attitudes are linked to a person's willingness to speak out with a different viewpoint.

There are limitations to the spiral of silence theory. Researchers such as Griffin (2009) suggest that the theory needs to be tested further on attitudes of speaking out in smaller social contexts as well. These can include churches, communities and organizations such as the Army.

Chapter III: Literature Review

To apply the spiral of silence theory, it is important to have an understanding of the body of research into PTSD and journalism, the bulk of which has focused on war correspondents who have covered combat since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. This review will provide an overview of the main research into PTSD and journalism, then delve into three dominant categories: personality traits, coping with PTSD and social responsibility of newsrooms.

A review of the literature aids in understanding how PTSD can affect journalists and gives insight into traits that make some more susceptible to PTSD. It also illustrates what drives them to continue putting themselves at risk for the sake of telling the story. Finally, it explains some of the stigma associated with journalists admitting to having PTSD and how they spiral of silence deters them from seeking help. Naturally, some questions emerged about training, the psychological dangers journalists face and whether there are predictors for PTSD in war correspondents.

During the first Gulf War, the military began a new approach on telling the story of war. We saw the first military-led press conferences detailing the day-to-day action on the front lines, when the word “sortee” was introduced to the civilian vernacular and Stormin’ Norman Schwarzkopf and General Colin Powell put new faces on the military. The military, at the time, made a ground-breaking decision to embed civilian journalists directly with military units. The purpose: to generate support for the military to avoid the anti-war sentiment of the Vietnam War era. Today, civilian photographers, videographers, writers and news people live, eat and sleep on the front lines alongside

soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines. Research suggests, however, that the price for the front-line pass to war can be costly.

Feinstein (2002, 2003, 2004, 2006), for example, estimates that about one out of four war correspondents develop post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Other quantitative and qualitative studies (Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2003) found similar rates of PTSD among war correspondents.

PTSD can have a vast array of mental health effects such as suicide or irrational thinking that may lead to extreme risk-taking (Feinstein, Owen & Blair, 2002). Soldiers diagnosed with PTSD, for example, have been shown to exhibit higher rates of domestic violence and commit suicide at a higher rate (Hoge, 2004). Additionally, there may be ethical considerations such as biased coverage of events and insensitive interactions with the subjects of their stories (Ochberg, 1996). Ochberg suggests that journalists who suffer from PTSD can cause harm to people they interview or present a biased point of view. They are also less reliable and tend to call in sick more frequently.

The Washington Times noted two Pulitzer Prize recipients who have exhibited extreme reactions to covering trauma (2009). John McCusker, a photographer for the New Orleans Times-Picayune newspaper had an altercation with police after losing his home during Hurricane Katrina in 2006. Kevin Carter, who was recognized for a photo he took of a starving child in Africa, killed himself less than a year afterward. His suicide note mentioned the images (McCauley, 2012). "I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses, anger and pain … of starving or wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police … executioners (p. 15)."

Adam McCauley describes the "juxtaposition" many reporters and photographers find themselves in (2012). The code of silence mentality sometimes forces journalists to disguise or hide their trauma, especially when career success often depends on getting the story or shot. Photographers tend to push themselves deeper into their work instead of getting help.

> Some photographers try to lose themselves in the technical elements of their images: the exposures and f-stops, saturation and white balance. These aspects allow a modicum of control. The most successful are praised and rewarded for their work. The events that shock their humanity, serve as fuel for their professional career. But sometimes, when trauma weighs too heavily -- when those recorded moments become too 'decisive' -- photographers internalize what they've seen. Like soldiers, photographers can carry these wars home (p. 2).

Reuters Health tells the story of Chris Cramer, a correspondent for the BBC who covered war in Zimbabwe and was held hostage by militants (Joelving, 2010). The experience left him emotionally and physically sick, with flashbacks, nausea, claustrophobia and paranoia. What made the condition worse, Cramer suggested, is that he did not seek help for his problems because of the culture of silence in the newsroom. "The last thing you wanted to do in those days was to admit to your boss that you kind of lost your nerve. Newsrooms were very macho places, you know (p. 1)."

The journalists themselves provide the most poignant details of their suffering. Sheila Dabu Nonato (2010), who reported on suicide bombings in Amman Jordan for *The Jordan Times* in 2005 describes the effects a year later:

> When the first-year anniversary of the Jordan bombings came, I was a wreck. I couldn't concentrate on my work. I had flashbacks and crying spells. I could barely finish assignments. I lost hair. Though I felt embarrassed, I knew I could no longer ignore these feelings (p. 24).

Feinstein, one of the leading researchers on journalists and PTSD, is a professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto. He, along with his colleagues, has conducted multiple studies and authored several books and journal articles on the subject. The bulk of Feinstein's research began following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., as the conflicts in the Iraq and Afghanistan were beginning.

Feinstein, Owen and Blair (2002) conducted a survey of 247 journalists in 2001, comparing psychological issues of war correspondents with non-war journalists. The first phase of research involved self-reporting surveys, while the second phase involved interviews of every fifth journalist from each group. They concluded that war correspondents have a significantly higher rate of psychiatric problems, including depression, alcohol abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder, than journalists who do not cover war. About one in four war correspondents or 28 percent, according to the research, demonstrated signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Another 21 percent demonstrated signs of depression and 14 percent abused substances.

The study is one of the first comprehensive examinations of the traumatic effects of covering war and is the basis for many follow-up studies by Feinstein and his colleagues, as well as others. But, Feinstein himself questions the results of his research, noting that it is preliminary at best because he was only able to conduct interviews with

one in five survey respondents. He cited time and funding as issues in providing a more complete study and challenged the industry to conduct a more thorough review.

McMahon (2001) conducted a similar study of print journalists. It included war correspondents, but was not focused specifically on them and the overall sample was small in comparison to other surveys. McMahon studied two groups of print journalists – the first group consisted of 32 reporters who had covered traumatic events such as war, riots, rapes and murders within the past three years. The second group of 25 reporters had not reported on these types of events. The study revealed that reporters who covered traumatic events suffered a variety of psychological effects ranging from depression to intrusive memories, some of which persisted for years.

Another researcher, River Smith (2008), agrees with Feinstein and McMahon in a more recent study. Her dissertation examines the effects of covering trauma in a random sample of 167 journalists across 36 states. The research supports the earlier research by Feinstein and McMahon, but Smith goes a step further by focusing her study on contributing job and organizational characteristics and individual risk factors that could contribute to predispositions for PTSD, which will be addressed later.

Two other early studies provided much larger samples of journalists. Pyevich, Newman and Daleiden's (2003) PTSD study, surveyed more than 900 journalists on the effects of exposure to traumatic events both on and off the job. The team's key finding was that the greater the trauma exposure, the greater the severity of the symptoms and the longer the symptoms would last. Further, it shows that war correspondents, in particular, have higher rates of PTSD than their colleagues who do not cover war as the other studies also suggest.

Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003) surveyed 875 photojournalists to study the psychological effects of covering trauma and found similar results. They did not focus specifically on war correspondents. However, they learned that while 98 percent of those surveyed reported they had covered a traumatic event, about 6 percent were labeled as having PTSD.

Statistically speaking, the McMahon survey is problematic because of its small sample size, in particular that only three of the respondents identified themselves as war correspondents. Feinstein's collective body of research, on the other hand, stands out because unlike the others, it specifically focuses on war correspondents. He outlines the three stages of emotions that characterize PTSD (2006) – fear, helplessness and horror, which manifest in the form of intrusion, avoidance and arousal to make up the "PTSD triad (p. 25)."

Similarly, Dr. Frank Ochberg (1996), a psychologist and professor at Michigan State University and founder of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, describes PTSD as a "shock to the system (p. 475)." He notes: "Journalists get PTSD when they experience a catastrophic, usual visual, stressor – something that surprises them, horrifies, and terrorizes them on the job (p. 890)."

PTSD, Personality Traits and Predictors

Marias and Stuart (2005) explore PTSD in journalists, theorizing that journalists have similar reactions to repeated exposure to trauma as police officers. The team looks at temperament traits such as neuroticism and compulsiveness, which can help predict the severity of the effects of exposure to trauma, from minor depression to full-blown PTSD.

Marias and Stuart analyzed 50 journalists based on their reactions to covering trauma in three groups: minor reactions, moderate reactions and severe reactions. They

discovered that reporters with severe reactions have similar traits and these traits can affect how they deal with their trauma as well as the severity of psychological effects. In other words, factors such as temperament, resilience and biology may make one person more vulnerable to PTSD.

This study is essential in identifying predictors of PTSD that could help pinpoint proper training and treatments. In particular, the study discusses desensitization of individuals to the trauma of war and predispositions to severe effects of trauma.

Feinstein and Sinyor (2009) present an interesting study into gender response differences. By dissecting data from 218 war correspondents, they concluded that while women, in general, are more prone to depression and anxiety, women journalists are no more likely than male journalists to develop PTSD. However, Feinstein noted that his study of women needs to be validated.

Feinstein (2003) describes war correspondents' "relentless drive to tell the story" driven by adrenaline (p. 60). He concludes:

> Many war journalists have looked inward and readily admit to the high that comes from experiencing and surviving combat, for even if their role on the battlefield is that of observer, the dangers they face are often no different from those confronted by combatants (p. 60-61).

> Some of the journalists Feinstein interviewed admitted to feelings of withdrawal or bereavement after leaving the combat zone. One reporter felt invigorated while covering war and old Feinstein: It was a very intense experience. After a day in Sarajevo, or one of the other places, the colors would seem brighter, drink would

taste better, you would get excited … I had terrible withdrawal symptoms when I left. It has actually been a very difficult transition for me, really difficult (p. 61).

This study is noteworthy because it helps develop a profile for war correspondents that aids in understanding what motivates them to put themselves in harm's way and may help explain why they feel compelled to keep their psychological trauma silent. The study shows a contrast between the general population and the characteristics of war correspondents. The war correspondents, for example, crave danger and prefer activities that stimulate their adrenaline at much higher rates. Relationships, marriage and family are less of a priority. They are also more prone to addictive behaviors.

Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003) likewise identified several factors that increased risk for PTSD among photojournalists, including the number of traumatic assignments, personal trauma history and lack of support in dealing with stress, helping build a more clear profile of the PTSD candidate.

Newman, Simpson and Handschuh additionally unearthed other risk factors that make journalists more likely to suffer from PTSD when exposed to trauma themselves as children. Sexual assault, sexual abuse as a child, witnessing domestic violence as a child and witnessing a car accident as a child predisposes journalists to PTSD. While their study focuses on photojournalists, it provides some valuable data on identifying factors that make journalists more susceptible to PTSD.

Smith (2008) closely examines the office environment as a contributing factor to PTSD, echoing findings of the earlier studies. The study notes that the type of support journalists get from their managers and the relationships they have with other journalists

play a role in coping. However, Smith's research is limited in that it only strictly to U.S. journalists in only 36 of the 50 states.

Feinstein and Nicholson (2005) look at the psychological profiles of 85 war correspondents from the war in Iraq – about half of them embedded with military units – to see if embedded journalists have an increased risk of psychological trauma. They found that there was no statistical difference in the two groups either on their rates of exposure to trauma or in their levels of psychological stress. This is one of the few works that looks specifically at embedded journalists.

Spiral of Silence and Coping with Trauma

Simpson and Boggs (1999) investigate whether war journalists are able to "compartmentalize" or repress their feelings in covering the news. Their goal was to understand and compare journalists with other professionals who regularly observe death and disaster in order to see if reporters could detach themselves emotionally from the shock of an event to covering the news. They describe the spiral of silence as an "unwritten code (p. 1)":

> An unwritten code among journalists holds that no assignment, no matter how brutal, can defy one's capacity to take a photograph, gather facts, and produce a story. Moreover, it is part of the code that the journalist then proceeds to the next assignment without acknowledging or treating the emotional toll of the event (p.1).

The team collected 131 surveys from four newspapers in Michigan and Washington. They found that while journalists are exposed frequently to traumatic events, unlike other public servants, they tend to deny the effects of covering trauma.

Keats and Buchanan (2009) conducted interviews with 31 Canadian journalists, some of whom were observed for several days during visits to newsrooms to determine the effects of stress assignments. The research aimed to understand the culture of journalism and journalists' access to support and assistance to help them with the psychological effects of covering trauma. Keats specifically addresses the stigma reporters feel in discussing their problems, which range from flashbacks to sleep disorders.

Based on the study, journalists have concerns about talking about their problems out of fear that they would lose respect. Keats and Buchanan mention a shift in consciousness in Canadian newsrooms about the importance of addressing traumatic stressor as discussion about PTSD increased. Much like their American counterparts, they point to the stigma that causes Canadian journalists to hide their emotions for fear of being perceived as weak.

> It is evident in this research that the voices of these journalists are missing from the general literature on trauma and journalism. This lack of voice is reflected in the strong discourse of silence that operates to suppress Canadian journalists form speaking about their struggles, and having their challenges recognized and validated in any formal way as in other countries (p. 170).

Keats and Buchanan cite a paper by Stephen Ward (2004) echoing the sentiment. "An admission of emotional distress in the macho world (of journalism) if feared as a sign of weakness and career liability (p. 162)."

Gould, Greenberg and Hetherton (2007) examine the effects of trauma risk management training in the military in order to determine if training reduces the attitudes

around stigma. By reducing the stigma, the study aimed to discover whether military victims of PTSD were more likely to seek treatment for the disorder if they received advanced training. The results show that training positively impacts rates of seeking help.

This study focuses on the perceived stigma of reporting PTSD or other mental health problems by military personnel. Both military personnel and journalists are expected to be resilient and have similar attributes.

> Results showed that admitting to a psychological problem was more stigmatizing than admitting to a medical problem and over half believed their career would be affected if they disclosed a psychological problem (p. 506).

The journalism industry can learn from the military, Gould and his colleagues note, because it is at the forefront of PTSD research. Specifically, the team evaluated the benefits of the Trauma Risk Management or TRiM program in the United Kingdom.

Greenberg (2009) and his team investigate journalists' attitudes about post-traumatic stress disorder, focusing on whether journalists seek help dealing with trauma through their organizations. The team questioned 124 journalists. The results showed that journalists were more comfortable discussing issues with the family and friends than confiding on colleagues or their managers for support in dealing with PTSD.

The research serves as a key to understanding the spiral of silence, or as the article defines it, ‘‘culture of silence,” (p. 543) for journalists to avoid the stigma associated with admitting they have psychological issues due to covering traumatic events.

Dr. Elisa Bolton said one debilitating factor for journalists that may keep them from reporting their illness is the perception they are trying to uphold (Bolton, 2013). "Many have viewed these journalists who cover death and destruction as unusually tough,

somehow immune to the reverberating impact of the human suffering they witness (p. 1)." Some of the things that can help, Bolton suggests, are writing about the experience, seeking help from a professional and leaning on family and colleagues for support.

Reid's (2008) dissertation explores causes of and solutions for post-traumatic stress in photojournalists, focusing on what the journalists can do to better understand the illness in order to get support, including seeking counseling. Reid surveyed 800 photojournalists.

Earlier research pointed to differences in rates of PTSD in different types of journalists (Feinstein, 2006). Specifically, the research showed that photographers experience higher rates of PTSD than reporters. Photographers' symptoms were more frequent and intense than others, followed by cameramen, then print reporters and producers.

Reid's anecdotes are highly compelling and back up Feinstein's assertions. Among the anecdotes, Reid's subjects discuss how their emotions help drive what they capture through their lenses.

Himmelstein and Faithorn (2002) examine the emotional impact of reporters covering traumatic events and their coping mechanisms that allow them to continue to be productive at work. The team conducted extensive interview with four seasoned journalists to gain perspectives on coping with stress in the workplace.

Himmelstein and Faithorn's research builds on a foundation of early psychology pioneers. Drawing upon early psychology pioneers like Sigmund Freud's studies relating to the Id, Ego and Super Ego, they identify 15 potential coping mechanisms that can be employed by reporters. The research will be useful in answering questions about

predictors and appropriate coping mechanisms based on personality factors. While interesting, Himmelstein and Faithorn's research is flawed and its generalizability limited because the data were based on interviews with only four veteran war correspondents. Flaws aside, Himmelstein and Faithorn drive home some valuable insights that need to be further validated, suggesting that journalism students would benefit from formal psychology training to help them cope with covering trauma, and more importantly, empathize better with the subjects of their stories.

Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003) concur, advocating that news organizations would greatly benefit from stress training and prevention programs and schools would produce better journalists if they effectively educated students in trauma.

Social Responsibility of News Organizations

Feinstein (2004) suggests that news organizations must provide support for journalists affected by PTSD and other psychological effects such as depression and alcohol abuse. One statement from Feinstein's article, in particular, stood out: "Good journalism requires healthy journalists, not those who might filter the news through their own emotional problems (p. 76)."

Even earlier than Feinstein, Castle (1999), an associate lecturer in Journalism at the Queensland University of Technology, discusses the public's perception that journalists are "less than human (p. 144)." Castle describes the "death knock (p. 145)" – when a reporter is required to confront a grieving family for comment – as causing some of the most stress for reporters.

He addressed the need for support systems for journalists who cover tragic events. He suggested that a program with the Queensland, Australia, Ambulance Service can

serve as a model. The program trains peers to help those with trauma by encouraging discussion.

Recognizing that reporters are thought to be resilient, Castle drives home the need for counseling services to help reporters. In his text, Castle describes how reporters feel shamed into keeping their suffering to themselves.

Pieton's (2009) thesis examines media organizations and procedures for helping journalists who are suffering from PTSD. The study also digs into the benefits of employee assistance programs designed to assist journalists in healing from exposure to traumatic events and provides some examples of proactive approaches to training employees. This work complements the works of Dworznik and Grubb, providing another point of view into the need for trauma training for journalists.

For her study, Killeen (2011) conducted both quantitative and qualitative research, looking at the social responsibility of news organizations in training reporters to manage stress. Her thesis suggests that news organizations have a responsibility to protect the journalism profession. She concludes that journalists with PTSD can result in traumatizing interview subjects and biased or overly emotional reporting.

Killeen's thesis provides some of the most recent data on journalism and PTSD. Her work helps to answer questions about the second and third effects of journalists with PTSD, including the dangers for journalists themselves but the interview sample was too small to derive any real conclusions.

Dworznik (2006) explores through qualitative and quantitative studies ways in which reporters are able to cope with stress. She interviewed and observed 26 journalists,

discovering that the more journalists talk about their experiences, the better equipped they were to cope.

Dworznik spent four years examining trauma training for journalists. This report helps answer whether training or exposures desensitize individuals to the trauma of war. However, the study is limited by virtue of the sample size.

Dworznik and Grubb (2007) conducted both quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to determine whether trauma training would be helpful in preparing journalists to cope more effectively with covering traumatic events. The team conducted in-depth interviews with students and collected surveys.

This study is a companion to Dworznik's examination of trauma training. The work provides substantial anecdotal information that will help provide answers to the kinds of training or exposures that can desensitize individuals to the trauma of war.

Jerome Aumente (2009) highlights the story of Muntader al Zaidi, the Iraqi television reporter who threw his shoes at President George W. Bush during a press conference. Aumente, an acquaintance of the reporter, claims that al Zaidi was suffering from PTSD from his exposure to the atrocities of war and could have benefited from counseling if it were available. Al Zaidi had tried to solicit help prior to the incident. Like many of the researchers, Aumente points out the lack of help available to journalists. Al Zaidi's case was one extreme. For his actions, he was sentenced to three years in prison, which was later reduced. PTSD can manifest itself in many self-destructive ways.

Greenburg's (2009) study questions whether offering counseling programs would serve any benefit at all when journalists are reluctant to seek help from within their

organizations until they are reassured that seeking support will be accepted from within the organization and their careers will not be damaged.

Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003) provide some alarming statistics supporting the lack of counseling services within organizations. Three out of four respondents reported that their organizations had no counseling services at all. Of the one in four that reported their organizations offered counseling, less than 20 percent took advantage of the service.

News organizations are taking note of the problems with PTSD and are implementing programs to address it such as hiring counselors and holding seminars for their news staffs (Steffens, et al., 2012). Many news organizations now have systems in place to help journalists with stress disorders, including CNN, Reuters and the Australian Broadcasting Company (Joelving, 2010). Journalism schools are also taking initiative in educating students about PTSD issues (University of Kansas, 2012). The University of Kansas sponsored a workshop for editors and journalists in 2012 on the topic.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is one organization that provides news organizations tools to help journalists cope with stress. The organization web site offers a downloadable guide, "Tragedies & Journalists: A Guide for More Effective Coverage." It is intended to help journalists compartmentalize their feelings after exposure to tragedy. Among the topics include tips for interviewing and writing about victims and covering traumatic events. One section is dedicated to teaching journalists how to take care of themselves. The organization provides five basic rules: know your limits; take breaks; find someone who is a sensitive listener; learn how to deal with your stress; and understand that your problem may become overwhelming (p. 7).

The document also puts some of the responsibility on the organization to help manage stress for employees who cover trauma, including encouraging them to seek help and talking about their problems, looking for signs of trauma and offering counseling.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, an organization that aims to protect the interests of journalists, also provides information in the "Journalist Security Guide" (2012). It points out the signs of stress managers and journalists themselves should look for after they return from covering trauma.

> Signs of stress are often subtle. A journalist may seem more anxious, irritable, withdrawn, numb, depressed, sad, or angry, and the emotions may be either sustained or fluctuating. Physical symptoms can include sleep or eating disorders, a rapid heartbeat, sweating, panic attacks, headaches, nausea, and chest pain. Strained personal and work relationships are often common. So is alcohol or drug abuse. Other signs may include an abnormally or intense focus on one's work, as if one is trying, as with other compulsive behaviors, to avoid uncomfortable feelings (p. 2).

Chapter IV: Research and Methodology

This research aims to explore PTSD among Army public affairs soldiers to help determine if their experiences warrant additional training and seeks to understand how Army combat journalists characterize their experiences in covering war. A qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and ethnography will be used. The four primary research questions are:

RQ1: How do Army public affairs soldiers characterize their experiences relating to covering war and their psychological well-being afterward?

RQ2: Is there evidence of a spiral of silence among Army public affairs soldiers that inhibits them from a. reporting and b. getting help for psychological trauma?

RQ3: Do Army public affairs soldiers exhibit characteristics that make them more susceptible to PTSD? Some possible characteristics include anxiety, a tendency to abuse alcohol or neuroticism. RQ4: Does training for Army public affairs soldiers adequately prepare them for what they will see from behind their lens in combat?

Qualitative research aims to inform a subject (Davis, 2012). "The goal is to provide a better understanding *why* individuals act as they do rather than numerical descriptions of *what* people do and think (p. 120)." A qualitative study also provides researchers with a starting point to see if there is validity in an idea, hypothesis and allows the researcher to focus more soundly without costly investment.

A qualitative approach was used in this study that included one-on-one interviews with 22 public affairs soldiers. Jensen and Jankowski (1993) advocate interviewing as a way to gather important information: "The primary strength of *interviewing* as a method

is its capacity to range over *multiple perspectives* on a given topic (p. 101)." Collectively, these two methods will help inform what additional research may be needed.

Interviews were conducted in person at Fort Bragg, N.C., and by phone and Skype in order to select soldiers from various public affairs detachments and units. The interviews were semi structured, with a list of demographic and open-ended questions that allowed for elaboration on interesting themes and for the soldiers to relate their experiences in their own words. Davis (2012) suggests: "A personal interview is a free-flowing, yet structured, conversation between the interviewer and the respondent (p. 121)." Open-ended questioning is designed to encourage the soldiers to expand on their thoughts. (Sample interview questions are provided in Annex A).

The researcher paid close attention to verbal and non-verbal cues to help guide further questioning and be careful not to ask leading questions that might bias the research (Anderson and Jack, 1998). At the same time, it was important for the interviewer to establish a rapport with the participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The researcher used the demographic questions to ease into the interviews. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes per participant and were scheduled at the convenience of participants. In-person interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the subjects to allow them to choose a location where they feel most comfortable to help encourage openness. Interviews were audio recorded for accurate transcription so that the interviewer could focus on the questions and take detailed notes, without concern for missing key themes.

A budget was not necessary to conduct the interviews. The uniformed code of military justice prohibits soldiers from being paid for participation in research. For

soldiers to participate, the research proposal was submitted to the Army Research Institute. The ARI did not require formal approval since participation in the study was voluntary. Primary support was provided by U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

The study used soldiers from throughout the Army. Soldiers were solicited through personal contacts, the Army Public Affairs Facebook page, the Army global contact list and word-of-mouth marketing. All in-person interviews were conducted at Fort Bragg, N.C. This location was opportunistic for in-person interviews. Fort Bragg is one of the Army's largest installations in the continental United States and home to the largest available sample of Army journalists. U.S. Army Forces Command at Fort Bragg has four eight -man public affairs detachments, one 20-man mobile public affairs detachment and one 30-man press camp headquarters. In addition, the Special Operations Command, the 82nd Airborne Division and 18th Airborne Corps has combat journalists in its ranks. In all, there are more than 130 combat journalists assigned to Fort Bragg. The interviewer was not able to solicit enough volunteers on Fort Bragg for the study and had to expand the reach through other Army public affairs channels. An announcement was posted on the Army Public Affairs Facebook page. Additionally, the interviewer called public affairs soldiers from the Army global contact list to solicit additional participants.

The aim was to interview both men and women of all ranks and public affairs specialties. It was preferable for the soldiers to have served at least one combat tour in Iraq or Afghanistan in the last three years, but soldiers who served since September 11, 2001, were included, as well as soldiers who served on humanitarian missions. There was a balance between officers and enlisted soldiers. The demographic questions asked information such as age, rank, gender, time in service and whether participants have been

diagnosed with PTSD or experienced symptoms of PTSD or Trauma such as sleeplessness, irritability and depression. These types of questions were helpful because they were easy to answer and helped put the participants at ease before getting into the open-ended questions. All questions were approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Analysis of Data

The responses drove the themes that were collected during the interviews since responses were not predictable based on the open-ended format that was be used. Common themes were aligned and grouped as data was categorized. Data were categorized into five areas: demographics, public affairs training, deployment experiences, worth and their perceived value to the combat mission in combat, and attitudes about PTSD.

The researcher looked for interesting stories that answered the research questions. Due to constraints with the Institutional Review Board, research questions could not be altered or additional questions asked. Each soldier answered exactly the same set of demographic and open-ended questions.

The researcher digitally recorded the interviews for accurate transcription and took robust notes. The noted responses for each participant were input into an excel spreadsheet so that the researcher could easily distinguish response patterns. This was especially helpful in synthesizing the demographic data.

Soldiers were not identified by name at any time during the study. They were not videotaped to ensure their anonymity and they were not asked to sign a consent form. The researcher worked with the Army Staff Judge Advocate to provide a waiver of consent for participants to ensure that no signatures were collected that could tie participants back to study. Anonymity was key in completing this study. Finally, the results were screened

by U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs security officer to ensure the study did not contain content that violated Army Operations Security regulations.

Chapter V: Results

Public affairs soldiers are ordinary young men and women put in extraordinary situations. They are writers, photographers, public spokespeople, media escorts, newscasters, editors, cameramen, interviewers and event organizers during normal situations. Combat, however, is anything but normal. In combat, public affairs soldiers are called upon to record events, memorialize the fallen, and educate the American public about war. This study aims to provide a glimpse of what these soldiers experience during combat and explore attitudes that surround them.

Twenty-two Army public affairs soldiers were interviewed for this study. This diverse cross section of soldiers represented both officer and enlisted ranks. Of the eight officers interviewed, there were two captains, five majors and one colonel. Of the 14 enlisted soldiers interviewed, there were five sergeants, three staff sergeants, four sergeants first class, one master sergeant and one command sergeant major. Their lengths of service ranged from four years to more than 20.

Fourteen of the soldiers in this study were on active duty at the time of the interviews, three were either Army Reserve or National Guard and five served a combination of both active and reserve duty. Four of the subjects were retired or no longer in Army service. Of those who were retired, three are still serving in public affairs careers as military civilians. Three of the soldiers interviewed were deployed at the time of their interviews: two to Afghanistan and one to Kosovo. The others are assigned to Army units throughout the continental United States. In-person interviews were conducted with six soldiers at Fort Bragg, N.C. Three interviews were conducted via Skype and 13 by telephone.

The majority of those interviewed have deployed in support of the Army's most recent operations in either Iraq or Afghanistan. A smaller number deployed in support of two recent humanitarian efforts after the tsunami in Japan and earthquakes in Haiti. Many of the soldiers deployed multiple times during their careers in support of both combat operations and humanitarian relief, some going back to military operations in Kosovo, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Africa, Central America, South America and the Philippines.

The soldiers in the study represented both conventional Army forces and Army Special Operations forces. They have served as part of Army-only contingencies abroad as well as in joint military environments with branches of other U.S. forces and foreign militaries. All of the soldiers have deployed at least once, but on average the participants have deployed at least two times during their public affairs careers. The number of deployments does not include deployments while these soldiers were serving in other career fields. It is strictly based on their public affairs experiences. Half reported three or more deployments apiece as part of public affairs. Three soldiers reported deploying five times each. Time in service did not factor into the number of deployments. Of the three with five deployments, for example, one served more than 20 years in the Army, one has served 11 years and one less than 10 years.

Interviews were conducted in person, via Skype and by telephone, and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. There was no notable difference between the length of interviews for officers or enlisted soldiers, for males or females or for active duty Army or Army Reserve soldiers.

The interviewer observed that public affairs soldiers are intelligent, thoughtful in their responses and very articulate. They are natural speakers and took care to answer

questions carefully and succinctly. The interviewer noted some interesting patterns. During questioning about PTSD symptoms, for example, many of the soldiers seemed to hesitate in responding to whether they experienced the symptoms. The subjects were only asked to indicate whether or not they experienced 15 symptoms associated with PTSD. In addition to hesitation, many of the respondents provided in-depth explanations of symptoms or wanted to put the symptom into context. Some soldiers also hesitated in responding to questions about whether they feel they are valued by the combat soldiers they are assigned to support.

The hesitation and framing could be attributed to a natural tendency for public affairs soldiers to be careful in their responses, especially in a formal setting where they believe their responses could have negative impacts for the Army. This natural tendency may cause difficulty for public affairs soldiers to transition from public affairs mode to personal mode. While the interview was conducted in a casual tone, it may have been viewed more formally.

The soldiers seemed to be keenly aware of when they were on the record. The first part of the interview - a series of demographic questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer - was not recorded, but the interviewer informed the subjects that notes would be taken. The second portion - a series of open-ended questions and responses - was recorded. The majority of soldiers in the study went into great detail during the non-recorded demographic questions and continued to discuss their experiences after the interviewer turned off the recorder. Much of the detail provided when the recorder was turned off was more in depth than the recorded responses.

Some of the soldiers asked for the interview questions in advance so they could prepare responses. Questions were not provided in advance. Many of the soldiers expressed interest in reading the results of the study and asked questions about how their responses compared to other participants.

Public affairs soldiers have a great sense of pride for the work they do and are concerned about the impressions they leave with the units they support as well as among other public affairs soldiers. Many said fear of failure, appearing weak or being a burden on others is constantly on their minds. Some struggle with confidence and frustration at not being able to do more. Participant 8, an active duty captain, said he has a "constant sense of self-doubt."

Public Affairs soldiers generally prefer not to focus on themselves and it is engrained in their training to steer away from personal attention. Participant 14 said: “We’re taught to act like we are not in the Army. We are covering the Army and should never become part of the story." Participant 22 described the public affairs solders’ job as “being the shadow of the heroes.”

> You feel like you have a bubble in comparison to the guys who truly maneuver and function side by side between one another. You're like a guest in the military and you're a correspondent. (Participant 22)

A few of the soldiers shed tears or their voices cracked during the interviews, but many kept their emotions in check - something they said they are taught to control. Participant 22, a sergeant first class, explained: "We don't own a lot of our feelings because we're not supposed to … As leader, your responsibility is to remind a soldier exactly how to keep it together all the time."

The soldiers in this study chose to serve in the Army for both patriotic and practical reasons. Many cited wanting to be part of a bigger picture, inspiration from family or friends who have served and a reaction to the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 as reasons for joining.

> I joined the Army because I felt that I had a life calling at a very young age. At five or six, I understood that I wanted to be a part of an organization, that I wanted to be part of a team, that the American public would see as someone special and that helps our nation when duty calls. (Participant 18)

Participant 10: “I was an Army brat. There’s a long history of family service. It’s the culture I grew up around.” Others joined for college money or to develop skills that will help them in their future after the Army. “I didn’t want to get stuck in a dead end job,” said participant 12.

Most said they chose public affairs because it was a good fit for their personality or skills and that they were interested in journalism prior to joining the Army. “I was a journalism major. I encountered USIS (United States Information Service) while writing a paper and I wanted to be like them: writing about relevant and important social and political topics," Participant 5 said.

> I chose Public Affairs specifically during the surge in Iraq. During a15-month deployment, I was currently in a transportation position stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. As the tour had progressed, I felt little satisfaction in my job and recognized this as an opportunity to change my job. I'd always felt like I wanted to connect more with my job and the public and public affairs was a natural position for me to take given my experience. (Participant 18)

A few said Public Affairs wasn't their first choice, but the best fit for their personality. "I wanted to be a linguist, but couldn't. I joined the chemical corps first. A personality test showed newscaster would be a good fit," said participant 13. "It spoke to me personally and would translate to a civilian world," Participant 19 said.

Enlisted public affairs soldiers must have at least a 107 General Technical Score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB (goarmy.com). The general technical score factors in the scores of arithmetic reasoning (AR) and sum of word knowledge and paragraph comprehension (VE). Of the nearly 180 jobs in the Army, public affairs is the only one that determines qualifications by GT score. Special Forces uses the GT score in combination with other scores. According to about.com:

> The Army converts the ASVAB subtest scores into 10 composite score areas, known as "line scores." The line scores determine what job(s) an individual qualifies for. The ASVAB subtests are: General Science (GS); Arithmetic Reasoning (AR); Word Knowledge (WK); Paragraph Comprehension (PC); Numerical Operations (NO); Coding Speed (CS); Auto and Shop Information (AS); Mathematics Knowledge (MK); Mechanical Comprehension (MC); Electronics Information (EI); and Sum of Word Knowledge and Paragraph Comprehension (VE). (www.usmilitary/about.com)

The ASVAB determines qualifications for jobs in the Army. It would not be fair to compare public affairs to other Army jobs because requirements are based on combinations of scores. However, when comparing minimum line scores, public affairs jobs require a higher line score than average. Special Forces and military intelligence

were among the few that required higher line scores than public affairs jobs. (military.com)

Officers must have a minimum GT score of 110 (goarmy.com). The public affairs officers in this study tended to have backgrounds in journalism or public relations. Officers must voluntarily reclassify for Public Affairs because it is not an entry-level career field. After being commissioned, officers are assigned to one of 25 branches in the Army. The participants of this study come from varying branches, including field artillery, transportation, chemical and infantry.

RQ3 suggested that Army public affairs soldiers may exhibit characteristics such as neuroticism, anxiety or a tendency to abuse alcohol that contribute to PTSD. Some soldiers indicated during interviews that they drank alcohol to forget some of the images, while others expressed anxiety about failing. The study, however, did not directly reveal any personality characteristics that make public affairs soldiers more susceptible to PTSD or combat trauma. This may be an area worth further exploration. However, several factors, which will be discussed in subsequent sections, may contribute to prolonging symptoms of PTSD, including perceptions in the career field that it's not safe or appropriate to talk about their experiences.

Public Affairs Training

Participants were asked how well their public affairs training prepares them for what they see and experience during their deployments. RQ4 suggested that training for public affairs soldiers lacks key components to prepare these soldiers for combat. Interviews confirmed this theory. Without hesitation, all of the soldiers interviewed said that the training does not mentally or physically prepare them for what they see or

experience during combat or humanitarian missions. Some said that nothing could prepare them or anyone for combat.

The majority of the subjects said the training they get at the Defense Information School, commonly called DINFOS, focuses on technical public affairs skills such as writing, taking photographs, media relations and public speaking, but falls short on other key areas such as basic soldier tasks. It also doesn't prepare them for the unique public affairs environment they encounter during deployment.

> I don't think unless you have folks within your unit who have deployed, that we fully or at all really adequately prepare soldiers for the kind of unique things that PA does. I don't think that we actually explain that sometimes even though you may not necessarily be doing the combat missions that we are the ones who deal with the after effects of those missions. You know, when a helicopter goes down or when there is a soldier who is killed, we're the ones who deal with that, we're the ones who do the memorial service we're the ones who do the notifications then take the calls. I don't think that we ever really prepare or talk about that aspect of the job with soldiers. (Participant 11)

One problem, participants suggested, is that the training at the Defense Information School, based at Fort Meade, Md., focuses on hypothetical situations that do not adequately mimic real-life combat scenarios. They said it is impossible to replicate an actual combat environment in the Defense Information School setting.

> I don't think we really talked about war that much at DINFOS. We basically got all of our training under our belt, you know, making sure we know how to write a press release, know how to write a story and get photos. We got all the basics out

> of the way, but we really didn't talk about how it was really going to be when we got to war. (Participant 21)

> What you get at DINFOS, at the schoolhouse, there's nothing related to combat that goes on there. … There absolutely should be. Shooting in a perfect world scenario where you are discussing, God, someone winning an award, or being the best teacher, or something like that as a scenario – that's what you get, the mechanics of doing it – in no way, shape or form prepares you for going out on a patrol, covering a patrol or what it's like to possibly see someone killed in action or being shot at or explosions going on around you. (Participant 10)

Enlisted soldiers who sign up for public affairs attend 9 weeks of basic training before attending a 56-day course for either public affairs or photojournalism designed to teach basic fundamentals of one of the two disciplines. According to the Public Affairs Specialist Course description, the purpose of the course is: "To train selected enlisted personnel and civilian employees of DOD components in the principles, techniques and skills required to perform the duties and functions of public affairs specialists." (p. 3)

> The *graduate* is prepared to perform skills as a public affairs specialist (supervised). The successful student can interact with command, community and media, and prepare and release information to report news and command information in accordance with applicable directives. This apprentice has studied and practiced theory, concepts and principles of public affairs, media relations and community relations. The student has applied various research methods and fundamentals of journalism to include acceptable media English as it applies to news writing with emphasis on style, format and techniques, and practiced basic

> operation of the digital camera and photojournalism skills. This graduate has successfully written news leads and headlines, and news and feature stories, and practiced publication design and layout. (Public Affairs Specialist Course Description, p. 3)

Similarly, Army officers attend an eight-week course in public affairs. However, officers cannot go directly into public affairs. They must serve in one of the Army career branches before being eligible for public affairs so they do receive additional training prior to becoming public affairs officers. Army officers in this study previously served in infantry, chemical, field artillery and transportation career fields, among others. Training in these branches can vary greatly in length. Generally, officers will have served five or more years in another career field before transitioning to public affairs.

The officers in this study had four year college degrees, which is a requirement in order to be commissioned into the Army. Once they serve in their branch, they can elect to reclassify for public affairs and must complete the Public Affairs Officer Qualification Course. This course equips them with basic public affairs principles. According to the course description:

> This course provides entry-level public affairs training for mid- to senior-level non-commissioned officers and commissioned officers from all U.S. military services, selected foreign nations, and U.S. government agency civilians selected for public affairs assignments at all levels of command. This course ensures those NCOs, officers and civilians are capable of performing the basic duties of Department of Defense military public affairs practitioners. … The Public Affairs Qualification Course provides entry-level public affairs training for the

> Department of Defense, U.S. government agencies and selected foreign military communication professionals. Instruction focuses on the foundational elements of the communication planning process; principles and techniques associated with implementing effective communication strategies; and the processes involved in integrating communication into military planning and operations. (PAOQC Course Description, p. 3)

Many soldiers, especially officers, said previous training for combat in other career fields or training in civilian jobs helped prepare them for combat more effectively than the courses at the Defense Information School. Participants suggested that while the Defense Information School provides the basics in public affairs skills such as writing, taking photos or public speaking, the unit focuses on the vital soldiering skills needed to prepare them for combat.

> I think once we got to the unit and the unit training is what's critical. That's where you have to sit there and basically put your soldiers into the situation, and hey, this isn't going to be good. You're going to be supporting a bunch of different people of different branches, of different branches and you need to be prepared for whatever happens. (Participant 1)

> Public affairs didn't prepare me for combat, but previous combat tours did in other MOSs …I needed that combat oriented training and it was always the previous active duty experience that delivered. I was supposed to be combat support, so why was I out killing people?" (Participant 5)

> Most of your training is going to be from the unit you get to and you. When I had my training, it was I went out with a specific set of soldiers that were going to be

> going out all the time and that's where I got my training, what I should be doing with my weapon and when was the best time I was going to be able to get the photos and videos that I should. I don't't' think public affairs training discusses that. I think in some part they discuss you have to establish a trust relationship, and you have to show up to a unit and you have to be squared away in order to be respected and you have to be in shape and people have to look at you and figure out if this person is going to be an asset or a liability when we're on patrol. (Participant 6)

Some suggested that even unit training is not adequate for public affairs soldiers, whose job is very different and not necessarily relatable to combat trainers. Participant 21 said: "Most soldiers at a brigade have no idea what a public affairs soldier does, so they have no idea how to train them."

Some soldiers emphasized that public affairs training didn't effectively prepare them to handle the emotional aspects of covering combat. Writing death notices, planning memorial services and working with families of fallen soldiers requires an emotional toughness that was not addressed in training either at the Defense Information School or at the unit level.

> I think that my training has helped me say the right things at the right time, but I don't think there is a method of training you can have to prepare you to write a release for a killed or wounded in action because it's still one of your own and they're still a very valuable life to your footprint and it was saddening sometimes. There's no way to prepare anyone to say our thought and prayers are with the loved ones of this fallen soldier and we'll continually be support for them. There's

> no way to prepare a public affairs practitioner to say those words to any audience. (Participant 4)

> I don't think it's addressed very much, the emotional or mental toughness you have to have with something like that, especially if you know the person, personally, that you're writing the release about. I relied more on my previous military experience to deal with that on several occasions. (Participant 7)

Others suggested that on the job training becomes very important to fill in the gaps not addressed by the Defense Information School or with unit training. One reason is that unit training isn't always an option before deployment. In addition to learning combat tactics, on-the-job training becomes especially important in learning how to work with a specific commander, staff or unit. "On-the-job training is a big factor," Participant 21 said. "When you go under fire, you have to decide what to do take photos or become a soldier."

> I had most of my training on the job; it was baptism by fire. I had come straight from DINFOS and went straight to the brigade PAO and they were actually already deployed when I got there so I met them in Afghanistan and met the brigade commander and staff the first time during Afghanistan. It was really a lot of baptism by fire. It was seeing how the commander responded to things, seeing what his priorities were for public affairs. Most of the training we did in DINFOS, I haven't touched since and that was almost four years ago, but in other aspects, there are things I use on a daily basis still to this day. (Participant 8)

Most of the soldiers who have deployed more than once said they learn from those experiences and tend to fare better in subsequent deployments because they know what to expect.

Several, however, suggested that the lack of preparation for combat is not unique to Public Affairs. Army training, in general, does not effectively train anyone for what soldiers may see or experience.

> I would say that none of it makes a lick of difference. They do not properly prepare public affairs officers or soldiers for what they are going to encounter in any kind of environment. Whether it's during peacetime in training preparing to go or actually going into a combat mission, they do not prepare you … but I would also say they don't prepare anyone for it. In the Army, they do not prepare even a combat soldier for it – for combat. (Participant 2)

Deployment Experiences

Public affairs soldiers characterize their combat deployment experiences as traumatic, surreal, shocking, confusing, frightening, stressful and conflicted. RQ1 suggested that combat experiences for public affairs soldiers are traumatic and can have affect their well-being. Interviews validated this. Their experiences during deployment vary greatly. Some described daily mortar attacks or getting caught up in firefights while on patrol with combat soldiers. Others collected very graphic historical footage of U.S. operations for classified Army archives. They planned heartbreaking memorial services and wrote death releases for fallen soldiers, documented fatal aircraft crashes and pitched in to recover bodies after natural disasters. One soldier recalled his first encounter with an IED or improvised explosive device.

> It’s traumatic. It’s very surreal. It’s something you can never really explain or compartmentalize. No matter how many times I would tell myself over and over again, it was something I couldn’t place, it didn’t happen … You question what happened. It was one of those moments it was just hard to believe. You live in a nice comfortable life where everything in the United States is essentially ideal and then you go into a situation like this that is unlike anything else and you can’t believe it happened to you. (Participant 1)

> We were mortared twice a day for three months. It was nerve wracking. You hold a discussion with yourself. It’s kind of like a lottery. When the time comes, there’s nothing you can do. (Participant 17)

Participant 10, now a master sergeant, described filming the death of a U.S. soldier. She and another public affairs soldier were out with the unit for several days filming their movements and gathering information to tell their story. On this day, the unit encountered enemy forces and her story gathering mission turned into a historical documentation. "I actually ended up with bits of blood and stuff on the camera," she said. "I carried around that tape for years, although I never watched it." She recalls being in "job mode" when the incident happened. You're making sure you're getting the shot, not really thinking about safety or what happened after the incident. I was just thinking, is my camera running?"

Some described being assigned to document the war, including photographing casualty evacuations, the after effects of U.S. or allied bombings and accidents. Some of what they saw tested their moral fortitude or showcased the conflict between the roles of public affairs soldiers and combat. Participant 12 recalls being tasked to photograph the

aftermath of bombings in Iraq, which resulted in the "largest loss of Iraqi life up to that point in the war." The photos he took were classified. They were never released to the public, but are fresh in his mind and left a lasting impression on him.

> We erased a little bit of humanity. I had to stop a couple times, but I pressed on because I've got to do my job, too. I didn't break down in tears …At first I thought this was just rubble of a building and then you start seeing that it wasn't just a building. I still pushed through and got the job done. I'm glad I did it, but it wasn't the best memory I have. (Participant 12)

Participant 22, now a sergeant first class, recalls documenting casualty evacuations of children in southern Afghanistan to be treated at U.S. clinics. The images of dying and wounded children still and hate in the eyes of some Afghan people haunts her.

> Some children clung to me. Some children spit at me. Some children posed for me for photographs and some family members embraced me, but the look in the eyes of the Afghan people, whose lives we were completely flipping up-side-down, whether anyone was emotionally attached to it or not, that trauma, that terror, that fear and that way that those people looked at us. … I'm haunted by the tears. (Participant 22).

Participant 15 said she feels a sense of guilt now when she sees news reports about current events in Iraq. There were times when she and other subjects of this would witness things that were not reportable through public affairs channels, either by command decision or by classification of the operations.

Many soldiers described their hardest assignments as preparing "death packets" or memorial services for those killed in action. One soldier reported losing 18 soldiers in her unit during a nine month deployment. With each death, she and her colleagues were required to prepare a biographical sketch to release to the media and plan a memorial service for the unit as they mourned for the soldier. "You feel guilty," participant 3 said. "There was a time when I thought I couldn't do even one more memorial video. Memorials for family members and soldiers killed in action, it's very depressing to do them," Participant 10 said.

> There was a lot of loss. You meet guys along the way and I was assigned to write about people. A month later, I was covering their memorial services. You are preparing the death packets for press and you see their smiling faces in the photos. You think about the families. The memorials are very difficult. That's one of the reasons I left. (Participant 21)

Public Affairs soldiers are not just responsible for covering combat losses. One soldier lost a member of his unit to suicide while deployed. The soldier was known around camp and the suicide took the unit off guard. He describes the shock he felt when he learned the soldier took his own life.

> There was one kid in the unit in Iraq. I knew him around camp. He had problems and killed himself in the motor pool. I was kind of in shock. It really hit home and was upsetting. I had to draft his bio sketch, the usual role. I thought about the family and him. This was a kid who had dreams of going to SF (Special Forces) selection. You don't know what took him over the top. There's something that sets them off. (Participant 16)

Participants described a sense of disbelief in what they saw and experienced during deployment. Humanitarian missions were sometimes more shocking than combat missions. “I saw horrible medical injuries, poverty and inhumanity,” participant 5 said.

> The irony, I saw more traumatic things in Japan than I did in Afghanistan based on the amount of destruction the tsunami caused. There were bodies left in buildings, a great loss of life across the area, because they hadn’t been able to get to the area. As far as differences, we were welcomed in Japan more than Afghanistan. There was a difference in mission for public affairs. We were out there not only telling the story, but also assisting in the humanitarian relief … As horrible as Japan was on a human level, it was much more rewarding because we were able to do a multitude of jobs there, as opposed to the war in Afghanistan. It was a different culture. We didn’t have that relationship with the people. (Participant 1)

Participant 14 said his unit lost 39 soldiers during his first tour in Iraq. On one occasion, he was on patrol with a military police company that was ambushed by Iraqi insurgents and cut off from the rest of the unit, including weapons and supplies. “It was a running gunfight. We were short on guns and totally isolated. I was frustrated. There was nothing much I could do,” he said.

Others described wondering if the next IED or mortar attack will be their last. Sometimes, it hits too close to home. Personal connections to those killed in action are much harder to handle. Participant 9 lost a member of his section while deployed to Iraq. His thoughts: “It could happen to anyone. It could happen any time. I was thinking about

him and his family back home." After encountering several IEDs and small arms fire, one soldier recalled the thoughts going through his mind.

> I would think, 'that was very close.' I remember thinking this could be my last breath. After an IED … you're in the vehicle rolling around and you know of all the incidents that this was the soldier's last breath that they took, but there's nothing else you can do. It could happen in the next second, the next minute, the next three minutes, especially if you're going into an area that is IED prone. (Participant 6).

Similarly, Participant 19, a sergeant, described what happened one month in to her first deployment. Her forward operating base was located right next to the red zone and came under attack. She recalls thinking, "I hope I'm not out of time."

> The local populous staged a riot on the FOB. We had to suit up and get all the ammo ready and we sat on alert for hour and hours and hours. That was jarring because you realized how real everything just became and the possibility because of our close proximity to the red zone of something happening. (Participant 19)

The stress of making decisions also affected the public affairs soldiers. Participant 13 described lamenting over sending her soldiers out on patrol. One of her soldiers, in particular, reminded her of her daughter. "As a leader, there are a lot of tough decisions to make," she said.

> There were a lot of incidents that were difficult because I was in charge of detachment. I was responsible for sending soldiers out who may or may not come back. So the difficulty was making sure that they were ready, willing and able to

> make life and death decisions so they wouldn't endanger the lives of other soldiers. (Participant 5)

Others experienced stress to perform while on patrol with combat soldiers. They wanted to make sure they didn't let the other soldiers down or embarrass themselves by their inability. One described two incidents involving small arms fire and a grenade attack.

> I do remember when we were getting shot at, you immediately go into the battle drill, getting down and returning fire. With the grenade, I was a little more confused, not as clear headed as the small arms fire. … There was mass confusion. At that point, I wanted to impress the brigade commander who was going around directing the circus, if you will, making sure everyone was safe. I didn't want to look like a complete idiot in front of him. (Participant 8)

Proving Public Affairs Value During Combat

Participants were asked whether they feel they are valued members of the team when assigned to support a combat unit and whether they have to prove themselves. They cited challenges with the units' knowledge of public affairs, conflicting missions, gender disparities, rank issues and problems unique to special operations units. Overall, study participants agreed they have to earn the respect of the units they support in order to become valued members of the team.

> Hell yeah, you have to prove yourself. There's an intellectual disconnect. They are not tracking that there were public affairs soldiers shooting that event. You can't be tired no matter how much equipment you are carrying -- camera equipment and tripod for hours on end. You learn to earn their respect because they think you're a sissy. (Participant 13)

Some said the units they supported are not very familiar with public affairs and don't initially see what they can contribute. Others said commanders who have had experience with Public Affairs tend to embrace them more readily. It's up to the public affairs soldiers to educate the units on their purpose.

> There are some units out there they don't see the purpose because they're not educated on what we do and what our capabilities are. Then there are other units that see the value of us as a resource … they want you there and want that story told. Some of the special operations units may not get it as much. You have to sit at the table and explain to them the benefit and it takes a little longer. I think overall, most of them make you part of the team especially after you've proven yourself. (Participant 1)

> At the brigade level, you're constantly dealing with soldiers who have no idea what you do. You're dealing with a staff that really has no idea what you do and it's your responsibility at that level to know what you do as a public affairs soldier, know how you fit into the equation, and then basically be aggressive and force yourself into that training equation. (Participant 21)

> It's pretty easy for a public affairs soldier to be told to go sit in a corner and color and called upon for grip and grin ceremonies or artistic interests of the command. I think it takes the true ambition of the soldier at heart and a public affairs professional to validate your capability to insist that seat at the table to show up and justify, that if you give me a seat instead of this other guy, this is what I can offer you. We can produce, we can document. You have to sell yourself. That's the vulnerability and thanklessness of public affairs. You're constantly having to

> influence your environment to make people believe that what you do is validated and useful from a command information level, a historical documentation level, a crisis management level. You know, that when the shit hits the fan, you have a course of action. (Participant 22)

Public affairs soldiers described one the biggest challenges as building trust and rapport with combat soldiers and commanders. They also felt pressure to demonstrate their talent and show the combat soldiers they are good at what they do and won't jeopardize the mission.

> I think to some degree, every day, there's a proving day and you've got to be there in the fight if needed and show you're not going to be a liability. I'm not talking as a public affairs soldier, but as a soldier, you want to be right there if you have to do something and you can be responsive and alert and help your fellow soldiers out. (Participant 6)

Building rapport doesn't always come easy. The nature of assignments can hinder rapport. Those who are assigned to one unit from the start tend to develop a rapport faster. Soldiers who don't spend their entire deployment with the same unit said they struggle with developing respect and rapport with the soldiers and unit leadership.

During one deployment, participant 15 anchored a newscast for Armed Forces Network and never spent more than a day or two at a time with a combat unit she was tasked to cover. After capturing the story, she returned to her the AFN outpost. "With some units, you do a story and leave. It’s hard to build trust and rapport. It was hard to get on combat missions. Nobody trusted me," participant 15 said. She described having to

prove herself even among other public affairs soldiers who perceived her job in public affairs as easy compared to their public affairs assignments.

> When I meet other public affairs people, especially in deployment, I was scoffed at because they thought my job was so easy or I got a lot of doubt when I talked about my experiences in deployment. There’s a closed off perception. I got grief from other public affairs soldiers. (Participant 15)

Public affairs soldiers feel a lot of pressure to fit it and to keep up. They are concerned about appearing to be weak or perceived as a liability to the unit they are supporting. They strive to showcase their talents and prove they can provide something useful to the team. There's also a strong desire not to be a burden to the unit. "I know what I'm doing is value added. In deployment, a lot of people I deal with, public affairs is a burden," Participant 16 said.

> I think that myself and many others work very hard to be seen as an asset and not a liability to these guys. It's about that developing of personal relationships and showing them that you're capable, being good on a PT test, being physically fit … being accurate on your weapon and stuff, so that they understand I can put my vehicle in your convoy and I can provide you with a gunner, because we're going to have a gunner on our system and here's what we qualified as and showing them that we're not somebody that they have to take care of and push behind them. (Participant 10, a master sergeant)

> I think with we're such a small branch and there's not really a lot of times they're going to be dealing with us. The perception of is all you do is shoot video. What do you know? Sometimes we're first seen more as a burden because we're taking

> away a seat from another rifleman or taking away another seat from an artilleryman or another seat on a helicopter for an air crew member. I think if we're with a unit for a while and they see that we can keep up and see that we're willing to be a part of the mission or willing to be a part of what' going on then I think there's a lot more respect that grows out of it. (Participant 11)

Some have had to overcome bad impressions left by other public affairs, who didn't carry their weight. One soldier described a situation where a public affairs soldier didn't properly lock and load his weapon and the rifle magazine fell out.

> From there on out, that's the story that got told. So I do think we have to prove ourselves a lot, but once you gain that trust, generally, I think it opens up doors and it's opened up a lot of doors for us. (Participant 10)

Another soldier said part of the challenge is overcoming your own self-doubt during combat.

> I look back and see how much the team accomplished and what we were able to do for the brigade with just four people and I'm really pleased with the efforts. At the time, it was a constant sense of self-doubt, wondering if you we were really doing the job right and I attribute that to a lot of things. At the time …I was very stressed out with wondering if we were doing all that we could and all that. (Participant 8)

Public affairs soldiers said that once they do prove themselves, they are treated as part of the team. Subsequent deployments gave them even more confidence and they were able to succeed more easily. "I think my second encounter in Afghanistan was a little more successful because I had since been published and I had embedded

correspondents and I had built relationships with a major editors and commanders," Participant 22 said.

Participant 4, an active duty major, said she was valued differently by different types of units she was assigned to support during deployment. The combat units, she said, tended to grasp the role of public affairs more readily than combat support units.

> It seemed as if the infantrymen believed in my ability as the subject matter expert on media relations. It was not the same with the logistics organization …They accepted me as I was and they may have asked certain questions out of concern for how our commanding officer may have been presented before the public, but they only need a glimpse of your ability to do your job and then they are your biggest supporters. (Participant 4)

> You get the ability to go places and do things that other soldiers do not have access to, and from my vantage point the command team realizes the importance of public affairs access to soldiers. (Participant 6)

Female soldiers, in particular, felt a sense of having to prove themselves to overcome low expectations. They said they are at a disadvantage at times due to the gender gap between them and their all-male combat counterparts. "Just by virtue of my sex, I'm already not at their level," Participant 11 said.

> As a female, it has been quite challenging over the years to validate. More often than not it's instinctual for men to give you that little sister pat on the head or wrap your arm around that young soldier and want to protect them. When I would patrol, I had three individual men assigned to me as my security detail as a correspondent. Although very flattering as junior grade soldier, it was

> overwhelming as well because I became an eyesore … Having a security detail was a reflection of the lack of confidence a command has in their public affairs soldiers. (Participant 22)

Sometimes it only takes a little feat to surpass expectations and earn a little respect. Participant 11 described a situation where she borrowed a heavy flak jacket loaded with ammunition from one of her male colleagues for a mission. The male soldiers were surprised that she was able to lift it and she later overheard one commenting that he didn't think she could pick it up. A little effort, she said, goes a long way.

> I think sometimes when you can prove yourself and you beat expectations, whether they're MOS expectations or whether they're gender expectations, I think there is an appreciation there. Because I know after that, the guys kind of warmed up. (Participant 11)

> You have to show them that you're tough enough, that you'll be able to hang with them, otherwise they're not going to let you in and be a part of their group and you're not going to get anything, they're not going to cooperate and you're not going to get a good story. You kind of have to buck up, especially as a female. It's really, really tough as a female to wiggle your way into their good graces and have them respect you and give you the time of day. (Participant 21)

The study participants discussed the importance of fitting into the unit, even if it feels uncomfortable. Public Affairs soldiers don't necessarily need to physically keep up with combat soldiers, but have to try to assimilate into the unit if they want to be accepted as part of the team.

> My first couple of embeds, I was kind of an introvert and antisocial. My first couple times and my first few articles weren't all that great. Then I had to step out of my shell and be a member of the team. They don't need to look at me as the camera guy and the guy with the pen and paper. I need to do everything that they're doing and get into the team and that's when you are accepted. When you do the day to day things that they're doing -- when you shower with them, you sleep with them, eat with them, when you go through hell with them -- then they'll accept you as a member of the team. (Participant 12)

Some officers also described having to overcome rank barriers. The opinion of a new public affairs captain straight out of the Defense Information School, the school that trains public affairs soldiers, carries less weight than a more seasoned major or lieutenant colonel in public affairs.

> Dealing with field grade officers and guys that were doing staff work longer than I had, you definitely have a disadvantage coming in as a junior captain into a brigade combat team staff and being a primary staff officer or special staff officer. It's definitely a major disadvantage because not only do you have the rank factor going against you, but you also have the inexperience and because I had met the brigade down range I didn't get a chance to know anybody before I got there and had very limited interaction with my predecessor. (Participant 8)

Some said public affairs soldiers say they are not just undervalued in combat units. They said the public affairs career field isn't really valued or appreciated in the Army as a whole.

> I don't think Public Affairs is as valued in the military as it should be. That's evident in the fact that it's not a CMF (career management field), it's not recognized as a regiment. We don't have our own colors. We are not owned by anybody. (Participant 22)

Some discussed the conflict between the role of public affairs and the role of the combat soldier. The missions for both sets of soldiers are different as well as the mentality. "What we do and soldiering tasks are polar opposites," Participant 19 said.

> Public affairs soldiers are completely disassociated from the true functions and execution of soldier common tasks. The METL -- the mission essential task list -- we are not stewards of the METL. We are uniformed press. What we do and soldiering tasks are polar opposites." (Participant 22)

> It's a struggle to feel like a valued member of the team. There's a conflict with the role of combat and Public Affairs. Combat soldiers are focused on killing; I'm focused on what's the story if we kill someone … I have been too nice with my peers (in other career fields) and as a public affairs officer feel like I always have to be nice and happy. That's not always what they want to see in the infantry. They want you to be decisively engaged in taking care of them. (Participant 18)

Others feel there is a negative view of public affairs due to perceptions they sit at a desk or somehow were not tough enough to make it in a combat unit. Participant 21 said they are called "pogues" by their combat arms peers. Pogue is an army term for soldiers who have desk jobs, primarily administrative-type jobs. "I didn't have to prove myself (in combat). It was understood I would have been useless," Participant 17 said.

> Every day there's a negative view of PA Office. We're seen as people who washed out of a branch. They do not understand the public affairs role. They don't see the value and don't see us as leaders." (Participant 18)

Public affairs soldiers assigned to special operations teams said the disconnect between public affairs and combat roles and is even more pronounced. Public affairs soldiers said their experiences don't measure up to the elite experiences of special operations soldiers. "Every day, people look down on you because you haven't been to the school. You don't have that tab," said Participant 16.

Special operations soldiers are also known as "quiet professionals" because they are taught not to seek accolades for their service. That practice makes the public affairs job more difficult since special operations soldiers tend to shy away from the limelight and are not very interested in telling their stories. Special operations public affairs soldiers face unique challenges due to unit missions and classification and release restrictions. One public affairs officer who previously served in the infantry, explained:

> In Afghanistan when I worked for the combined joint special operations task force, even though I came in and I had all the infantry badges and stuff, I still felt like I had to prove myself. I was the guy who just dealt with the media. A lot of it is the commands, the education, lack of education of what public affairs is about and provides. It took me a little bit, a few months, to get out there and be able to show them that I wasn't just some guy who sat behind a desk taking photos and writing up press releases. Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe we need to get out there and fight for that recognition of what our capabilities are. (Participant 1)

PTSD and Spiral of Silence

Public affairs soldiers are not openly discussing their combat experiences, feelings about combat or psychological trauma with their family, friends or colleagues very often. When they do, they worry about what people in their profession will think or about burdening their families with worry. Their biggest fear is that their reputations will be tarnished. They don't want to be viewed as weak or a detriment to the other soldiers in their units. RQ2 suggests there may be a spiral of silence that inhibits public affairs soldiers from reporting combat trauma and seeking help for it. Based on this study, evidence does exist that there is a spiral of silence.

Participants were asked a series of questions about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They were asked if they have been diagnosed, believe they have PTSD or experience any symptoms. Five of the soldiers interviewed said they have been officially diagnosed with PTSD. Nine said they believe they have PTSD or other trauma-based illnesses.

Soldiers were read a list of 15 symptoms commonly associated with PTSD and asked to indicate which ones they have experienced. All of the respondents indicated they have PTSD symptoms associated with PTSD, ranging from 1 to 15. Those who said they have PTSD or believe they have PTSD reported having twice as many symptoms, on average, than those who said they do not believe they have PTSD. On average, those not reporting to have or believe they have PTSD have four symptoms, while those who reported they do have PTSD or believe they have it averaged eight symptoms. Three of the respondents said they had pre-existing traumas from earlier experiences in childhood or combat while serving in another career field that contributed to their symptoms. The most common symptoms were having a heightened sense of alert and reactions to loud

noises such as fireworks or loud engines, especially if they could not immediately identify the source of the noise. Many soldiers said their symptoms have lessened over time and they have learned better coping skills.

Soldiers were asked to rate their level of comfort in talking with friends and family about their combat experiences from very comfortable to very uncomfortable. About half said they do feel comfortable talking to family and friends, but many of them said that they don't share all of their experiences with their families. They cited wanting to protect their families from worry as the reason.

One participant described Skyping with her daughter while deployed to Afghanistan when the unit came under heavy mortar fire -- a routine experience during her 9-month deployment. Her first reaction was to cut the Skype feed so her daughter could not see the chaos. When her daughter called her later, the soldier downplayed the incident so that her daughter would not worry.

Other soldiers agree they want to maintain a safe haven at home and leave the worry and fear at the office. Participant 3 said she didn’t want to worry her parents or show her emotion to her children. “You see so much bad, you don’t want to take it home. Every day, I boxed it,” she said.

Those who do feel very comfortable talking with family or friends do so only because their family and friends have some connection to the military and feel they would understand their experiences. Participant 19 said she has talked about her experiences with her husband and father, both of whom have served in the Army. Sometimes, she said, she feels comfortable talking with her close female colleagues. She

is cautious about who she talks to in public affairs because she thinks many people in the public affairs field tend to be judgmental of others.

Many said the fear of judgmental reactions have conditioned them not to talk about their experiences, especially psychological problems, with their colleagues. The spiral of silence theory describes how people shut down when they feel they may be ostracized by others or in a minority. The soldiers described the stigma associated with discussing PTSD and trauma despite efforts by the Army to educate the force in order to change the perceptions about reporting PTSD and seeking help for it.

> I think there's a stigma behind public affairs because we are not combat arms, because how can someone not directly related to combat have it? Of course, there are times when we put down our camera and pick up weapons if needed, but there's that whole stigma behind it still. How can we have PTSD? How can we be upset by something when we're not actually involved in it? We're just filming it. (Participant 10)

The soldiers described both perceived and real reactions to talking about their experiences. Those who have not discussed PTSD, trauma or their experiences with colleagues overwhelmingly believed they would get negative responses. The most common beliefs were that their colleagues wouldn't understand, thought they might be faking it or don't deserve to have it.

> Given the nature of our job, they probably wouldn't think it was a real thing. Even though there is so much information about it, I think PTSD only seems valid if you are in a combat MOS. I think that's how it's perceived, both internally and externally in the Army. (Participant 19)

> I think if they knew the background they would try to be considerate and understanding, but there is a culture of disbelief in public affairs, that the experiences we have couldn't possibly lead to PTSD. (Participant 13)

Many said they wouldn't want anyone to know if they were diagnosed with PTSD. Thirteen of the 22 soldiers interviewed -- slightly more than half -- said they believed their colleagues would treat them differently if they were diagnosed with PTSD. When asked what their colleagues would think of them, most said it would be perceived as a weakness. "I work mostly with men," Participant 7 said. "If they saw me cry it would show weakness."

Those in leadership positions, in particular, hold strong beliefs that revealing combat trauma will harm their careers. "There would be consequences due to the office atmosphere," one major, participant 6, said. Participant 2, a command sergeant major, said: "It wouldn't have matched the rank."

Public affairs soldiers are concerned about what others think of them. Some soldiers suggested that their colleagues wouldn't believe they had PTSD. They think their colleagues would think they are faking to get benefits or exaggerating their experiences in order to gain some kind of notoriety. "They would think I am crazy or just trying to cash in on the government," Participant 17 said. Another, participant 19, said: "Given the nature of the job, they would think it wasn't a real thing."

Many said they personally felt that their experiences in combat didn't measure up to soldiers in combat units and don't feel they have a right to complain or have problems.

> There are many, many people in the military who have gone through much worse situations than I ever have and as a non-combat MOS, I just simply don't feel

> comfortable saying, oh well, I'm having a hard time with this, when people have gone through much worse. (Participant 10)

Those who have shared their trauma with colleagues feel that opinions changed. Some said it hurt their careers. In the worst cases, soldiers said it ruined their careers or they felt abandoned and ignored. Participant 4, a major, said she felt rejected when talking to colleagues about a traumatic experience. “I have entrusted information to colleagues before. They did absolutely nothing to assist me.”

Participant 14, an Army reserve sergeant, described seeking emotional help to overcome a combat trauma when he returned from deployment. The unit's response was to put him on a medical hold while he was being treated. "It was well known in the unit I was on medical hold and couldn't do a lot," he said.

Not only are soldiers not talking about PTSD and trauma, but they aren't talking much about their combat exposure, either, at least not to a detailed degree. Public affairs soldiers say they don't mind talking about their experiences in combat but generally they focus more on the technical aspects or the logistical aspects of combat rather than the emotional aspects. Some say they don't talk about their combat experiences because I don't want them to come across as bragging. "We talked about it, but not in terms about how it made us feel," Participant 10 said. "It was almost clinical in our discussion of it."

Public Affairs soldiers said they learn to become experts at compartmentalizing their feelings. Part of this stems from public affairs soldiers constantly being told not to focus on themselves that to focus on the soldiers that they are covering. “You learn how to numb yourself, suck it up and get through it.” Participant 2 said.

> We are still very cautious with descriptions. There's paranoia. We have to keep it professional. Public Affairs soldiers are trained to desensitize the human factor. We're not supposed to have feelings. (Participant 22)

Those who do tend to talk more openly about their experiences in combat discuss experiences they had with those colleagues. More often, however, soldiers encounter the most traumatic experiences when out on patrol without their public affairs colleagues. They tend to feel that people who did not experience exactly what they did would not be able to relate to them. They also said they felt people would doubt that their experiences would be bad enough to cause psychological trauma.

A few said they are careful because the public affairs field is small and word tends to get around when people have problems. Some said those who really know them would not judge them. "Those who don’t know me might think I wasn't resilient enough," participant 20 said. "For people who know me well, they wouldn't have issues, but a lot of questions would be asked to validate my illness," Participant 15 said.

> I don't think they would judge. Those that do know me know the type of person I am. Nothing's changed about me over the last 11 years. I don't think they'd be judgmental just like I wouldn't judge any of them. We all handle stuff differently -- tragic events, emotional events -- and we have to respect that because unfortunately PTSD does exist and we can't degrade each other for having it and I'm pretty sure no one would degrade me if I was ever diagnosed with it. (Participant 16)

Regardless of reality or perception, some won't take any chances. They wouldn’t' want anyone to know if they were ever diagnosed with PTSD. "I don't think their opinion would change, but I wouldn't want them to know," Participant 8 said.

Chapter VI: Conclusion and Future Research

The participants of this study are intelligent and articulate. They are proud of what they do, but often feel they are not valued or must prove their worth during combat. What they have experienced in war-torn places such as Iraq and Afghanistan to support combat or humanitarian missions would be considered horrific to most Americans who have never put on an Army uniform, but yet they feel it's not bad enough to cause personal trauma.

They prefer not to talk about their feelings or share their experiences among their own colleagues because they fear they will be misunderstood or judged. They care about what others think of them, especially their public affairs colleagues. They also care about preserving the career they love, even though they believe the career field doesn't train them adequately to handle the role they play during combat.

This study aimed to answer four questions: How do Army public affairs soldiers characterize their experiences covering war and their psychological well-being afterward? Is there evidence for a spiral of silence among Army public affairs soldiers that inhibits them from a. reporting and b. getting help for psychological trauma? Do Army public affairs soldiers exhibit characteristics that make them more susceptible to PTSD? Does training for Army public affairs adequately prepare them for what they will see from behind their lens in combat?

Based on the interviews, Army public affairs soldiers characterize their experiences as stressful, traumatic and life-changing. They see and experience events that they sometimes cannot process or put into a proper context. One of the most stressful jobs for these soldiers is preparing death packets and memorial services for soldiers killed in

action. They also struggle with moral conflict. The images they take and the stories they collect are often not releasable due to classification or appropriateness.

Evidence for a spiral of silence does exist among public affairs soldiers. The stigma they feel is based on both perceived and actual reactions. The spiral seems to be strongest within the public affairs career field than in the Army overall. Those who have revealed having combat trauma believe it hurt their careers. Those who did not report having trauma believed it would have an adverse impact. One contributing factor is the universal opinion among study participants that they are not worthy of having combat trauma because they believe their experiences do not match the experiences of combat soldiers. Even those who suggested that their colleagues would not treat them differently if they were diagnosed with PTSD said they would not want their colleagues to know.

Some of the Army public affairs soldiers in this study did exhibit characteristics that can be linked to PTSD susceptibility, including anxiety, fear of failure and tendency to abuse alcohol. However, the limitations of questioning could not adequately validate a connection between the characteristics and frequency of PTSD.

This study found that training does not adequately prepare public affairs soldiers for the unique aspects of combat. Participants said the combat environment cannot be replicated in a school setting and they are not emotionally ready for what they see and experience.

The literature shows that there is substantial research into how civilian war correspondents are affected by PTSD, but this is the first of its kind study of Army combat journalists. The interviews were both provocative and insightful. Ultimately, it could impact training for these unique scribes and provide them proper tools to fight

PTSD. It could also have broader implications on PTSD training throughout the Army and the other armed services.

Army journalists are unique. They are on the front lines as both observer and soldier, and sometimes this experience can cause conflict. Public affairs soldiers say they are treated differently than other soldiers. They also say they fear that telling anyone about having PTSD symptoms will be harmful to their careers. Some questions still remain. Do their experiences predispose them to PTSD at higher rates than their civilian counterparts? Is this an Army problem or a public affairs problem? This qualitative study does not fully validate any of the assumptions outlined in this paper or even answer them adequately. It serves as a starting point to better understand this Army minority and direct future research.

Admittedly, there are limitations to this study. The manner of solicitation, the restrictions from the IRB on questioning and the fact that the majority of interviews were not conducted in person were factors that can be argued to have affected the findings. This study focused on a relatively small sample of Army public affairs soldiers. While the study polled a diverse cross section of public affairs soldiers of varied ranks, it did not include soldiers ranked below sergeant, nor above lieutenant colonel. Therefore, the opinions and experiences expressed may not be entirely representative of the career field. Additionally, only a small portion of study participants represented the Army Reserve and National Guard. A broader study of Army public affairs soldiers should include soldiers of all ranks and active and reserve components.

Several areas of further study should be considered. One area for consideration may be comparing public affairs with other support occupational specialties in the Army

to determine if there is significant difference in how they are valued within the Army units they support and how well they are trained for combat-related tasks.

This study focused solely on Army public affairs soldiers. Since the Defense Information School trains public affairs personnel in all military branches, additional research could be applied to Air Force, Marine, Navy and Coast Guard public affairs personnel. Research in this area may more effectively answer the question of the adequacy of DINFOS training or indicate a service-specific issue with training.

One area that has extraordinary potential is probing deeper into the personality traits and characteristics of Army combat journalists that make them more susceptible to PTSD. Likewise, this study could examine traits that make some soldiers better able to cope with trauma than others. It could be investigated on a larger scale as part of the exploration into PTSD and journalism, and even in the Army.

While soldiers in this study indicated they have PTSD or think they have PTSD, having the symptoms doesn't necessarily imply a diagnosis of PTSD. A study into PTSD and public affairs should also look at environmental factors such as predispositions for trauma and coping strategies employed by public affairs soldiers. General research on PTSD indicates that someone who has experienced trauma at an early age is more prone to have a severe reaction. Sleeplessness and concentration can be environmental factors that are not necessarily related to PTSD.

Finally, it seems clear that there is a difference between perception and reality. Most of the soldiers in this study indicated they don't share their experiences because of perceptions that others will treat them differently, not that they have been treated differently. A few, however, seemed to validate the negative perceptions. This study does

not prove that the negative perceptions are specific to public affairs. They may cross into other military specialties. Regardless, this could be an indication that the Army's anti-stigma campaign aimed at encouraging soldiers to report psychological trauma and seek help for it is not breaking through.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Part 1: Demographic Section

1. Are you male or female?
   Male ___ Female ___

2. What is your rank?

3. How old are you?

4. How long have you serve in the military?
   1. Less than a year ___
   2. 1-3 years ___
   3. 4-6 years ___
   4. 7-10 years ___
   5. 11-14 years ___
   6. 15-20 years ___
   7. More than 20 years ___

5. In what branch of the Army did you serve in public affairs?
   Active Duty
   Army Reserve
   National Guard
   Combination of Active and Reserve

6. Where have you deployed as a public affairs soldier?

7. Have you been officially diagnosed by a medical professional with PTSD?
   Yes ___ No ___

8. Do you think you could have PTSD or other combat related trauma?
   Yes ___ No ___

9. What, if any, of these symptoms have you experienced?

   1. Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event ___
   2. Flashbacks (acting or feeling like the event is happening again)___
   3. Nightmares (either of the event or of other frightening things) ___
   4. Feelings of intense distress when reminded of the trauma ___
   5. Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event (e.g. pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea, muscle tension, sweating) ___
   6. Avoiding activities, places, or thoughts that remind you of the trauma ___
   7. Inability to remember important aspects of the trauma ___
   8. Loss of interest in activities and life in general ___
   9. Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb ___

10. Sense of a limited future (you don't expect to live a normal life span, get married, have a career) ___
11. Difficulty falling or staying asleep ___
12. Irritability or outbursts of anger ___
13. Difficulty concentrating ___
14. Hypervigilance (on constant "red alert") ___
15. Feeling jumpy and easily startled ___
16. Other ___

10. Would you say that most combat journalists are open about experiences they've had after experiencing firefights or other combat incidents?
    Yes ___ No ___

11. If you were diagnosed with PTSD, how do you think your colleagues would treat you differently?
    Yes ___ No ___

12. How comfortable do you think you would be talking with your family and friends about your experiences?
    1. Very comfortable
    2. Somewhat comfortable
    3. Neither comfortable or uncomfortable
    4. Somewhat uncomfortable
    5. Very uncomfortable

Part 2: Open Ended Questions

1. Why did you join the Army?

2. Why did you choose public Affairs?

3. Describe an incident that was difficult for you or your colleagues.

4. Describe how you felt when you have witnessed combat incidents such as IED explosions or firefights that have resulted in serious injuries as part of your job.

5. Would you say that most combat journalists are open about experiences they've had after experiencing firefights or other combat incidents?

6. If you were diagnosed with PTSD, what do you think your fellow combat journalists would think of you?

7. How comfortable do you think you would be talking with your colleagues about your experiences?

8. How well does your public affairs training prepare you for combat experiences? (Are you prepared for what you see and experience during deployment?)

9. When attached to a combat unit, do you as a public affairs professional feel like you are a valued member of the team? How so?

10. Did you ever feel you had to prove yourself among the combat arms soldiers you were assigned to support? Is there pressure to do so?