

Kill the Messenger: Why Good News Goes Bad

Mr. Napoleon Byars

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Mr. Byars: -- Five better steps to take when the news is bad. Let's kind of flash through a couple of these. Yesterday, presentation headlines.

I'm going to do a brief intro since I walked around and shook everybody's hands, and I'm going to do a little bad news year in review and then look at the media storm up close. We're going to look at John Edwards doing that. Talk a little bit about media values a little bit.

I teach journalism school at the University of North Carolina. On one side I teach people how to be public relations pros, and then in another class I teach other students how to be journalists and go at public relation pros. I'm a schizophrenic. It depends on which time of day you get me in terms of content.

And then I want to talk about five steps that are better than murder in terms of killing a reporter, and then a workshop exercise, and then closing comments. I don't know if we're going to be able to do that exercise, but I'll put it out.

I'm a native of North Carolina, studied at the University of North Carolina School of Journalism, which is the number one school in the country for at least another couple of months before they grade us out again. I have a graduate degree in organizational communications, a 21-year Air Force career. I left about two weeks before my number was called on the '06 list. I thought it was time to get out and do something else.

The something else - I started a company called Creative Communication Works. It was a - well, it still is - it's a public relations consulting company.

And then, I was the AFA Director of Policy and Communications for five years here. And one day, I used to, well, when I was captain in the Air Force I was an ASTRA. They used to bring captains in and assign them to the Pentagon, so we could get coffee quick, you know, to people.

But one of my assignments was to work with the AFA. And that's when I fell in love with the AFA, as a young officer, and I became a life member and all of that. And I watched AFA all of the years, from when I was a captain all the way up to lieutenant colonel. And then once I got out and did Creative Communication Works, AFA needed a policy and communication director and they called me. And I went over there, knowing that I was going to say no to the job, but when I got there it just reminded me of the days when I was a captain.

And one of the problems that the AFA had at the time was how do they make themselves relevant to a young force. And for two years I kind of wrestled with that thing, and then one day I was out in LA at the LA show that the AFA does, and we were sitting down in a Starbucks, and Dan Mars and myself thought about the Air and Space Conference. It was really one of those things where we wrote on a little napkin. And we ran out of space on the napkin, so I whipped out the laptop and we kind of did a talking paper for the AFA Conference 2003. So this is the fifth year of it. And that's how this thing kind of started. And one of the things -

I teach at UNC. You know all that already. I'm a professor there. One thing that was important about the Air and Space Conference is that they have events like this and topics that are off the road a little bit, but will still allow you to do some professional development. And really, a workshop on media relations, how the media thinks is not that far off the road.

I spend most of my time in Carolina, not teaching, but doing workshops with Exxon Mobil and some of the Fortune 500 companies that come in and need media training or need a perspective on how to deal with the media, or I'm in China or Russia talking to various aspects of the Chinese government and Russian corporations - new Russian corporations - just what public relations is all about.

If you look back over the past year, the Air Force - I think when I was here last year, the B-52 incident was in the news, because I remember changing my presentation right before I spoke. And for the last 12 months or so, the Air Force has been in the news on and off. Now if you want to really think about it, it's been a bad news year in review.

You start looking at the headlines, and I read the *Earlybird* every day. I still read - I consume as much as possible about the Department of Defense.

Gates critical of USAF on Drones. Flap over the VIP capsule. Of course the two number ones out, the tanker acquisition program, which has been up and down and up and down; it's down again. And then, of course, as early as last Friday, the Air Force was criticized again on the nuclear mission and the whole thing needs to be overhauled. And it's a very public thing that hasn't been pleasant.

This is what I need - okay. What I want you to do is, because sometimes the Air Force can feel like it's being picked on, and it probably is in some cases. But let's go to somebody who is really in hot water - still is - and it's John Edwards. And he's our guy down in Carolina. I mean he was like a golden boy. He came on campus and he set up an institute on poverty and everybody thought North Carolina at least is going to get a vice president out of all of this. But this guy has been in a media storm. And he's the perfect example of what not to do in a storm, really. He kind of plays loose with the facts. He tries to get over the storm before the storm has spent itself, and he really, he really has underestimated the power, the influence, and the professionalism of the media. And he did this with ABC Nightline.

We can roll it? Okay. Okay, though, so it starts. With sound. Somewhere. Right?

[Technical difficulties].

Mr. Byars: One of the not-so-brilliant things about Edwards' approach to getting this story out. One is to run away from *The National Enquirer*. That's just not an opt - that's just not cool - when he was out in LA. The other thing was is that he chose an exclusive interview with ABC News. I mean, when you're in this much trouble [recording in background]. Okay, can you pull it back just a little bit? Yeah. He chose the approach of having an exclusive interview with one media outlet. So here we go.

John Edwards: -- since that time. All of my family knows about this. Just to be absolutely clear, none of them are responsible for it.

Mr. Byars: Listen to his words a little bit.

John Edwards: Oh yes. It's been over for a long time.

Bob Woodruff: How long did it last and when exactly did it end?

John Edwards: Well, here's how I feel about this, Bob. I think my family is entitled to every detail. They've been told every detail. Elizabeth knows absolutely everything. I think that's where it stops when it comes to the public because I think everything else is within my family, and those privacy boundaries ought to be respected.

Bob Woodruff: I know this is a very difficult question, but were you in love with her?

John Edwards: I'm in love with one woman. I've been in love with one woman for 31 years, and she is the finest human being I have ever known. And the fact that she is with me after this having happened is a testament to the kind of woman and the kind of human being she is. There is a deep and abiding love that exists between Elizabeth and I -- [recording continues in background].

Mr. Byars: In PR, this is what we would call an unsuccessful bridge. You're supposed to bridge from something unpleasant to something that's pleasant. But for Edwards, there is no bridge here. You know, there's no land that that bridge is going to. He's just out there.

Bob Woodruff: What happened?

John Edwards: First of all, it happened during a period after she was in remission from cancer. No excuse in any possible way for what happened. This is what happened. I grew up as a small town boy in North Carolina. [Recording continues].

Mr. Byars: Now we're on the campaign trail again. We're not answering the question. We're the son of a mill worker now.

John Edwards: [Recording continues]. I became a lawyer. We put a lot of work and success, got some acclaim as a lawyer. People would tell me, oh he's such a great person, such a great lawyer, such a talent. He's going to go, no telling where. This is when I was 30-31 years old. Then I went from being a young Senator to being considered for Vice President. Running for President, being a Vice Presidential candidate, and becoming a national public figure. All of which [inaudible] a set focus, an egotism, a narcissism that led you to believe that you could do whatever you want. You are invincible. And there will be no consequences. [Nothing could be further from the truth.]

Bob Woodruff: So your assumption was that you would just never be caught?

John Edwards: *First of all, it was short. It was a huge judgment - a huge mistake in judgment. But yeah, I didn't think anyone would ever know about it. I didn't.*

Mr. Byars: [Laughter].

John Edwards: *And the important thing is, how could I ever get to the place - to that place - and allow myself to let that happen? And I believe the reason it happened is because I'd gone through this long process where I became -*
- [recording continues].

Mr. Byars: Even the setting is not the setting you want for a confession. If you're going to confess about adultery, you don't want to do it in your living room. You know. It's just not the best place. You know.

Bob Woodward can't believe the answers he's getting.

Bob Woodruff [Recording continues] - *you thought that you would not get caught. How did she find out about this affair?*

John Edwards: *I told her.*

Bob Woodruff: *This is before the public reporting about this?*

John Edwards: *Oh, it was way before. This was in 2006. She was mad. She was angry. I think [inaudible] would be a good way to describe it. It was painful for her*
[recording continues].

Mr. Byars. Let's stop it.

John Edwards: [Recording continues] *she was finally [inaudible] the kind of woman she is. Then she forgave me, and -*

Mr. Byars: Yeah. Yeah, John's just not doing a good job. And I can call him John because - I used to say I knew him - but [laughter] now I don't know him at all.

The types of things he was doing in this interview, I mean he was dodging questions. On the sequence of events; he wanted to make sure that the sequence of events was vague. Organizations do this a lot.

How did it happen? He didn't want to get to that either.

Bob Woodward asked some really short and precise questions. He's a good journalist. And Edwards is a good trial lawyer, but he's not a good interviewer. Really. He asked him who knew, was he the father - that goes on later on. Edwards doesn't even say he's not the father. He says, you know, I don't know what you're talking about when he first shows him the picture of the baby and that kind of stuff.

Was there a payoff? When they talked about the money, Edwards didn't seem surprised. He looked like he was looking for an answer, you know, to get out of a legal situation. He looked like a legal mind thinking publicly.

Did he think he could keep it secret? I mean, that's just kind of crazy. And the message in this whole interview, once you come out of it, when you're teaching public relations you never do a media interview, a press conference, without having a message.

And the message you're left with from Edwards' talk with Woodward was: I confess; this is over; it's behind me. That's the message. Once you reduce it down, once the grit's all - the water kind of fries out of the grits - this is what's left. I confess; this is over; it's behind me. That's not the message that someone who's repentant is supposed to do. He's not the kind of guy that has a successful run for the presidency.

Tell me, in this audience, who do you think in terms of presidency, got the most horrible treatment by the media, or is getting the most horrible treatment by the media? Who would you say?

Answer: George Bush.

Mr. Byars: George Bush. Why would you say George Bush? Just because.

Answer: No, not just because. Because they've even done a study on the media, some people did an independent study that indicated the number of positive versus negatives, and he's been overwhelmingly negative.

Mr. Byars: Okay. Air Force Times is here. If you had to pick a president that really got a black eye from the media, either fairly or unfairly, who would you pick?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: There are others. I just put these up there. Lincoln. You would give a Lincoln.

Answer: Yeah.

Mr. Byars: Yeah. Okay. I'm going to come back to you. You going with Lincoln? Lincoln?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Lincoln?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Nixon. Come on now.

Answer: Well he was driven out of office.

Mr. Byars: Yeah, he was driven out of office.

Answer: Not that he didn't deserve it, but -

Mr. Byars: Yeah. Dan Rather did kind of snicker as he watched that plane take off. Who would you pick?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Jackson?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Yeah. Well Jackson did a lot of things too. Who would you pick?

Answer: I'm between Lincoln and Washington.

Mr. Byars: Lincoln and Washington. Okay. Anybody else want to take a stab?

Answer: Clinton.

Mr. Byars: Clinton? With a hairdo like that, you're supposed to catch a little hell. [Laughter]. But it's not any of those guys. These guys did have a hard time. It's Thomas Jefferson. The guy was pillaged by the media. And actually, if you go back, you know, and you start doing archive research, Thomas Jefferson had to deal with Fox and the other media times ten. And they were separated in those camps, too. Federalist camp and a Republic camp. And they did everything from talk about Jefferson's hair to his wife to his other wife, of course, that he had out on the plantation, and his tariff, and his embargo. Everything that Thomas Jefferson did, he got criticized

from Federalist newspapers, and it was really, really horrible.

The only person that comes close, the president that comes close to Jefferson is Lincoln. Lincoln did catch a lot of it, but Jefferson is the winner. And it's all right, too, because Jefferson has two points of views about the media. One is - and you can see the one on top - the man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers. I mean, that's, you know, a pretty harsh thing from a guy who's a scholar and a founding father. Yet on the other side, Jefferson also knew that the media was essential. So the president in him, the part that looks at the Constitution, knew that the media had a purpose. And that's why even a President takes a hard time - has to live up to the Constitution. And also protect the media, because they have a role.

But Bush, if you did a media analysis - if you analyze Bush - does not come close. He's not even in the top ten. It's Jefferson and then Lincoln, and then you have to go to Jackson, Hoover - I mean it goes down. Even Franklin Roosevelt, in his time. Crisis before the storm.

A lot of people say, okay, the media crisis is the storm, but it's not. There's always a crisis first and then the storm happens. A crisis is a time of great peril for organizations in which their very futures are at stake.

Last year when I stood up here and I put that B-52 thing up, I thought in my head, somebody is going to get fired. I mean, not somebody small. You know, you misplace some nuclear weapons, even for a moment, how do you know where the other ones are? Don't you have to count them all? You know. Really. Isn't that what your dad would do? If he had something that was treasured, twelve of them, and you kind of misplaced three and he hadn't seen the other nine for awhile, wouldn't he want you to count them all, find them all? You know, that's not a small endeavor. But as I go through these slides, I'm going to talk a little bit about media personalities because I've done studies on those, too.

Katie Couric, 11 million dollars a year. Used to be a Pentagon reporter. She's tough. She has a great smile, but they're last in the ratings; they've been in last in the ratings since she has took the chair. So if you ever encounter her for a media story with the Air Force, Katie Couric is going to be tough. This is not going to be an easy affair. So you guys who see Katie Couric comes on and she flashes a smile, something's after that, really. So watch for the spear, and it's not unfair; she's just tough.

Again, disaster followed by the media storm. Disaster hits first. Hurricanes or Wall Street.

I think the media did one of the best jobs it's ever done yesterday when Wall Street failed. They got down there and analyzed that thing for us minute by minute. You know. It took all the powers of the financial media reporters to put that story together, and now we're bringing this thing into focus.

What would have happened if we hadn't known about that? You know. You probably wouldn't have been here. You probably would have been out trying to get your money out of a bank. Yeah. In many ways, the media kept the country from falling yesterday. Because if the country had panicked, if it didn't have a full explanation of what was going on, people would have took out their money.

Even Pat Buchanan said, which I couldn't believe on TV yesterday morning, I'm thinking about taking all of my money out of the bank. He wasn't joking. He says because they'll insure up to \$500,000 on my 401, but after that, he says, if you've got three million, you know, two and a half is gone. But that; it was an irresponsible comment by someone who I don't think, in a sense, is a professional journalist. I think he's a professional politician.

Dynamics of communication in an organizational crisis. Organizations' crises intersect with communication at many points, but the key thing to know is cause, and media effects is another way to gauge media reaction to a crisis.

The kind of things on the journalism side of the equation I teach at Carolina is cause and media effects. How should you react to an event if you are a reporter or you're a media organization? If it's an act of God that causes the crisis, it's pretty straightforward coverage. You're not going in there to kill. You're going in there to find out what happened. An act of God, no one can stop. A hurricane rolls into the Gulf, you can't stop it. You know. Or if it rolls over Florida, you report what happened.

A mechanical problem, a leaky pipe in the electrical overloads, it's pretty straightforward too. I mean, if you had put media coverage on a hurricane scale, act of God, it would be a 1. A mechanical problem would be a 2. Human error; that's when it ratchets it up a little bit. It would be a 4. When two trains collide on the same track as they did in California - was it yesterday or day before yesterday - you get pretty good and critical and intense

media coverage of that. It just shouldn't happen. And then management decision and indecision, it's the most intense.

That's why up on the stage last year I thought, what happened on that flight? And then in subsequent times following over the months up until about three months ago I thought this is going to go to a bad place. Because it deals with management decisions and indecision. And I didn't know all the facts of that, but it was apparent it was management and it was decision that was causing that.

Media as watchdogs. Uh-huh?

Question: Where was your bullet on celebrities?

Mr. Byars: What's that?

Question: Cause and media effects. I'd like to go back to that one. Shouldn't you have a bullet there for celebrities? Which it seems to take a preoccupation over almost any of those.

Mr. Byars: Celebrity as it relates to the media?

Question: If Britney Spears hiccups, I'm going to know about it.

Mr. Byars: Oh, I'm going to talk about that in a moment. Okay. I've got it. It's coming up.

Media as watchdogs. We need the media as watchdogs. Someone once said if the media weren't around, the U.S. would be a cesspool in about a month. Really. You know, we don't like to give them credit but if we didn't know things in that newspaper or that online website we would be pretty much out of it. We'd lose a lot of fortune. We'd buy [inaudible] products. The media is absolutely essential. And the public sees them as the watchdog. No one else is doing that independently.

Now I'll talk about the media being a monolith soon. And it's not. You can't put *The National Enquirer* in with *Air Force Times*. They're not the same. Yeah, we like to paint them with the same brush, but they're not the same. It's not even close.

Media stakeholders. Media stakeholders have an interest in an organization or an issue involving that organization. And the media is involved in almost every issue, because we want them to be.

Scott Pellock. I met Scott Pellock when I was a major in the Air Force, and Scott has a deep background in military reporting. If he shows up, you're in trouble, too. You're in big trouble. Scott Pellock is so good he can make you cry. You know.

I mean, I remember him coming to Kelly Air Force Base when I was a lieutenant, and we had a guy fall off of a C-5 wing. And the guy was, I think he was 68 years old, and he was really overweight and had some other medical issues. And he didn't die from the fall. You know. But Scott Pellock came out there and he stood in the graveyard and he talked about how this guy went to, you know, where he was born in Mexico. He came to San Antonio. He went to High School. He had 14 kids. You know. He took them all to church. I mean, I was crying. And then he cut to right to our senior commander who was smiling at the time from something else that Scott Pellock had said. You know. So Scott just took him apart. Bit by bit.

But Scott Pellock is - he's very good, but I wouldn't put him on the same level as Katie Couric. Katie Couric, you know she's going to get you. Scott Pellock, sometimes I think maneuvers you into the oops.

What's driving the story? This is what readers look at when they look at a story. Is it politics, crime, corruption, money, influence, celebrity, religion, sex? All of those things can drive a story in terms of the readers, but the way we teach it at Journalism School, we teach these things.

The eight news values. When an editor is looking at a story, what they're looking for is, is there conflict in this story. Does the story impact the reader somehow? Is there some emotional impact? Is there magnitude? Oddity. Prominence. Proximity. If you've got all those things going in this, you've got a big story.

So if you're in the Air Force and this stuff is kind of lining up with the topic you're dealing with that day, it's a big story. It's not because the media is trying to make it a story, but it appeals to all media values. And that's what readers look - and conflict is always number one.

In terms of dealing with the media, first you have to pick a strategy. And there's only two options. Are you going to tell your story or let someone else tell it? You know. There was a time when they weren't that strong, but today they're strong. They have online operations. They have radio operations, TV operations, and some of them are

all owned by the same owner. So you have to decide tactically are you going to do 101 interviews, hold a press conference, issue a written statement, communicate on the internet. Are you going to be on the record, off the record, do background only?

And a comment about no comment. I would just not use no comment. There's nothing that's gained by no comment. You give up an opportunity to plant a message and to tell your story.

Answer to the five Ws. Something happens on your base or in your organization; you should be able to do this because this is what reporters want. They want to know who, what, when, where, why. Edwards should have known that before he gave that interview. You know. And then how. How is always dropped in there. There's a book on that. *Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How* by James Stovall, an old-time reporter who works in Tennessee right now. It's a very good book on it. But you'd need to know the five Ws.

This isn't stuff Public Affairs offices need to know. It's stuff that you need to tell Public Affairs offices. You have to do some of that work. You have to be decisive.

Actions to take and to avoid. You've got to maintain trust. Don't shade the truth. You can't use classification to shade the truth, to say well we're going to shade it a little bit. You know.

And the last thing you want to do is dribble out the facts over a period of time. Dribbling out the facts is almost as bad as shading the truth.

And then you have to fight rumors. As an organization, and Public Affairs has to do that for you. You have to get out there and fight rumors, because there are a lot of rumors out there. The B-52 flight, there are at least 12 websites to say that flight was supposed to go and hit Iran. It's weird. And some of those sites you look at them and man, this site looks almost legitimate. I mean, it's got layers and other things.

I mean, come on. But you have to get out there and fight rumors. Did a plane actually go into the Pentagon? For awhile there, 40 percent, not of U.S. population but the world population, didn't believe that. The Pentagon kind of let that go for about four years and then they started to attack it and say, look, we've got to get something on websites to prove that this plane went into

the Pentagon. The World Trade Center had to do the same thing. Was it actually a bomb or was it a plane?

Then you have to select the spokesman, and this is what you have to do. You have to consider the gravitas of an issue. When you're a professor you can use words like gravitas. And then, you have to choose a spokesperson. Is it going to be Public Affairs or the commander? And that's not an easy call. A lot of times commanders come out, and it should be a Public Affairs officer, and that's because Public Affairs officers, if trained and experienced, are better at dealing with the media.

Actually, you've got to look at your commander and see if he's up to it, she's up to it. You know, because let's face it, you know, not every pilot, you know, can be a doctor. You wouldn't let a pilot operate on you, unless it's a flight surgeon. And then the flight surgeon's kind of shaky too. So why put one as the spokesman for your organization when you're going into a media storm? Unless it has to be that person. They're just not - they just don't have that skill.

You know, this is the big leagues. You're not playing little league baseball here. You know, you're going up against Katie Couric, Scott Pellock, and others, and *Air Force Times*. No, this is not little league stuff.

That doesn't mean that they can't speak to commanders and higher principals; it just means you've got to look at that. Should it be a civilian or military, officer or enlisted?

There are all types of credibility issues and whether you want to expose a military person to that type of traffic. Because sometimes it'll kill them, you know. Sometimes you need somebody who can take a hit and say okay, I'm still a GS-15, you know, after it's over. And not be banished to the Kanto Plains in Japan.

You have to ID your messages. You've got to prepare effective messages, and the fewer the better. If somebody comes to you with a book or bunch of messages, that's no good. You've got to have fewer messages. You want to kind of let those things resonate. You want to include a message with every answer. You want to put the fact - because the messages put the facts into context.

What you are trying to do is you're aiming to influence the net graph. The net graph in a story - in journalism we teach - a net graph is why you wrote the story. Why do we send that reporter out there to write the

story in the first place? That's the net graph, and it's in the story somewhere. It's not in the lead. It's the second, third, or fourth paragraph that editors look for a net graph. I sent you out there. Why did I send you out there? So what you're trying to do with messages is influence the net graph. There's nothing wrong with that.

Time to engage. This is what you want to do.

Get to know reporters. Nothing wrong with that. He won't bite you.

Get comfortable with media settings. You got to go up to the radio station, TV stations. You have to see what their formats are like. You have to avoid media bias. And I don't mean them being biased. Of course, the medias have media bias in terms of affiliations. That has been established. But what you don't want is organizations sometimes are biased against the media. You know. They have to tell your story. You got to get out of that media bias stuff. You got to get in there and mix it up.

And then look to tell the story inside the story. When there's a crisis going on, look for a hero inside that story. A compelling story that a reporter can write as a sidebar or as part of the main feature story.

I had a workshop thing here, but we're not going to do that. It's a stinger of a situation. Every now and then I'll come up with these things for classes, particularly over at the business school.

But here you are, you're a commander for a weapons depot, working around the clock to support the war on terror. Okay. And you have a major contractor that's running a large part of your operations. Half of your troops are deployed. And the contractor has experienced a lot of labor problems. And then your supply officer comes in and says look, for our most recent inventory we've got 12 Stinger missiles missing. You know. And you know, you just know someone's going to leak this information. Okay.

Now the contractor believes some employee manipulated the process to embarrass management, but there's no way to determine the shortage unless you get an outside auditor to come in. So here are the actions, command actions. Auditors from DLA have been dispatched to conduct a complete inventory. But because you're the Army, the depot is so large and all the audited items are not bar coded, they've got to count them one by one. It's going to take weeks, because that's the Army. And in your perspective, the chain of command is closely following the situation

when they do anything else. But their guidance has been conflicted and pretty much lacking in terms of trying to tell you what to do.

Other developments. Accent Airlines, which is a regional air carrier, is testing a missile defense system on three of its commercial airliners, one flying into your airport. And it's part of an FAA, Homeland Security-type of program. What next? The heat turns up. The secretary tells you that a local news producer's on line two waiting to speak to you. Something about missing missiles. You know. You can assume that national news media organizations are only a step behind on the story. So how much harder can it get?

Your task. Answer the five Ws. You've got to do that. Who should represent the depot? Who would you get to get out there and talk to the - not the reporter that called? Who would you get to talk at a press conference? Who would you put out that day? Well, media availability. I don't know what you call it, the press. Who would you put out to about four reporters to talk about this?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Depot commander? Okay. Now if you picked the depot commander, what does that say?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Okay. If you think it's a - if you really think it's a paper issue. If you really think the employees engineered this, do you want to say it's important or - you know, this is administrative. Let's send somebody out there to, you know, to hit this at the level that it is. Let's not ratchet this up right away. You know.

You may want to think about that one a little bit. It's not the wrong answer, but you may want to think about who should represent the depot.

How long should you take before making a comment? What would you do? Would you comment that day or the next day, the next week?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: That day.

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Yeah, and it also keeps it at a level. It also keeps it from escalating. Give two messages that you would want to communicate to the media that day. What impression would you want to leave with them? What would you want for them to include in the story?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: So this is serious. Okay. That's what you would do too.

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: I kind of like that. I like what I'm hearing so far. Is there a story inside this story? Large Army depot. Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Can you try to sell another story while this is going on?

Answer: [Inaudible].

Mr. Byars: Yeah, there's not much you could sell here. Really, this is chicken shit; this is not going to turn into chicken salad. So don't - sometimes - you can't sell soap in a crisis sometimes. And this is not one of those times where you want to do that.

Possible lead. Government auditors have been ordered to conduct a thorough interview of a local Army depot in connection with what is believed to be a discrepancy in the number of Stinger missiles and launchers stored. That's too long a lead, and they're not going to take that. But there's a message. You're going to cooperate fully with DLA. It makes it sound like you're taking action now. You know, we're going to cooperate fully with DLA to reconcile the inventory.

Never repeat the negative. Don't say to find the missing missiles. [Laughter]. You know, and launchers. And oh, by the way, we're not going to shoot down any planes. You go down that road and you'll never get back.

And then you say, of course, your number one priority is accountability. People always say that, and that's a good one to say. Said [Edward Pope], the Depot Director of Public Affairs.

And I, I would go with the Public Affairs guy on this one. And then maybe later on down the story have a commander's quote that they can kind of float into that story. But don't always roll the big gun out first.

Now there is some danger in that in terms of Public Affairs, because I was a Public Affairs officer back in the days when you had a lot of Public Affairs officers. I didn't think it was a lot at the time, but there were a lot. And they were experienced. You know, you didn't have all the colonels deployed. You know. Or all the lieutenant colonels deployed. You know, people were a little bit more positive about life. And you could - in those days you would have a Public Affairs officer roll out there and do stuff. But now you don't have enough. You know. And the ones you have, some of them, are very young and they haven't gone through all the chutes, so what you find is a lot of commanders attempting to be Public Affairs officers.

And again, I would say the same thing to Exxon Mobil, RJR Reynolds, I mean the same things to Fortune 500 companies that come through the business school. Don't always put your big guns out there. It's not necessary. That doesn't mean you don't make them accessible to the media. You can do that. You're not trying to hide your CEO. But don't bring them out for everything.

So you want to prepare for the media storm before it occurs. That's the conclusion of this thing. Remember the five steps to survival.

And then don't kill the messenger. They have a job. The media really has a job. And it goes to the Constitution. You know. And it's odd that I respect it now more than I was - you know, when I took the oath. Protect and defend the Constitution. That means them, too. I mean, they're doing a very vital role. I mean it's, I know, we do tongue in cheek and say yeah but. No. That's what this is all about.

Because like it or not, a story will be told. I mean, it's a good thing this story came out. What if it hadn't come out? Ten years from now, 52 still would be below the priority list for getting things fixed - electrical systems. Still have a colonel at ACC in charge of nuclear matters. A colonel. All those things. It's because of this the organization took corrective action.

Okay. The last thing I want to say is thanks for your service. Thanks for your news writing, too, and just for listening to me today. And I hope the next 12 months are a little better than the last. You know. Let's get Britney Spears back up where she should be; on the front of the news. You know. Get the Air Force back in the air. So

take care and thanks for - again, thanks for listening.
And hopefully I'll see you next year.

[Applause].

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