

Project Plan

I hope to receive one of the University College's named fellowships to complete my doctoral dissertation titled, "Total Coverage: How the Media Shaped Command Decisions During World War II." This is my fourth year of graduate studies as a member of the History Department at Ohio University where my research focuses on international military history and the American media. Before coming to Ohio University, I earned a master's degree in American history at George Washington University and worked as an adjunct for a year at two community colleges. I have received two teaching awards, including Ohio University's "Graduate Associate Outstanding Teaching Award," and published several articles in scholarly journals. After passing comprehensive exams last fall I have been working full time on my dissertation, with the goal of completing it in the spring of 2019. Since a substantial amount of the research and writing for this project has already been completed a named fellowship will allow me to reach my goal of finishing my dissertation in the coming academic year.

My dissertation examines the relationship between the U.S. military and media during World War II. By reconstructing the decision-making process of Allied generals and admirals during the war this project endeavors to answer how much media and public opinion shaped commanders' actions on the battlefield. Media pressure, for example, led Franklin D. Roosevelt and General George C. Marshall to order General Douglas MacArthur to escape the beleaguered Philippines in 1942 and, by doing so, reshaped the Allied command structure in the Pacific War. Public opinion for an offensive somewhere against Germany convinced both Winston Churchill and Roosevelt to launch an invasion of North Africa in 1942. Negative media attention by the British press against American troops in the Battle for Sicily goaded General George S. Patton Jr. to attack toward Palermo and then Messina to gain recognition for American soldiers in the international press. When Churchill continued to push for operations in the Balkans instead of a cross-channel landing in France, Roosevelt countered that American public opinion could not allow him to agree. Once a landing in France was decided on, Churchill chose General Bernard Law Montgomery over General Harold Alexander to lead the ground forces, partly because Monty was better known to the Allied public. Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the Allies agreed on a two-pronged advance against Japan, in part, to avoid the public relations crisis of sidelining MacArthur.

My dissertation's main argument is that the military saw the value of the media during World War II and attempted to use it as a weapon. This often took the form of intelligence operations where the hope was that the Axis would be deceived by factitious news stories. Many generals also saw the press as useful in improving their soldier's morale. At the same time, however, the press and public opinion also began shaping the military's actions on the battlefield. An example of this took place during the last battle for North Africa when General Bradley learned that the final assault would be made with only British troops since it would be easier to supply them. Bradley immediately visited Eisenhower and stated that American press and public opinion would never tolerate U.S. troops being absent when the Axis armies in North Africa surrendered. Eisenhower agreed, and Axis forces surrendered to both Allies. This is

simply one example of Eisenhower making an operational decision that had little military purpose, but made perfect public relations sense.

This argument thus pushes scholarship on the press and war in a new direction. Though there is no shortage of books on the media during World War II most of it focuses on propaganda, censorship, or war-correspondents. Likewise, books on Allied leaders during World War II pay little attention to how the press influenced command decisions. Those books that do focus on the relationship between the media and military often depict a one-sided relationship with the military controlling the media through coercion and censorship. This project flips this assumption around by showing how the media influenced the military. In doing this it not only links media and military scholarship but channels it into a new direction.

This project also has broader implications that reach outside academia. The relationship between the military and the media during World War II created the ideal that both institutions remember fondly. In recent years, it is common for the media to bemoan the lack of military clarity in today's wars, while the military longs for the days when "the press was on our side." To understand the military-media relationship of today, and thus current warfare, one must also understand the relationship formed during World War II, which both institutions glorify.

My dissertation is on track to be completed by the spring of 2019. Over the past three years, I have conducted extensive archival research at the Library of Congress, the U.S. National Archives, the Army Heritage and Education Center, and the Archives & Special Collections at Ohio University. With the generous assistance of the Original Work Grant and the Graduate Student Research Fund, I will complete most of the remaining research at the Eisenhower Presidential Library over the 2018 spring break. I have also made substantial progress in writing, with the first three chapters on track to be finished by the end of the spring semester. Over the summer and fall, I plan to complete chapters four, five, and six. The concluding chapter, along with general editing, will be done in the spring semester of 2019.

Receiving a named fellowship will greatly facilitate the completion of my dissertation by the spring of 2019. Though there is much scholarship about the press during World War II, this dissertation makes a unique argument by linking media coverage with military decision-making. This is a contribution to historiography, yet it is also a pressing question for current events. The media today is a major part of modern warfare. This project explains why.