

News organizations criticize Pentagon rules

WASHINGTON (AP) — Several major news organizations Wednesday protested Pentagon ground rules for covering war in the Persian Gulf that restrict descriptions of combat and require military review of combat dispatches.

In letters to the Pentagon, the organizations said the rules would unacceptably limit combat coverage to pools — small groups of reporters who share their work with colleagues — and would give the military too much control over reporting.

Separately, Rep. Frank McCloskey, D-Ind., a member of the House Armed Services Committee, urged Committee Chairman Les Aspin, D-Wis., to pressure the Pentagon to drop many of the planned restrictions. He said he was seeking a congressional hearing on the

subject.

And in Europe, Britain and France announced similar restrictions for correspondents with their troops.

"We think the existing proposals go far beyond what is required to protect troop safety and mission security," the four major television networks said in a letter to Defense Secretary Dick Cheney.

"Specifically, we object in the strongest possible terms to the so-called 'security review' provisions that set up cumbersome barriers to timely and responsible reporting and raise the specter of government censorship of a free press."

The review provision provides that matter objected to by reviewing offices will be referred to the Pentagon, which will discuss it with the organi-

zation concerned.

"Security review may not be censorship in its purest form, but it compromises the free flow of information with official intrusion and government oversight," said the letter signed by three network news division presidents — Roone Arledge of ABC, Eric Ober of CBS and Michael G. Gartner of NBC and Tom Johnson, president of the Cable News Network.

The Associated Press, in a separate letter to the Pentagon, objected to the security review provision and several others, including a prohibition on reporting "details of major battle damage or major personnel losses" until announced by the Pentagon.

"You could drive an Army truck through this provision,"

The AP's Washington bureau chief, Jonathan Wolman, said in the letter. Wolman said the broad language in the provision could be interpreted by military officials conducting the pre-release security reviews "as an invitation to strike out descriptive material of unsuccessful or costly combat events."

"We must and we will accept clear ground rules that protect the lives of the troops and the security of their mission," said Louis D. Boccardi, president and general manager of The Associated Press. "But that should be accomplished without imposing unnecessary restrictions that make editors out of military people."

And *Time* magazine, in a letter to Cheney written by managing editor Henry Muller, objected to the reliance on combat

pools to report the fighting.

"This is simply unacceptable," Muller wrote. "Pools are intended as short-term, stopgap measures until independent coverage can be arranged. I know of no precedent for the kind of open-ended and severely limiting policy that the Pentagon is contemplating in this case."

Other news organizations said they had protested, or planned to.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial Wednesday, applauded the Pentagon for dropping some restrictions and said there were times when military censorship was acceptable for security reasons. But it cautioned the Pentagon against using the reviews for reasons other than protecting safety and security.

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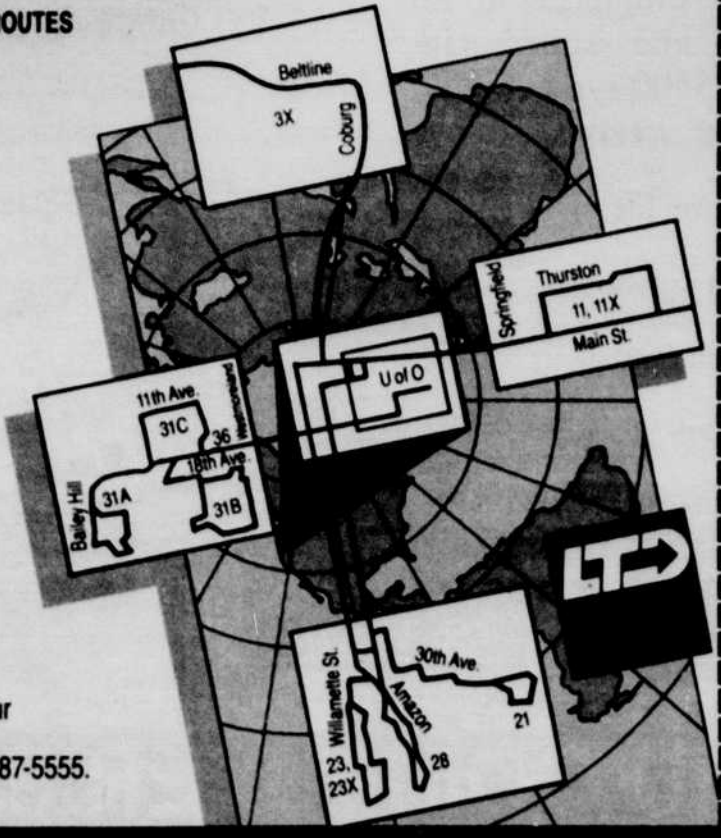
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