

# US psychological warfare experts worked at CNN and NPR during Kosovo War

By Tom Bishop  
18 April 2000

Cable News Network (CNN) and National Public Radio (NPR) have acknowledged that eight members of the US Army 4th Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) Group served as interns in their news divisions and other areas during the Kosovo war. PSYOPS is a highly specialized unit of the military whose personnel are trained in the production and dissemination of US government propaganda, including on television and radio programs.

According to CNN executives and military officials, the intern program began last June and ended in March. A total of five PSYOPS sergeants were assigned to the network's Atlanta headquarters. These included two at the Southeast bureau, two at CNN Radio and one at the satellite department.

Three PSYOPS personnel also worked at the Washington DC headquarters of NPR, a publicly-funded radio network. They worked for periods ranging from six weeks to four months from September 1998 through May 1999 on such programs as *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*.

On March 29 top CNN officials acknowledged the presence of the military personnel in a written reply to the media watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), which had issued a media alert two days before, entitled "Why were government propaganda experts working on news at CNN?"

In her response to FAIR, Sue Binford, CNN executive vice president for public relations, claimed that while the interns were present "no government or military expert has ever worked on news at CNN." She said that the five interns were among hundreds who spend a few weeks at CNN and like all interns "observe under the supervision of CNN staff and have no influence over what CNN reports or how CNN reports it."

An NPR spokesperson said the interns performed minor tasks and "had no influence on our news coverage."

The issue was first raised in the media February 17 when the French publication *Intelligence Newsletter* published a report of a military symposium held in Arlington, Virginia early in February. At the symposium, Colonel Christopher St. John, Commander of PSYOPS whose 1,200 soldiers and officers are stationed at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, said the cooperation between the army and CNN was a textbook example of the kind of ties the US Army wants with the American media.

According to the article, St. John said rather than use outright military censorship as was done in the Gulf War, NATO tried to use more subtle means to regulate the flow of information where they could spread selected information while suppressing unfavorable information. Rear Admiral Thomas Steffens of the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) said at the symposium that the military should have the capacity to gain control over commercial news satellites to bring an "informational cone of silence" over areas where special operations are taking place. (Indeed, one of the PSYOPS officers worked in CNN's satellite division.)

Colonel Romeo Morrissey, also of SOCOM, said in his report that NATO should have taken out the Serbian radio station B-92. The Internet web site of B-92 became an independent source of coverage of the bombing in Serbia for journalists looking for information other than that presented at press conferences held by NATO in Brussels.

The information in *Intelligence Newsletter* was brought to a wider audience when it was published by the Netherlands daily newspaper *Trouw* on February 21. The magazine interviewed Major Thomas Collins

of the US Army Information Service, who acknowledged the interns worked at CNN as part of the army's "Training With Industry" program. Collins stated, "They worked as regular employees of CNN. Conceivably, they would have worked on stories during the Kosovo war. They helped in the production of news."

The story was first reported in the US by such web sites as *emperors-clothes.com* and on *CounterPunch* by its coeditor Alexander Cockburn, a columnist for *The Nation*. In its response to CNN's denial that military personnel ever "worked on the news," FAIR said this was "essentially a semantic quibble" and pointed to the comments of Major Collins. It also pointed out that CNN only acknowledged that the presence of PSYOPS personnel in the newsroom was "inappropriate" after this was revealed in *Trouw*. NPR officials also waited until the exposure of the intern program to remove them.

Top CNN officials have also claimed that they were unaware of the PSYOPS intern program, and would never have approved of it. Instead, they say, such decisions must have been made by lower-level human resource managers. But according to an article in *TV Guide*, several unnamed sources at CNN told the magazine that a network programming executive who left the network months before the intern program became public signed off on the internships. Moreover, CNN and military sources acknowledged that the interns never concealed their identity at work.

In its original action alert FAIR stated: "What makes the CNN story especially troubling is the fact that the network allowed the Army's covert propagandists to work in its headquarters, where they learned the ins and outs of CNN's operations. Even if the PSYOPS officers working in the newsroom did not influence news reporting, did the network allow the military to conduct an intelligence mission against CNN itself?"

These revelations are only the latest concerning CNN's relations with the US military, particularly during the Kosovo war. On July 2, 1999 the *Independent* newspaper in Britain published an article entitled "Taken in by the NATO Line." The article suggested that major media outlets went beyond the usual unethical and dishonest news practices to outright collusion with NATO.

Belgrade war correspondent Robert Fisk wrote: "Two

days before NATO bombed the Serb Television headquarters in Belgrade, CNN received a tip from its Atlanta headquarters that the building was to be destroyed. They were told to remove their facilities from the premises at once, which they did.

"A day later, Serbian Information Minister Aleksander Vucic received a faxed invitation from the Larry King Live show in the US to appear on CNN. They wanted him on air at 2:30 in the morning of 23 April and asked him to arrive at Serb Television half an hour early for make-up.

"Vucic was late—which was just as well for him since NATO missiles slammed into the building at six minutes to two. The first one exploded in the make-up room where the young Serb assistant was burned to death. CNN calls this all a coincidence, saying that the Larry King show, put out by the entertainment division, did not know of the news department's instruction to its men to leave the Belgrade building."

Also during this period, CNN fired its Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Peter Arnett from his 18-year career as an international journalist for CNN. He was fired April 20, 1999 after calling a press conference to protest CNN's refusal to assign him to cover the war from Belgrade. Arnett had been sidelined since June 7, 1998 when CNN aired his investigative report "Valley of Death". In the joint production by CNN and *Time* magazine Arnett gave compelling evidence that US commandos had used deadly sarin gas to kill American soldiers who had defected into Laos from Vietnam. After intense pressure from the military, the co-producers of the production, April Oliver and Jack Smith, were fired when they refused to disavow the report.

To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>