

The War Correspondent Action Hero (guest blog)

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2012/07/15/the-war-correspondent-action-hero-guest-blog/

2012-7-15

Probably the most dangerous role in modern journalism is that of the 'War Correspondent', but what does that title actually mean?

Polis Summer School student Karl Sorri reports on a talk by BBC World Affairs Producer Stuart Hughes who has covered conflicts around the world.

Like pretty much all forms of journalism, Hughes stresses that recent advances in technology have had a major impact on the way journalists can report from a war zone. In the past, if a journalist wanted to deliver their report back to the network, they had to find a good old-fashioned land line telephone. In many areas of conflict, this meant that the journalist could not stray too far from a larger city, restricting the information they could obtain. Nowadays, with internet access literally in your pocket, journalists can report live from virtually any location at little cost.

Not surprisingly, this means that journalists venture deeper and stay longer in dangerous territory, putting them at significant risk of injury or death. For protection they will increasingly become 'embedded' – when journalists accompany a troop of soldiers into the heart of battle.

The UK Ministry of Defence requires all embedding journalists to sign a contract known as the 'Green Book', which not only sets limits on how and what information can be released (which, according to Hughes, does not actually result in censorship), but also sets requirements for the journalists' physical condition. With an increase in journalist casualties, it is essential that media professionals have the "ability to endure difficult, dangerous, and often extreme environments", and don't collapse from heat exhaustion during a critical moment.



No, it's not Alan Little

The role of conflict reporter has become so associated with thrills and spills that there are now even 'war correspondent action hero dolls'. Despite all the drama involved, Hughes feels that the job is over-glorified, and that most of his colleagues do not consider themselves action heroes. Indeed, if someone were to introduce themselves as a 'war correspondent' to him, he said he would have deep concerns over their "sense of self", as well as the risks involved in working with such a person.

Yet the profession is undeniably dangerous, as well as traumatic. In 2003, Hughes himself fell victim to anti-personnel mines in Iraq. The incident claimed one of his legs and, sadly, one of his colleagues. After recovery, Hughes is still a (war) correspondent, but now that he has a family, Hughes says, half jokingly, "I want to work with other people who have families", as they won't force him to take unnecessary risks. Interestingly, Hughes speculates on the future of war journalism, claiming that many senior journalists feel it has become too dangerous.

However, a lot of the information and audio-visual material from conflict zones is now coming from a variety of new sources. Not only has the military begun to train their own PR info-gathering units, but many soldiers have joined the wave of "citizen" journalism and equipped themselves with smartphones – even in combat situations. In fact, the BBC has produced a programme called *Our War*, using footage provided by soldiers in Afghanistan. With such new technology, the frontline has changed from a place reserved for soldiers into a live studio that anybody can watch, anytime.

The author of this article is Karl Sorri, a Polis Summer School student and an international relations scholar at the

For more information on the Green Book [click here](#):

For the BBC programme *Our War* [click here](#)

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science