

Monday, March 25, 1991

The Battalion

Panel criticizes war coverage 'Nation' writers say media omitted war details

By Bridget Harrow
The Battalion

Many details of the Persian Gulf conflict never appeared in mainstream media, leaving responsibility for accurate war coverage to the alternative press, said three writers from The Nation at Texas A&M Friday.

Alexander Cockburn, a columnist for The Nation since 1983 and for the Wall Street Journal since 1980; Christopher Hitchens, a columnist for The Nation and Washington D.C. editor for Harper's magazine; and JoAnn Wypijewski, managing editor of The Nation since 1987, served on the panel.

Panelists said more of the Persian Gulf story was left out than was told.

Cockburn questioned if the war could have been avoided.

He said Saddam Hussein issued public statements hoping for negotiations and made private appeals that largely were ignored by the mainstream press.

"All these overtures were systematically refused by the United States," Cockburn said. "Some people say (Saddam Hussein) was never serious. Wouldn't (the overtures) have been worth exploring? The United States did not think so."

Hitchens said polls show Americans are proud of winning the war, but that he does not believe in opinion polls.

"Not only do I not believe in the answers or the figures, I do not believe in the questions," Hitchens said. "It is not important what you think, but how you think."

Hitchens said the United States is a large, rich country that wallows in self-pity. He said it is

sad if winning a war is what it took to put a spring in the steps of American citizens.

Wypijewski said she has a problem with "Support our troops" slogans because they were immediately accepted without discussion or debate.

"For those on the right, (the slogan) meant unquestioning backing for the war, unquestioning approval in a tirade of yellow ribbons, acquiescence in the murder of women and children from the air and in retreating (Iraqi) soldiers," she said.

The slogans were a contradiction for many people who asked themselves how they could oppose the war, but support the troops, she said.

"If you basically say, 'Support the troops,' you also are saying you support their actions and, therefore, are falling in line," Wypijewski said. "The only

valid way to support the troops is to demand that they come home."

Wypijewski said most of the soldiers interviewed in the mainstream press during the war were from "the elite group" — pilots or those who load the bombs. She said "grunts" — ground soldiers — rarely were interviewed.

She said the different groups of soldiers in the Persian Gulf break down into classes.

"We essentially have a poverty draft," she said. "Those who join the armed services have no alternative or the alternative is bad."

Panelists also attacked Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, the allied commander, for reporting that 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed and 7,000 to 10,000 Iraqi civilians were killed.

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KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Pulling for charity

Gunnery Sergeant Hilliard, military adviser to Company E-2, lends a hand in E-2's victory in a tug-of-war at the Brazos River following the Corps' March to the Brazos. Hilliard, with other military advisers, also marched with the cadets to the river. The annual march raises money for the March of Dimes Foundation.

A&M knew of money woes, Pierre says

PRAIRIE VIEW (AP) — The Texas A&M University System holds some of the blame for the financial controversy swirling at Prairie View A&M, former Prairie View A&M president Percy Pierre said.

Much of the criticism over unaccounted funds totalling \$15.1 million at Prairie View A&M has been directed at Pierre and two other top university officials.

But Pierre, who was president from 1983 to 1989, says Texas A&M System officials were aware of Prairie View's financial problems and should have acted

to correct faulty procedures.

The fiduciary responsibility for Permanent University Funds rested with the A&M System in College Station, Pierre told the Houston Chronicle.

"None of this would have happened if College Station would have reconciled its disbursements of PUF funds with its construction bills," he said.

He said bills were sent from one office; the money from another.

"Had those two offices been talking to each other, this never would have happened. Needless

to say, they talk to each other now," Pierre said.

Investigators said records at Prairie View A&M were so poorly kept that no one will ever know exactly where all that money went.

Bill Wasson, vice chancellor and comptroller for the A&M System, said an outmoded accounting system combined with Pierre's move to establish a certain autonomy for the university resulted in the loss of accounting control.

"I'm not sure there's any blame to be fixed, except to cor-

rect the problem and go on from there," Wasson said. "We were the firemen sent in to put the fire out and solve the problem."

Pierre, who left Prairie View in August to become vice president of research and graduate studies at Michigan State University, says the ongoing inquiry is unnecessary.

"There's really nothing left to investigate," an angered Pierre said last week in a telephone interview from his office at Michigan State. "It's just throwing mud at me and some others. It's just outrageous."

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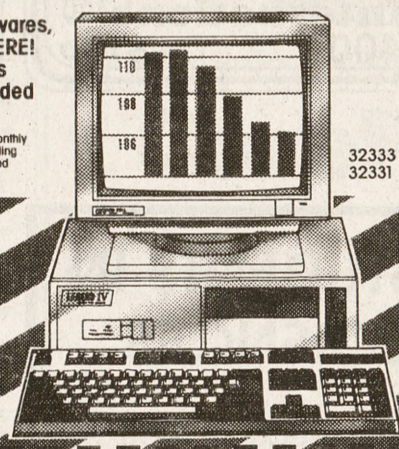
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