

SAIGON TO BAGHDAD: COMPARING COMBAT CORRESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN VIETNAM AND IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the responses of journalists who covered the Vietnam War with responses of reporters who covered the conflict in Iraq to measure differences and similarities. The comparison showed that reporters working in Iraq faced more constraints in accessing the news because of greater physical danger and less cooperation from the military. Vietnam era journalists had fewer dangers and worked with a military more willing to facilitate coverage. The rules covering embedded journalists in Iraq were more limiting than what journalists in Vietnam encountered. Vietnam era journalists were more likely to use confidential sources than those who covered Iraq.

Reporters in Iraq had the benefit of improved technology that enabled them to deliver news more quickly and reliably. This also enabled troops in the field to see what reporters were writing about them. Journalists said the technological improvements should make coverage more accurate. Vietnam era reporters were more likely to have had prior military experience, a difference that might have given them more insight into what was happening.

Reporters who covered both wars were drawn to the challenge of tackling the 'big story' despite the danger. Journalists in both conflicts said they bonded with the troops they covered and formed personal views of the wars. They said they did not believe these relationships or beliefs affected their reporting.