How an Army Brat Consumes Information

An army brat by definition is “a child of a career soldier, especially one who has lived in various places as a result of military transfers” (Google definition). While I did not move around as a child, my father was a career soldier and thus this affected not only what information I consumed but how I consumed it.

Take for example, the “War on Terror”. I remember that when the twin towers fell my first thought was to question what the government’s reaction would be to such an attack. This immediate jump stems from my background of a military family, because whenever the government decides to go to war my family, and millions of other families, are directly affected. So when President George W Bush announced that we were starting a “War on Terror” a month later I knew that my life would change. Since then my Father has served a tour in Kuwait in 2004 and a tour in Afghanistan in 2012.

During these tours I learned to shy away from the nightly newscast coverage of the war, mostly due to the emotional response that I would have to the material that the News decided to show their audience. So I developed a habit of either consuming my information from newspapers of the internet. I had my preferences within these media. For example I preferred dealing with both the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times* when reading newspapers; while avoiding more local newspapers like *The Hartford Courant* or *The Norwich Bulletin*. My reasoning for these preferences was that my concern was on a more global scale than a local scope. My Internet sources were not as specified besides the fact that I never went to Wikipedia. Wikipedia is written and added to by anyone and everyone, thus making it very much like a gossip site; and if there was one thing you learned during a deployment it was to never believe gossip. There was always a new gossip circulating among the troops or the family of the troops that centered on when the unit would be going home. If you listened to such gossip you were bound to be driven crazy with the false hope of the unit coming home early. Most of my internet searches started and ended with a Google Search. I have since then continued these preferences almost unconsciously.

The “War on Terror” never really stopped. As soon as we supposedly defeated Al Qaeda a new enemy, or simply a new name for an old enemy, emerged: ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. My continued habits of only looking for information from Google, *The New York Times*, and *The Boston Globe* have thus been beneficial and hurtful to the total knowledge I have amassed about the topic.

One of the positive results of reading articles from these outlets is that they tend to give a more holistic approach to the topic with a human element. For example in the article “Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?: ISIS and other extremist movements across the region are enslaving, killing and uprooting Christians, with no aid in sight” by Eliza Griswold, the author presented not only ISIS, which had been advertised as our main threat, but also other extremist groups doing the same thing ISIS does and telling the audience where ISIS fits in among the groups as a whole. The hook of the article was especially significant for me since it presented a portrait of a specific married couple living in a city that was taken over by ISIS. By introducing these two people I was reminded that, among all the political jargon and planning surrounding military movements, when our troops mobilize they affect the lives of specific individuals as well as nations as a whole. Thus just as I am personally affected by US military movements that are directed by people I have never met before, there are other individuals that are affected on a personal level by troops they have never met before.

This human component is definitely designed to hook readers and to get them to care more than they would over twenty statistics in a row, but if this kind of element is used to drive home an opinion instead of a fact than it can be dangerous. This is especially true when talking about war. So in an effort to consume information critically I do try to simply skim the emotional story until I find the more informational part of the article. I will often go back to read the emotional story after consuming the facts in an effort to connect the factual information to the emotional information instead of letting my own ideas impact how I read a sad story of a war-torn family.

So in general I am picky about my sources. My background has dictated where I choose to consume information from and has the potential of affecting how critically I consume information based on my personal upbringing and biases. The first step in getting away from my “Army Brat” approach is to be aware of my faults in information consummation and take steps to counteract these.

Works Cited

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?_r=0>