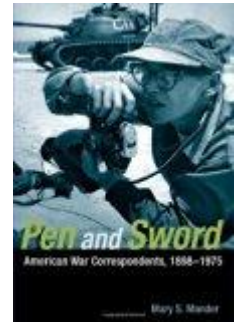


**Mary S. Mander.** *Pen and Sword: American War Correspondents, 1898-1975*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 188 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-03556-2.



**Reviewed by** Richard Fine (Virginia Commonwealth University)

**Published on** Jhistory (April, 2011)

**Commissioned by** Donna Harrington-Lueker (Salve Regina University)

## The Military and the Media: Coalescing Cultures

Controversy over media coverage of the armed forces has surrounded virtually every American military conflict since Vietnam. Given the intensity of this debate, which even prompted a congressional hearing after the Persian Gulf War, there are startlingly few comprehensive histories of American war reporting. Of those, each has limitations. The most recent, John Byrne Cooke's *Reporting the War* (2007), attracts by its historical sweep, from the American Revolution through the continuing war on terrorism, as does the best known, Phillip Knightley's *The First Casualty*, which when published in 1975 ranged from Crimea to Vietnam. (A 2004 revision extended the timeline through the Iraq War.) Cooke, though, focuses on instances when journalists defended press freedoms during wartime rather than on the actual experiences of war correspondents; Knightley, who is Australian, is as concerned with British as with American war reporting. A number of other books are even more limited in scope, examin-

ing either individual reporters or specific conflicts. [1] Indeed, Joseph Mathews's *Reporting the Wars* (1957), written more than fifty years ago, remains the smartest and most trenchant study of media coverage of America's wars, at least to that date. Thus, Mary S. Mander's *Pen and Sword*, is a welcome and by title promising addition to this short list. Some serious shortcomings, though, leave much of this promise unfulfilled.

Mander's agenda is ambitious. She seeks to assess the relationship between war correspondents and the American military from the Spanish-American War through the Vietnam War, and not only to chart the major developments in that relationship, but also to identify and track changes in the ways in which correspondents thought and wrote about war. *Pen and Sword* rests on research into the papers of some thirty individual journalists and into several relevant archives, and its introduction announces that "the overall argument for this book is that the war reporter is a walking

advertisement for the nation-state,” by which she means that “the war reporter carries around with him certain assumptions about his importance to the nation in living out the ideals embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights” (p. 3).

A first chapter details some of the background to this claim as Mander examines nationalism and its relation to journalism, asserting that “the press cannot be understood in [the] absence of understanding nationalism” (p. 23). Mander notes that the United States both enshrined press freedoms in its Constitution and limited that freedom through censorship in times of war. She also introduces her contention that the war correspondent is an “embodied ethos ... the very embodiment of the social values our nation tried to codify in the eighteenth century” (p. 19).

Three chapters then trace the progression of war correspondents’ relationship with state authority from the Spanish-American War through Vietnam in which she argues that “the story of administrative censorship in the United States is the story of the integration of the reporters into the military machinery of the nation-state” (p. 25). Some of the freshest and most valuable material in the book, drawn from military documents in the National Archives, concerns the development of censorship practices and codes in the years before World War I, many developed during the expeditions into Mexico during 1914-16.

A chapter concerning the two world wars argues that during these conflicts “the link between the nation-state and journalists went from being assumed to being explicitly stated through military practices” (p. 63). For the first time, correspondents wore uniforms, were granted officers’ privileges, and in other ways were “fully integrated into the military system” (p. 64). Mander also contends that during World War II, state control and management of information greatly increased. The process of integration continued in Vietnam as correspondents “adapted well to military life without anyone prompting them” and

even as many reporters came to question American policy there (p. 65). It is inaccurate, Mander contends, to see the media and the military as antagonistic cultures; rather, “it is more correct to understand war journalism as one culture being integrated into a second culture, one involving the military and its sense of system” (p. 65).

An additional chapter, “The Culture of Press Censorship during Wartime,” more thoroughly investigates what Mander terms the “dance” between war correspondents and the military system of censorship. She detects seven different patterns to that relationship, what she calls “steps” to this dance, remarking, among other things, that military officials who oversaw censorship were frequently reporters and editors in their civilian lives, and as a consequence military censorship practice acknowledged the competitive pressures among news organizations and sought to be an impartial referee.

*Pen and Sword* then takes a noticeable turn away from this analysis of media-military relations focused on censorship toward a discussion of the “tropes” correspondents have used to convey their experience of war. She redefines “trope” to mean a “strategy rather than a figure of speech” (p. 98). Mander’s discussion in this chapter is difficult to capture quickly, but she identifies a number of such “tropes,” from irony to surrealism, from romanticism to realism, that she detects in both the public and private writings of a host of reporters. While certain conflicts emphasized one of these strategies over others (as in World War II, when realism predominated), she argues that “the records left by war correspondents indicate that romance has, indeed, been the master trope guiding their interpretive strategies and classifications” (p. 101).

There is much of real value in *Pen and Sword*. In particular, Mander’s research into and analysis of the beginnings of formal relationships between press and military during the Mexican incursions prior to World War I revises our understanding of

the development of military censorship. Mander has similarly located intriguing documents concerning the accreditation and discreditation of reporters in Vietnam, and discusses the alarming number of bogus journalists who arrived in Vietnam, thus fueling the military's suspicion of all reporters. Mander's search for patterns in a sea of often confusing and contradictory documentary evidence also leads her to claim convincingly that correspondents became increasingly enmeshed in the machinery of the military system as the twentieth century progressed, at least from the Spanish-American War through World War II. Her contention that censorship is not so much a set of rules as an environment, a set of tacit assumptions shared by both reporters and their military minders, also helps explain why even in wars where a formal censorship regime did not exist (such as Vietnam) reporters held back from revealing certain types of information. Her ambitious attempt to tease out the common rhetorical patterns that correspondents used to make sense of their experience in war zones also breaks new ground, even as her conflation of trope, genre, and literary mode is a bit disconcerting to this English professor.

Despite these strengths, there are major problems with *Pen and Sword*, both with Mander's argument and with its presentation. Attempting to cover so much ground in less than 150 pages of text results in that argument being so condensed, so telegraphed, that it is often difficult to follow. Sweeping generalizations come fast and furious, and are neither fully explained or adequately supported, as in this passage from the first chapter: "The importance of closely examining the evolution and development of the war correspondent is self-evident. For to understand his history is to understand our society. The story of the press is interwoven with the development of nationalism" (p. 13). Or this, from later in the book: "No true journalist is interested in theory. In fact, his disavowal of it is one of the chief characteristics of the authentic reporter. This is especially true of

war correspondents because they deal with the deaths of men and women on a daily basis" (p. 135). Or this, from a few pages later: "Every reporter is skilled at lying. He has tunnel vision and will say anything to get to the source of information. He does not see this as a moral lapse because he is doing it for a greater good: the well-being of the public" (p. 138). Such passages tend to raise far more questions than they answer.

Similarly, Mander never fully delineates her oft-repeated central point, that reporters are "walking advertisements for the nation-state." It is not clear whether Mander is speaking only of *American* war correspondents embodying the political philosophy and values of the Founding Fathers, or whether Mander believes that *all* war correspondents embody the values of their respective nation-states. It is also unclear whether this claim applies to correspondents covering wars that do not involve their own country, which, if so, would exclude a great deal of such reporting.

Some chapters are also confusingly structured and their arguments curiously misshapen, as in the chapter on Vietnam which is top-heavy with material Mander discovered in the National Archives regarding accreditation. In much the same vein, the sections on World War II seem to focus on a very few episodes during that war, the invasion of Normandy most notably. While Mander cites President Dwight D. Eisenhower's well-known remark to reporters that he considered them officers in his command, she seems unaware of the great tensions that had existed between the press and Eisenhower at an earlier period in the war. Moreover, digressions frequently overwhelm the main narrative, as when a discussion of the history of what she terms "the gendered self" interrupts her discussion of romance as a recurring pattern in the writing of correspondents (p. 104).

*Pen and Sword* also needs much more careful editing, as there are a bewildering number of factual and stylistic errors. For example, a crucial

“not” seems to be missing from one sentence: “I am [not?] saying that ideology cannot be found in the experience of journalists—in other words, ideology is a legitimate concern for contemporary scholars” (p. 8). For another, the book has correspondents being assembled for the Normandy landings beginning June 1, 1945, too late by a year (p. 59). She also asserts that “one of the most thoroughly organized [public relations] operations was the landing on Omaha Beach” on D-Day, as if that was the only landing to take place that day, or as if Omaha was targeted in advance for additional press coverage, neither of which is true (p. 58). Finally, and most puzzling, the caption for the jacket photo identifies it as “Photographer Dickey Chappelle at the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, July 1959.” The picture itself is recognizably Chappelle, but it is a young Chappelle on a beach with a tank in the background, by all visual evidence a photograph from the Pacific during World War II. Even if the caption is indeed accurate, one wonders why a photograph from a peacetime event would be appropriate for this book. This inattention to detail disappoints in a book from a respected university press.

More serious, however, are the numerous errors and inconsistencies in the book’s documentation. To cite just a few examples from among a great many, in the notes to chapter 4, Mander directs the reader to “the Disaccreditation or Suspended Correspondents files at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.” (p. 63n3). First, the relevant archives are not housed in the National Archives’ Washington location but rather in College Park, Maryland, and should be cited as such; in addition, given the enormity of this repository, such a note is about as helpful as suggesting that a particular grain of sand can be found by going to the beach. Other notes do identify the Records Group (RG) in which documents are located, but because most Records Groups are themselves enormous, the standard in citing material from the National Archives is to include entry numbers as well; without them, locating specific documents can be

impossible. Other notes misidentify Records Groups, as when note 39 in chapter 5 identifies a memo written by Eisenhower in 1944 as contained in RG 472 (Vietnam-era records), rather than correctly as located in RG 331. Other notes simply refer to “Records Group 4xx,” as if these are still in draft awaiting revision. Still others simply misidentify sources, as when the Office of Censorship’s *Code of Wartime Practices for American Broadcasters* is wrongly cited as the source for details of briefings for reporters that occurred before D Day. In short, the documentation in the book does not meet professional standards and calls into question the accuracy of the research itself.

There is a fine book lurking within *Pen and Sword*, but the experiences of American war correspondents would need to be examined more comprehensively, presented more coherently, and documented more accurately for this work to be one of truly lasting value.

#### Note

[1]. See, for example, James Tobin, *Ernie Pyle’s War: American Eyewitness to World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Robert W. Desmond, *Tides of War: World News Reporting, 1940-1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1984); Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and Allan Stuart and Barbie Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (New York: Routledge, 2004), among others.

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**Citation:** Richard Fine. Review of Mander, Mary S, *Pen and Sword: American War Correspondents, 1898-1975*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. April, 2011.

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