



VIEWS

PART 2

✓ **TEN PRESENTERS** with different backgrounds and viewpoints share their experience in opening up to the media. Representing the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces, the media and private communication firms, they impart strong messages.



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STRATEGIC

A rock musician at heart, Kåre Helland-Olsen joined the Information Section as an Executive Officer in 1990. He manages long and short-term communication strategies, the development of Internet as a communication tool, services for the media, visits, protocol and the provision of PR advice to Ministry staff. Mr Helland-Olsen holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Oslo. His studies also include History and English as well as Political Science studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Mr Helland-Olsen has completed NATO courses including the ACE Staff Officers Orientation Course, the ACE Press and Information Officers Course and the Senior Officers Policy Course. He has also attended courses in crisis management, crisis information and in psychological defence at the Defence College of Norway.

– Understanding and support at the management level of an organisation is crucial in making a communication strategy work, Mr Helland-Olsen said. His presentation focused on the need for a long-term communication strategy.

Mr Helland-Olsen pointed to a chain of “communicative logic” in explaining strategic communication: By informing your audience, you give people knowledge, which hopefully leads to understanding and, when successful, support. As Head of the Information Section of MOD, one of Mr Helland-Olsen’s responsibilities is to enhance the understanding of, and support for, Norway’s defence policy. In his view, it is crucial to have a well-founded communication strategy as a basis for all communication activities.

“The strategy should ensure that there is long term thinking behind short term activities, such as brochures, press releases, interviews, seminars, publications on the Internet, etc. The strategy should also ensure that you assign the right priorities when there are more tasks than available resources, and make the right decisions where communication principles and working ethics are concerned.

COMMUNICATION

Why do we need a communication strategy? asked Mr Helland-Olsen. He gave several reasons:

- Lack of public interest
 - If the public is not interested in your organisation, you will lose influence and importance. If you lose influence and importance, you will lose your funding.
- Lack of transparency
 - If the public does not trust you, it will not listen to you.
- Fragmented internal information
 - A well-informed employee is a good ambassador for the organisation, and the best PR investment you are ever going to make.
- Lack of international recognition
 - To have international influence, you need to be visible in the international arena.

Mr Helland-Olsen presented certain communication principles that he said one should keep in mind.

Communication should always be:

- Truthful
- To the point
- Transparent
- Proactive

It is crucial to have a well-founded communication strategy as a basis for all communication activities

In sharing his experience from developing a communication strategy for MOD Norway, Mr Helland-Olsen suggested that a strategy should be split into several parts. The first part should address the overall strategy, he said. Here, the organisation’s principles, goals, visions and responsibilities should be stated, as well as how, in general terms, communication should contribute to achieving those goals. He strongly

emphasised how important it is to involve the top management and heads of divisions and sections in phrasing this part of the strategy. Once support for the strategy has been secured at the top level, Mr Helland-Olsen said, information staff should work out the other parts of the strategy. These are the sub-strategies and the more detailed information plan and task list.

If you detect hesitance or downright opposition in carrying out an information activity, it helps to have an agreed overall strategy to lean on, and if necessary, point to, Mr Helland-Olsen concluded.



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STRATEGIC INFORMATION

Dag Leraand has worked as a foreign affairs journalist for the daily Dagsavisen and has contributed articles to a number of newspapers and magazines. Mr Leraand was an editor with the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation. He served six months as Press and Information Officer (PIO) in the Norwegian UNIFIL contingent, Lebanon (1984), and 12 months at UNIFIL HQ (1986–87). Mr Leraand has spent 18 months as a freelance journalist in Cairo, Egypt. Since 1980, Mr Leraand has been a contributor to the Norwegian national encyclopedia on African and Middle Eastern affairs. He is a co-writer of books on UN peacekeeping, global refugee challenges and development co-operation. He holds a BA in political science, sociology and history from the universities in Oslo and Trondheim.

– Lack of openness makes people distrust the authorities, Mr Leraand said. In his view, people “have a right to know.” He emphasised the value of a communication strategy. You cannot achieve goals without a proper long-term plan, he said. He believed strategic thinking should come naturally to a ministry of defence and to the armed forces. ‘Strategy’ is a military discipline with a long history and with legendary thinkers like Sun Tsu and Carl von Clausewitz, Mr Leraand said. However, the armed forces have yet to exploit in full its strategic expertise and apply it to information and communication. A better label for information and communication in an armed forces context would be ‘public relations’ or ‘public information’, in Mr Leraand’s opinion. He said that more focus needs to be put on public relations in the armed forces.

In Norway, the MOD has deliberately chosen communication – not information – as the key word. This signals an ambition to do more than purely informing the public, according to Mr Leraand. He said that the 2001 strategic communication plan prepared by the Norwegian MOD and the Headquarters Defence Command represents a new element in defence and security policy thinking and planning. In his opinion, the military organisation has a lot to learn from the private

– THE HEART OF THE MATTER

sector in the field of communication. In many private enterprises, the head of information is part of the management group, while in the armed forces, this is usually not the case, Mr Leraand said.

He gave the following information on the why’s, whom and what in relation to the communication strategy: The Norwegian MOD has decided to develop a truly strategic policy document rather than the activity-oriented strategies it has adopted in previous years. It is also important for the Ministry to encourage closer coordination of the information endeavours in the security policy and defence sphere. The target of the strategy is the MOD management. Through this strategy they are made aware of the communication aspects of achieving MOD goals. Both the civilian and the military parts of the defence establishment are covered by the strategy. Based on the MOD strategy, lower levels will develop their own strategies and plans. The strategy itself refers to a set of major policy documents regulating the Ministry’s work. Its communication work should be based on factual information, openness and accountability, and it should be proactive.

The implementation of the MOD communication strategy is achieved through sub-strategies for:

- Internet
- Media
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- International cooperation
- Internal information

Mr Leraand said that it was a goal for the Ministry to develop cooperation with other players in the security policy and defence field. These include NGOs engaged in security and defence matters, other government institutions, research institutions, the media and private enterprises.

He concluded by noting that the internal dissemination of information in the Armed Forces has improved through the use of sound and specific information strategies and plans. He pointed to the practice that began during the NATO exercise Battle Griffin in 1999, when the Army’s 12th Brigade set clear goals for the information activities. Two issues of a field newspaper were produced, supplemented by daily newsletters and bulletins on the Internet. The purpose of the first newspaper was to explain the aim of the exercise to the troops, in order to strengthen their understanding and motivation. The second newspaper served as a summary of events and a thank you to the troops who participated.



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THE INTERNET AS AN

Ørjan Karlsson came from the non-governmental organisation “People and Defence” where he had served as an information advisor for one year. Mr Karlsson holds a Master of Arts degree in sociology from the University of Oslo. His studies also include the history of ideas, gender issues and management. In 1999 he received a scholarship to attend a course at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, Austria. Before pursuing an academic education, Mr Karlsson completed the Armed Forces Officers’ Training School and served for six years in North Norway and for seven months in the UN Protection Force in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. At the Ministry of Defence Mr Karlsson handles media analysis, Internet strategy, the intranet and public speaking.



According to Mr Karlsson, many government offices throughout the world use their home page on the Internet as an electronic bookshelf. Publications are available, but there is little to entice people to read them, he said. He stressed the importance of attracting the public to the page and the information it offers. The Ministry of Defence, for instance, should be promoted as a source of valuable and interesting information on defence and security policy. The actual steps to take should be rooted in a separate Internet strategy.

In Norway’s case, the vision is that the MOD should be the primary source of information about Norway’s defence and security policy. The goal for this use of the Internet is to achieve, through better understanding, a more widespread degree of support for Norwegian defence and security policy. But there are competitors, Mr Karlsson said. The “killer dot com” scenario applies to the government and its institutions as well. This scenario implies that another information provider has a better offer and walks away with the users. You are in trouble the moment a majority of Internet users selects a different web site to find information about security and defence issues,

To G2B or not to G2B, that is the question!

INFORMATION TOOL

Mr Karlsson said. It is crucial to be proactive, to be on top of things and to provide early and user-friendly information. Provide an easy search for documents, he urged. Make the information simple, attractive and available.

One of the greatest challenges, Mr Karlsson believes, is how to attract young visitors to the web site. Our field is not one that usually proves alluring to a young audience. But we want to interest more young people in, for example, applying to schools in the Armed Forces, joining peace-keeping missions and engaging in the current debate on defence and security policy.

When launching a new Internet project, Mr Karlsson suggested the following check-list:

- Ensure that the project is backed by a senior executive
- Develop a strategy before developing a web presence
- Develop an IT structure capable of matching the strategic objectives
- Identify and use knowledge in the organisation
- The strategy must add value for users, and it must be flexible

Mr Karlsson distributed a one-page questionnaire concerning the use of the Internet by the Defence Ministries and Armed Forces present. He also distributed a list of technical terms with explanations. See “Internet Strategy Test” and “White paper for *non-techies*” in the appendix.

In Ørjan Karlsson’s view, one needs to adopt an ambitious G2B (government to business) approach in order to become and remain a useful, attractive and innovative web site.

An Internet Strategy may be spelled out in different ways, according to Mr Karlsson. He quoted the State of California’s G2B objective as an example: Working toward a “one-stop” government portal where businesses can easily access government information and services through the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week. “To G2B or not to G2B, that is the question,” Mr. Karlsson said.

KATRINE ADAIR lets no-one rest for a second during their media training. Thanks to her enthusiasm, drive and warm personality she gets away with it. Ms Adair founded The Media Lion in 1997.

HANDLING THE MEDIA

The Media Lion is the brainchild* of Katrine Adair's work as a TV news producer in the Norwegian National Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). During her seven years in NRK she often witnessed how a microphone and a TV camera could disconcert people who nonetheless were experts in their field. Ms Adair wished to help people in getting their message across and dealing professionally with the media. The Media Lion trains and lectures for renowned private companies, individuals, research institutions and public organisations such as the Ministry of Defence. Ms Adair holds a degree in media and journalism from Volda University College (1982). She studied law at the University of Oslo and holds a BA degree. Ms Adair has completed several courses in Psychodrama and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) which helps her to approach people in an open-minded and honest manner. She has worked with film and television productions for more than 15 years.



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**brainchild: "someone's idea or invention, esp. if successful" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)*

Inspire rather than humiliate is the credo of media trainers Katrine Adair and Kristin Hetle when they put participants in front of a camera and fire off difficult questions. In their view, a boosted self-confidence and mastery of media handling techniques are crucial when meeting reporters. "A single interview may be your organisation's only chance to convey an important message, so it's only fair that you get it right," say the Media Lions.

Over a day and a half, Ms Adair and Ms Hetle apply knowledge, fervour and humour in drilling participants in individual media handling sessions. Armed with a video camera, microphone and TV set, Ms Adair and Ms Hetle show participants the power of an official statement. An open exchange of views on media relations in crises and everyday work accompanies the training. The trainers stimulate discussions on the importance of supporting a free press in a democracy. During the training, there are usually lively discussions about the journalists' role and their wish to make a good story. How to gain credi-

KRISTIN HETLE thinks like a journalist and acts like one. She presents chilling scenarios and complex challenges during media training, but seeks – and finds – each participant's strong sides. She has since 1999 been co-owner and co-director of the media and communication firm The Media Lion.

Ms. Hetle's field of expertise covers various aspects of public information, journalism and media handling, with special emphasis on practical media training with groups and individuals. She has been in charge of press service and media handling during major international events with up to 600 attending journalists. A guest lecturer at The Norwegian School of Management (BI), Ms Hetle is co-author of the best-seller "The Art of Leading Yourself". Her education includes a two-year journalism degree at Oslo University College and a BA in French literature and geography from the University of Oslo. Ms Hetle began her professional career at the Norwegian National Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), where she worked for 20 years as a reporter and as presenter of various radio programmes. During a year's leave of absence, she was an information advisor at the Norwegian Red Cross.



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bility is also debated. MOD and armed forces staff sometimes find it difficult to achieve openness within their own organisation. A common challenge appears to be how to win support and understanding at the management level.

HANDLING THE MEDIA

This part of the seminar has a dual purpose:

- Encourage discussion and understanding of the role of the media in a democracy, and
- Provide participants with useful tools in dealing with journalists, both in general and in a Pfp/NATO context.

The session starts with a plenary discussion on the principles of openness when dealing with difficult situations. One example could be the exposure of bribery within the armed forces or ministry of defence.

After the plenary discussion the trainers divide the participants into groups and give each a different case to work with. For example:



SCENARIO

During a military exercise a soldier is killed in a car accident and others are severely injured. They were all in an overloaded truck that turned over on a bend. The rescue efforts were badly organised and the ambulances arrived too late to save the soldier's life.

TASK

You have 25 minutes to prepare a media strategy for this case. Fill in the details you find necessary for the story. Make sure that everyone in the group participates during the presentation of the strategy.

1. Make a priority list of whom you need to contact or inform.
2. What actions need to be taken with regard to the media?
3. What will be your key message?
4. Whom do you want to reach?
5. What do you want to achieve?

Each group presents its strategy in a "staff meeting", while the other participants ask questions. The presentation is videotaped and the participants get feedback both on the strategy they chose and on their individual performance.

The cases are starting points for individual interviews, which are also videotaped and evaluated in the same manner. All this is done in plenary sessions.



PRACTICAL ADVICE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH JOURNALISTS

One should for example always bear in mind that journalists consider themselves to have a right to demand answers on behalf of the public; journalists are always looking for a story (preferably one with a conflict to it); and the journalist's loyalty is not to you, but to the story and the audience.

Some basic rules apply when you wish to get your message across to journalists. It is essential to prepare a key message and stick to it. To be clear and explicit, and to give examples that make people understand and remember your message.

The participants are reminded of how important it is to be alert when contacted by a journalist. Whenever a journalist calls, you should consider it an interview from the start, in the sense that anything you say to a journalist who has identified her- or himself as such may be quoted. It is always wise to ask for the context of your statements; whether she has spoken to others in your organisation; and to ask yourself if you are the right person to answer. Always agree to call back in order to give yourself time to think and prepare.

When preparing, it is important to be conscious of what kind of audience you want to reach and what you want to achieve with the interview, and to formulate your key message accordingly.

During the interview, it is all about getting your message across. Listen carefully to the questions (do I accept the premises for the question?); state your key message at the beginning, make your answers brief and simple, be specific and use examples, only give answers that can be quoted, speak the truth even if it hurts, put yourself in the position of the public – and know when to stop.

To earn credibility with the media and ultimately with the public, it is essential to treat bad news the same way that you treat good news.



Major Iver Tokstad during media training at 6th Division, Armed Forces of Norway



Kristin Hetle "interviews" Jana Jelinkova, Spokeswoman for the Czech Ministry of Defence

MORTEN JENTOFT may be called l'enfant terrible* of these media and information seminars. Never missing a chance to question facts presented by authorities, Mr Jentoft is the personification of the investigative and fearless journalist.



*enfant terrible: "a shocking but often also interesting and amusing person" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)

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OPENNESS TOWARDS

To illustrate his points during the seminars, Morten Jentoft shows footage from his field coverage of the Chechen war and from political reportage in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. Mr Jentoft has worked for the main national radio and TV channels (NRK) in Norway since 1982, first in Vadsø in North Norway and from 1990 as a correspondent in Finland and Russia. For the moment he is working at the foreign news desk in NRK in Oslo. He has a degree in journalism from Volda University College and has studied Sami, Finnish and Russian languages at the universities of Tromsø, Helsinki and Oslo. He has specialised in Barents Region issues and has written books about Norwegian emigration to Russia and Norwegian intelligence activity in Finland during the Cold War.



– From a political perspective the armed forces are interesting because they are an instrument of security and foreign policy, Morten Jentoft said. Even though he is not interested in weapons and technical aspects as such, Mr Jentoft seeks to meet military commanders and staff in the field. Only by including all actors and affected groups can he present balanced and analytical news coverage. He appreciates being able to shoot TV footage from military activities to illustrate his news reports.

During the Cold War, Mr Jentoft said, the Norwegian MOD Public Information Section's main activity appeared to be to take journalists to NATO exercises in the North. He believes the MOD goal of these maneuver visits was, via the reporters, to convey to the public that we would get allied help. Now there are not so many trips. The media policy has changed, according to Mr Jentoft.

As MOD information staff, you must know what kind of message you wish to send out through the media, Mr Jentoft said. Having this sorted out, you should begin by fulfilling the reporter's wishes. He said that all reporters must be treated equally and gave some reasons for this: A TV reporter representing a small station may make a good story that is picked up by large networks.

THE MEDIA



What if you ignore a small TV station and it makes a negative report that is picked up by others and broadcast widely?

I dislike PI Officers, Morten Jentoft said. PI officers are trained to handle the media in a conformist manner. In his experience, they sometimes divert attention from the issues journalists look to cover. A PI

Officer may keep journalists away from soldiers, officers and civil servants who have first-hand experience with the issue or event, Mr Jentoft said. But, it is still important for a journalist to have a media contact in a ministry or military unit. What a journalist needs is a helpful PI Officer, he said.

It is important that the commander immediately receives a journalist who visits a military unit or exercise, Morten Jentoft said. This shows the journalists that they are welcome and vouches for good cooperation between the journalist and the military staff.

People who are sent on a peace-keeping mission should be trained to handle difficult challenges – even media, in Morten Jentofts' opinion. There is something wrong with the system when a journalist cannot ask any soldier or officer who has experienced a crisis what is going on, in his opinion. We need to hear from the horse's mouth what is happening. We may have no time or interest in waiting for the official PI Officer version, Mr Jentoft said.

Morten Jentoft said he visited the Baltic countries for the first time in 1991. The situation was very tense in Riga in January 1991, he said, as Russian authorities tried stop the Latvian struggle to regain independence. There was shooting and barricades in the streets, and people were killed. As an NRK correspondent in Finland (1990-94) and in Russia (1996-2000), he followed the events in the Baltic region quite closely. He said he was pleased to see the difference between the early 1990s and now. Quite a number of foreign journalists are interested in security policy in the Baltic states, according to Mr Jentoft.



HANDLING A CRISIS

Since 1996 Dr Rom has served as Chief Physician in the Stress Management Team for International Operations in HQ Defence Command, Norway. She is a specialist in occupational medicine. The Stress Management Team counsels commanding officers and personnel before deployment and during their tour of operation, and offers follow-up after redeployment. Dr Rom has formerly worked as head of occupational health services in private business and public corporations, specialising in management support, human relations, and organisational development. In 2000 she spent three months in Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia working for KFOR HQ 5 and Norwegian detachments to KFOR.

– You may make fatal mistakes if you go 48 hours without sleep, according to Dr Rom. You need to sleep or rest for four hours a day. The hours may be split up, but experience shows that sleep is crucial, she said.

Dr Rom referred to different types of crises and stress that information and military staff may encounter. It may be, for example, an unusually hectic and demanding work period, a bad accident or armed conflict. Her message is that you have to understand the stress reactions in order to be able to control them.

Often, managers risk exhaustion from being involved and responsible during a stressful situation or crisis, Dr Rom said. As she sees it, “leader support” is called for during a serious crisis. This means that a familiar, trusted person, co-worker or consultant offers emotional and practical support to enable the leader to make sound decisions. Dr Rom illustrated this with an example from a 1986 accident when an avalanche killed 16 young soldiers in Vassdalen, North Norway, during a NATO exercise. The colonel who was in charge of the rescue operation said later that he would have had difficulties pulling through without the daily telephone conversations with his wife. Dr Rom said

she could hardly recommend laying the whole burden on family members, but in this colonel’s case, it worked. Dr Rom encouraged everyone present to establish leader support as part of their organisation’s crisis plan. During a crisis, team work is the key, in Dr Rom’s view.

DEFINITION OF A CRISIS

- Sudden adverse change in the situation
- Unexpected? Unplanned?
- Threatens lives and/or important values

CRISIS IN AN ORGANISATION

- Alarm! Acute stress
- Who is in charge? Where is she?
- Breakdown of telephone and message systems. Chaos is possible.
- Where are the plans for handling the crisis?
- The media are at the front door
- Relatives try to get in touch

Managers may feel the trauma of responsibility and ask themselves if the crisis was their fault, according to Dr Rom. They may face very difficult choices and be afraid to make mistakes. She said they may also be afraid of their mistakes becoming known to the public, and the possible personal consequences. Dr Rom said that people react in very different ways in a crisis. Immediate physical shock reactions include feeling cold, “numb”, sick, having increased cardiac action, being agitated or showing a “frozen” attitude. Some psychological stress reactions are impaired thinking, anxiety, and sense of defeat. One’s sensory impressions and sense of time may also be affected. To be able to counteract and control such reactions, Dr Rom said, it is essential for a leader to be familiar with crisis reactions and management. If you do not have a crisis plan, make one immediately, she urged.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Work as a team
- Use leader support
- Establish a work/rest schedule: Four hours sleep every 24 hours
- Provide a rest area with beverages and food
- Keep in contact with your family

Crisis management should be demand driven, not supply driven, Dr Rom said. Media management is crucial during a crisis. If you do not inform the media, someone else will! General Eisenhower said: A plan is nothing, planning is everything! (but remember where you put it.)



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MEDIA HANDLING AT

Ms. Skjerven was recruited by the Ministry of Defence from the Defence Medical Command in 1990. From 1991 she served as Head of the Press and Information Office. Ms Skjerven holds a BA degree in political science, mass communication and public law from the University of Oslo. She has studied literature in the UK and has completed the Information Course at the National Defence College. NATO courses she has attended include the Staff Officers Orientation Course, the Crisis Management Course and the 3rd Mediterranean Dialogue, General/Flag Officers Course in Rome. From August 2002 Ms Skjerven is due to serve as Counsellor, Defence Resources, at the Norwegian Delegation to NATO in Brussels.

– It is a struggle, but the Ministry of Defence is proactive vis-à-vis the media, said Kirsti Skjerven. Still, a lot of her time is spent on “extinguishing fires”. We try to be ahead on difficult issues, but I doubt if we will ever see the day when others than the media will set the agenda, she said.

Ms Skjerven’s role as spokeswoman has since a reorganisation in 2001 been similar to that of the spokesperson for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the MOD and the MFA, the spokesperson has a general authorisation to speak on behalf of the Minister, she said. The spokesperson’s office is part of the Minister’s small secretariat, while the Information Section that Ms Skjerven headed earlier is now separate. In the other Ministries, the spokespersons head the information unit and must split their time between requests from the media and the responsibility for communication policy, information activities and running the section. Ms Skjerven said she prefers the current model, as it gives her easier access to the Minister of Defence and the possibility to focus on media matters.

Every manager in the MOD is responsible for the external and internal information aspects of their work, Ms Skjerven said. Requests from the media

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

are channelled through the spokesperson’s office, but persons with expertise in the field often answer journalists directly.

Many media requests are based on the transparency regarding all in- and outgoing MOD correspondence, according to Ms Skjerven. Pointing to the most difficult cases, she mentioned calls she had received from journalists who extremely quickly had obtained letters to the MOD from the Auditor General of Norway where financial misconduct was implied. We are of course bound to be accountable to the public for what we do at the Ministry, she said. The open correspondence lists are a tool that enhances trust between the government offices and the media and the citizens, in her view.

According to the Freedom of Information Act of 1970*, all documents produced by government institutions are in principle open to the public eye, Ms Skjerven said. Exceptions may be made for documents that treat national and international security, personal information and bidding rounds in connection with material purchases. She emphasised that internal casework and correspondence regarding

Be egalitarian: Respect the small media

Do not cover up: You are not the only source of information

Do not lie: Lie once and credibility is lost

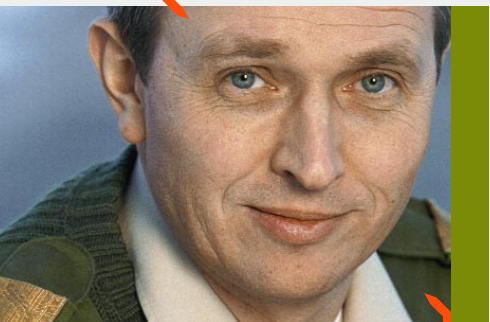
matters that are not yet concluded (for example the annual defence budget) are not publicised. Until 1998, the lists containing the titles of the daily correspondence were available to journalists and members of the public at the Government’s Press Centre in Oslo. For the past four years, subscribers have also been able to access the correspondence lists via the Internet. Anyone may request a user ID and read the mailing lists on the net, Ms Skjerven said.

Continuing on the transparency issue, she noted that easier access has multiplied the requests for documents. More than 100 media organisations receive the electronic correspondence list daily from ministries and other government offices. During the first six months of 2001, the MOD received more than 2000 requests to release letters and documents, Ms Skjerven said. Almost 1 500 of these documents were released. The average number of requests per month in 2001 was 303, she added. That means more than 15 requests per working day.

Ms Skjerven believes a change has occurred over the past years in the relationship between public opinion and the media. She perceives the journalist’s role today as too focused on pleasing the public, as opposed to educating it. The working situation for journalists, too, has changed, she said. “Instant” defence correspondents are made overnight, in her experience. In Ms Skjerven’s opinion, technological advances put reporters on the front line to a higher degree than earlier. As spokespersons we must stay on top of developments to meet these new demands and changed scenarios, she concluded.

* The purpose of this Act is to regulate citizens’ right of access to documents of the public administration. In principle any person has the right to inspect such documents.

BRIGADIER KJELL GRANDHAGEN was baptised by fire when he became Chief of the Press and Information Branch, HQ Defence Command Norway, in the summer of 2000. In August, when the Russian submarine "Kursk" sank in the Barents Sea, the media were up in arms.



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MEDIA HANDLING IN

Brigadier Grandhagen faced the media day and night, in August 2000, answering on aspects of the Norwegian "Kursk" rescue operation. Brigadier Grandhagen graduated from the Norwegian Military Academy in 1978. He completed the Army Staff College in 1987 and L'Ecole Superieure de Guerre Interarmées, France, in 1990. Before his current post, Brigadier Grandhagen was Commander of the Nordic Polish Brigade/SFOR in Bosnia in 1999-2000. From 1996-1999 he was Commandant of the Norwegian Military Academy. His various other postings include North Norway, the Army Staff College and peace operations in Bosnia and in Egypt.

– It is much better to break a negative story early yourself than to wait for the media to find out and handle it their way, said Brigadier Grandhagen. It may hurt you, but it will hurt much less than losing control over how the information is presented. He said that in the cases where he and his colleagues had been proactive concerning a negative matter, they had fared much better than when they had waited. He illustrated with a recent example from KFOR: An Albanian was arrested by Norwegian forces and handled roughly. The officer in charge did not foresee the effects and did not alert the Press and Information Branch about the possible media focus. "Abuse by Norwegian KFOR" was placed all over the front page of national newspapers as a result.

In addressing freedom of speech for Armed Forces staff, Brigadier Grandhagen said there had been some difficulty after the launch of the last White Paper on the Armed Forces. It entailed severe cutbacks and restructuring of the forces, and was a bitter pill to swallow for many. Through the media, some officers openly criticised policy decisions. In his view, Armed Forces staff should express their concerns before such a paper becomes official. But, he said, much more could be done to build acceptance internally ahead of important decisions.

THE ARMED FORCES

Brigadier Grandhagen said officers may speak as openly as possible to the media on matters they know well and about incidents they have been directly involved in. Usually, the unit commander should be the spokesperson. Armed Forces staff should not give political comments but stay within their area of expertise. As a boss, you have to accept that mistakes will be made, that all statements may not be exactly the way you prefer. The Armed Forces should be an open institution, Brigadier Grandhagen said.

In a recent poll, 66 % of the Norwegian public regarded the Armed Forces as very credible, said Brigadier Grandhagen. This is almost as high a score as the police got. In his view, the Armed Forces is unique in having such a large national network to use for information purposes. Norway has some 20 000 full-time staff, 15 000 conscripts and thousands of reserves. About 60–70 persons work full time on P & I, while there are some 150 Press Contact Officers in addition, according to Brigadier Grandhagen. It is our ambition to ensure excellent internal communication, because this is a prerequisite for good external communication, he said.

We put non-media experts in spokesperson roles during training and regular activities, Brigadier Grandhagen said. We also hire journalists to serve in the Press and Information Centre (PIC) during major exercises. In his view, it is important that these civilians wear a uniform to show the military affiliation. Thanks to conscription, several reporters with military experience may be called upon for such tasks, he said. Our experience with such "hired reporters" is very good, he said.

MEDIA POLICY RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ARMED FORCES

- The communication strategy of the Ministry of Defence is the basis
- The Chief of Defence provides an overall information strategy for the Armed Forces
- Each command or unit should have its own press and information plan, with an annual calendar of P & I activities

KEY PLAYERS IN THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

- The commanders. A lot of effort and training is put into using the commanders as spokespersons
- Professional P & I personnel
- Part-time P & I personnel and Press Contact Officers (PCOs)

We encourage the PCOs to be proactive, to send out press releases and invite TV stations and reporters, Brigadier Grandhagen said. The PCO is also an advisor to the commander, helping to prepare for interviews by producing likely questions, finding answers and rehearsing. A media handbook that is issued every year gives practical advice on how to prepare for and conduct interviews. It also contains lists of Press Contact Officers all over the country and their telephone numbers, and is useful for Armed Forces staff and journalists alike, Brigadier Grandhagen said.



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THE PRESS CONTACT

Commander Karlsen assumed his current post in 1989. He has developed and organised some 30 seven-day courses for Press Contact Officers and high-ranking officers. From 1989 to 1997 he also served as Assistant Spokesman, and has headed several fact-finding missions and media tours to Norwegian units in Lebanon, Israel and the Former Yugoslavia. Commander Karlsen was responsible for the development of the Armed Forces homepage, Forsvarsnett.no, which was launched in March 1998. Currently he is developing and implementing the Armed Forces joint Intranet Portal. Commander Karlsen joined the Navy as a student at the Coast Artillery Officer Candidate School in 1963, and has also completed courses at the Navy Logistic and Management College and the Navy Staff College. He served 18 years in North Norway as Coast Artillery Officer, and 10 years on the staff of the Coast Artillery Officer Candidate School.

– Few professions are more likely to misunderstand each other than journalists and military personnel, said Commander Karlsen. What can we do to promote understanding and dialogue between the Armed Forces and the media? he asked.

In Norway every military unit should have a Press Contact Officer (PCO) who is known to the local media, according to Commander Karlsen. Since the Press Contact Officers' Course was introduced in 1988, we have trained some 80 persons every year, he said. How to handle the media in a professional manner is too important a matter to be left to chance, Commander Karlsen said. Each individual's abilities and experience are, of course, valuable. But we feel that the media training is an eye-opener to the participants and a must for those who are in contact with journalists, he added.

During the week-long course, we do life-like drills in handling the most terrible crises, said Commander Karlsen with a cheeky smile. He has had the main responsibility for developing and organising the course, and admits that the participants and he have got many a laugh during the media drills. There is plenty of room for error, and subse-

OFFICERS' COURSE

quent salvage, when participants answer tricky questions in front of a camera, Commander Karlsen said. Professional journalists play the part of reporters during the course – with the instruction to show no mercy.

Commander Karlsen went through the course programme. He said that key aspects of the course are: writing a press release, distributing it electronically, arranging a press conference, working as a team, crisis handling, interview training, information policy and evaluation of the participants' efforts.

Top management must support and carry out the media policy of the Armed Forces, Commander Karlsen said. Hence, in 2001 his office began training the "top rank": the Inspector Generals, the Chief of Defence, the Admirals and Generals. Tailored media training for these groups has proved to be very popular and useful, according to commander Karlsen.

The Armed Forces Rules for Media Contact

- Never bluff – give the correct information
- If you cannot comment, tell the journalist why
- Get facts as soon as possible
- If you say you will call back – DO IT!
- Never speculate
- Make sure to clear up misunderstandings
- Know the local media and journalists
- Do not treat any media unfairly

The Press Contact Officer's Vital Checklist

(If you can answer 'yes' to these questions, you are safer when giving comments)

- Is the information correct?
- Is the information unclassified?
- Is the protection of persons involved taken care of?
- Does my unit have the authority to release the information?

A Press Contact Officer Should

- Buffer some of the tension directed towards the unit commander
- Be available
- Be well briefed
- Establish cooperation with the media
- Plan and initiate visits by the media
- Answer questions from the media
- Pay attention to the local media
- Correct false information

