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War Blogs: Alternative Media in Narrating the War?

Abstract

The nature of war has a major impact on how it will be represented and remembered in the media and literature. Unlike in previous wars, the developments and the availability of technologies and media have enabled twenty-first century soldiers to become the immediate protagonists of their own war narratives. Technology has allowed for a more instantaneous, first-hand experience of the war to reach the public gaze and, even more importantly, to challenge, disprove, or even subvert official military, political, and media reports. One such example is Colby Buzzell's blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which he launched during his deployment to Iraq in 2004, and turned into a memoir, *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, in 2005. Writing the blog in the midst of the war, in which he disputes many official reports, put him under the surveillance of his commanders and of the Pentagon itself. This paper will focus on how the cynicism, sarcasm, and honesty of Buzzell's memoir and blog entries indeed contradicted the mainstream media and military reports of the Iraq War. With that, the blog seemed to challenge Baudrillard's insights on the media, simulation, and spectacle. However, the analysis will also point to the fact that the power of Buzzell's blog as an alternative media was brief since the military managed to undertake actions that regulate (censor) twenty-first century war narratives.

1. The Media and Representations of War

Every war in history is specific and different from previous conflicts concerning the nature of war, timespan, geography, the use of weapons, casualties, causes, and consequences. The same applies when we consider the representations of war which Kate McLaughlin in her study *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* corroborates, "[I]t now seems evident that the First World War's natural form was the lyric poem, that the Second World War's was the epic novel, that the Vietnam War's was the movie," and that the Iraq Wars' natural form "may well turn out to be the blog" (10). It is noteworthy to mention that the Vietnam War was the first televised war, granting the American public access to images of combat, destruction, and crimes, which, consequently, added to the public's disapproval of the war. After the war, it was "widely believed that . . . the United States lost the war *because* it was televised," an argument made by President Lyndon Johnson (Mandelbaum 157). It is clear that, since the Vietnam War, the media became a tool not just for reporting about the war but also for the way in which the war would be perceived by the public: "[T]he television coverage revealed the truth of what was going on, even in the face of constant Pentagon reports of successes and victories" (LeShan 92). Since the Vietnam War was the first one the United States lost despite their technological and military superiority, in the following decade, the nation desperately tried to make sense of the fiasco, however, mostly by blame-shifting; soldiers blamed the military strategy, the government blamed the media, and the majority of the public blamed the government. All this compelled the American military to question and consider the role of media in war reports, which would prove to be an extremely clever tactic less than twenty years later.

In fact, a peculiar turn happened in 1991, during the Persian Gulf War. That particular war was also televised to the point that CNN covered all of its stages 24/7 in an unprecedented way. In many ways, it "resembled a miniseries" ("Television") with its memorable graphic introduction and a distinct jingle.[1] There were images of American air-strikes, interviews with American troops, constant reports from embedded journalists, all of which seemed so authentic, immediate, and trustworthy that the public utterly ignored the fact that the sanitized version of combat was provided by the Department of Defense. All aspects of the TV coverage of the Gulf War "seemed fantastic and futuristic, something that reminded many viewers of a video game" ("Television"). In his study *The Psychology of War*, LeShan explains the function of mainstream media and the objective of military officials during the First Gulf War:

> The media as a whole was magnificently managed by the military, showing how well the military has learned the lessons of the Vietnam fiasco. . . . Not only was the Persian Gulf War different from Vietnam, it was the cleanest, most bloodless, most ideal *picture of war* we had seen. . . . The military had solved the dilemma of how to present war to the civilian population. (93–94; emphasis added)

In other words, the military now controlled the media by carefully selecting how and what should be disclosed to the public eye, and the war was presented as a swift and surgically executed victory, light in casualties. This was, however, far from reality, since the information that reached the public disregarded the fact that there had been an ecological disaster in the Gulf with oil wells burning for months after the end of the war, that soldiers were afflicted with severe chronic disorders (such as sclerosis, neurological disorders, cancer, migraines, seizures, skin disorders, and respiratory conditions) upon their return

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[1] See: "CNN – Gulf War Theme '91."

home,[2] and the fact that the war's mission, the New World Order, almost entirely failed.[3] Indeed, the coalition that fought Saddam Hussein's army in 1991 did not overthrow the dictator from power. Because of this, Jean Baudrillard made, at first, a seemingly ridiculous statement that the war had actually never happened: "[T]his is not war, any more than 10,000 tons of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than a direct transmission by the CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war" (Baudrillard, "The Gulf War" 61). Baudrillard's reasoning lies in the assumption that a war requires two opposing sides in a conflict, which is something that essentially did not occur in the Gulf,

> because the two adversaries did not even confront each other face to face, the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, and the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance. They never saw each other: when the Americans finally appeared behind their curtain of bombs, the Iraqi had already disappeared behind their curtain of smoke . . . the fact that the Americans never saw Iraqis is compensated by the fact that Iraqis never fought them. (62; 82)

What Baudrillard criticized in that essay is not the actual war (he was not denying it had indeed occurred) but, rather, the media's virtual/hyperreal representation of war. Clearly, the proclaimed aim of such coverage of the war was to present the public with seemingly ob-

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[2] See: "Gulf War Illness and the Health of Persian Gulf War Veterans: Scientific Findings and Recommendations."

[3] The New World Order is an idea formed by President George H. W. Bush in 1991. The main objective of the NWO was a world united in its mission to halt aggression and secure world peace: "Until now, the world we've known has been a world divided – a world of barbed wire and concrete block, conflict and cold war. Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. In the words of Winston Churchill, a 'world order' in which 'the principles of justice and fair play . . . protect the weak against the strong . . .' A world where the United Nations, freed from cold war stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations" ("After the War").

jective and impartial real-time information about the war by offering them a false sense of direct involvement and interaction. In other words, the CNN coverage was not a representation of the war but, rather, a mere simulation based on a spectacle. In his "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities" (1983), Baudrillard already pointed at a cultural phenomenon—that masses do not require information and meaning but, rather, a spectacle: "[N]o effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence. What they reject is the 'dialectic' of meaning" ("In the Shadow" 10). Similarly, it was exactly the spectacle that the masses were served with the non-stop media coverage of the Persian Gulf War.

The turn of the millennium brought about another revolution. Since the appearance of Google in 1998, the world has had the opportunity to search for information more quickly and easily than ever. Advancements in computer technology, Internet access, and various new platforms like *Skype*, *Facebook,* and *YouTube* forever transformed the way humans communicate and interact. This also affected the way of reporting about war, and the way the public consumed those reports, making the reports all the more pervasive. The United States government (and military) fiercely tried to use the same Persian Gulf formula for securing public support of the pending Iraq invasion in 2003, but this time with little success. This is because by 2003, the world learned the truth about the war in the Gulf, and people were reluctant to believe anything served by the government and facilitated by mainstream media. With the emergence of the Internet, war blogs seemingly became an alternative media that the public turned to for trustworthy, unbiased, and uncensored information. However, the

analysis of Colby Buzzell's blog and memoir will soon indicate that such an alternative media function of war blogs was quite short-lived.

2. War Blogs and Military Blogs

Web logs, better known as blogs, appeared on the Internet by the end of the twentieth century, and the first war blogs appeared just days after the 9/11 attacks. The main objective of war blogs was to comment on "political and diplomatic circumstances surrounding the attacks" (Reynolds 60), their "chief attraction [being] that they offer[ed] perspectives overlooked in most U.S. news reports" (qtd. in Reynolds 61). In 2003, a journalist commented that war blogs enabled a "parse overview for news junkies who wanted information from all sides, and a personal insight that bypassed the sanitizing Cousineart of big-media news editing" (Levy). The number of war blogs exploded during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and soon even the mainstream media journalists became avid readers of war blogs. It is thus no wonder that the London *Times* dubbed the conflict in Iraq "the first www.war" (qtd. in Reynolds 61).

Additionally, when the war in Iraq started in 2003, American soldiers were supported by a massive infrastructure. Their military bases were like little towns in which the troops had phone centers, Internet cafés, gyms, shops, fruit juice stands, tailor shops, movie theaters, Xboxes, and PlayStations at their disposal.[4] On top of that, the infrastructure also included Internet access; therefore, e-mails, social media, and *YouTube* were soon flooded with comments, images, and videos from the battlefield from the soldier's perspective, which sparked a large interest among the readership. In their article "Believing the Blogs of War?" Johnson and Kaye provide three major reasons why

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[4] See: Colby Buzzell's memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (147–54), in which the author describes all the amenities that American soldiers had at their disposal.

military blogs gained not just popularity but also credibility during the Iraq War. The first reason was that blogs were written by soldiers whom readers found more informed and credible than the traditional media. Next, they saw them as more subjective and honest, and finally, the readers liked the fact that blogs were interactive, allowing them to post comments (317). All these purposes seemed to resolve the problem Baudrillard had with mass media—that there is no exchange of information and meaning: "the very concept of medium . . . it no longer acts as a *medium*, as an autonomous system administered by the code. . . . the code becomes the only agency that speaks, that exchanges itself and reproduces . . . it is no longer people who exchange; the system of exchange value reproduces itself through them" ("Requiem" 284–45). Blogs, on the other hand, were seen as personal with the ability to create meaning among one another through posts, comments, and responses.

It is then no wonder that the website milblogging.com (2005–2016) counted over 3,000 milblogs from over fifty countries for the duration of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and since 2005, there have been annual conferences regarding military blogs (Milblog Conference) with the aim of bringing together military bloggers and their avid readership. Also, the first anthology of military blogs, *Blog War: Reports from the Front Line of Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan*, was published in 2006 by Matthew Burden, a former US Army major and the founder of one of the most popular military blogs. In the introduction to the anthology, Burden states that there are three types of conflict reporting—war reporters, official reports from the Ministry of Defense, and soldiers' testimonies, pointing out that the last method has historically been the most susceptible to censorship. He praises the power of the military blog that gave an "unfiltered [and instant] approach to the War on Terror" to "anyone with an internet access and interest" because the "military population has access to the same

means of communication as the media" (4). Since 2007, there has even been a special literary award category (Lulu Blooker Prize) for books published from blogs.[5]

   In sum, the above-mentioned arguments indicate that, in the twenty-first century, war and military blogs have become the primary and preferred source of information about the war because the public believed that the mainstream media were once again controlled by the military. In fact, the media continued to write positively about the War on Terror up to the point that Martin Bell, a veteran and a journalist, discussed "the death of news" (221). In his opinion, the media "promoted the government's efforts with reports crossing the line from being detached observers to acting as if they were government representatives" (Bell 223). In the opinion of many, "journalists abandon[ed] the notion of neutrality and cover[ed] the war in terms of good guys/bad guys and good versus evil" (qtd. In Johnson and Kaye 316–17). Unlike the mainstream media, military blogs offered a valuable alternative.

3. *CBFTW*: "Becoming the Media"

Colby Buzzell was twenty-six years old when he joined the Army in 2003 to find some anchor in life and move away from alcohol, drugs, and petty crimes. He was deployed to Iraq the same year and started journaling, partly as therapy and partly to pass the time. When several computers arrived at his base in Mosul, the author decided to start a military blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which soon became widely popular up to the point that the author came under surveillance and was pressured into shutting it down. In 2005, he turned his blog into a memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* and was praised for his "un-

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[5] Colby Buzzell was the first recipient of the award for his book *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*.

filtered, often ferocious expression of . . . [a] boots-on-the-ground view of the Iraq war" ("Ex-GI's Memoir"). The book is a collage of diary and blog entries, enriched with excerpts from official CNN reports, fan mail, quotes from his favorite books and songs, the U.S. Constitution, and complete transcripts of military oaths, official military speeches, and numerous official guidelines for soldiers when addressing the media. All of this served as his method of questioning and subverting mainstream media and discrediting official government and military reports.

The first part of the memoir reflects on Buzzell's mentioned reasons to join the army, which are, ironically, not at all connected to patriotism, a sense of duty, or belonging to generations of servicemen in his family. His reasons are far more pragmatic in the sense that he wants to move away from his parents' house at all costs. It is interesting and important to note how Buzzell was influenced and shaped by American popular culture that immortalized soldiers and sacralized war to the point that he believed that his reasons for enlisting were an anomaly in the system, only to learn that the majority of enlisted persons decided to join for the very same reasons—financial security and housing independence. In addition, the influence of American popular culture seems to have shaped his expectations about the war and the army. Just weeks before deployment, his battalion met their new commander, who appeared on the stage with a Tomahawk in his hand (they were the Tomahawk Battalion). Buzzell admits that, as he was listening to the commander saying "Men, this is not a peacekeeping mission. We will not be handing out bread, we will be handing out lead," he imagined the scene as "something out of *Patton*" (Buzzell, *My War* 57) with an American flag unfolding in the background. Furthermore, the commander's speech denies the fact that the American public does not support the invasion because, in his opinion, real Americans love to wage wars (57). Next to this, Buzzell confirms how

his generation grew up on Hollywood war movies such as "*Apocalypse Now, Full Metal Jacket, Platoon, Hamburger Hill, Patton, The Dirty Dozen, Black Hawk Down, In the Army Now*" and that many of them probably joined the Army "because they watched these movies one too many times" (73). To them, these are "classic war flicks" (73) that clearly no longer bear any anti-war message but are rather consumed during leisure time before deployment. Stacy Peebles, in her study *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq*, observes this phenomenon and states that "instead of reflecting somberly on the carnage at hand, . . . [they] thrill to the violent and sexy spectacle of fighters like them violating social and moral taboos" (24).

During another battalion meeting, the soldiers were instructed on how they should deal with the media, in particular, what they *must* say if the reporters ask them about the mission:

- We are here to help Iraq restore its independence.
- We will work to eliminate the enemy that continues to hinder the progress for the Iraqi people.
- Our efforts support the continuing fight in the Global War on Terrorism.
- We will remain in Iraq until our mission is complete.

(Buzzell 60)

Clearly, the media were not directly to blame for censorship and the lack of criticism since, just like in the earlier Gulf conflict, the censorship came precisely from the ranks of the military leadership. Also, Buzzell was informed that embedded reporters would be with them in Iraq, with the aim of providing an accurate account of events. However, Buzzell remembers "how the embedded reporters reported the twenty-one days to Baghdad, and it was pretty sickening how they covered it. The media reported the war the same way they would have if it was the fucking Super Bowl of the century. Good vs. evil. America vs. Iraq. Us vs. Them. Right vs. Wrong" (Buzzell 59). Apart from

this, the author recalls how reporting about the war resembled a postmodern spectacle in which reporters were "all pumped up and excited like [they were] actually playing in the fucking game" before the report was interrupted by a "Britney Spears Pepsi commercial" and cell phone advertisements (60). It seems that the mainstream media still held onto the Persian Gulf War scenario regarding reports on the Iraq invasion, in which the line between reality and entertainment virtually disappeared. The public became a part of the "society of the spectacle,"[6] in which viewers, or better to say consumers, had only the illusion of being informed, whereas it was them who were actually consumed by hypermediation and hyperreality. As early as 1967, Guy Debord observed that life is an "accumulation of spectacles" and that reality resides in a "*pseudoworld* that can only be looked at" but not retrieved (4), which, in the digital age, surely became the new reality, or, as Baudrillard calls it, "hyperreality."

This is exactly what Buzzell wishes to challenge with his blog, however, but not at first. He admits that he learned about the opportunity to blog in a *Times* article and thought that posting "a little diary stuff, maybe some rants, links to some cool shit, thoughts, experiences, garbage, crap, whatever" (Buzzell, *My War* 107) might be a fine way to pass the time. His first post appeared on June 22, 2004, and the seeming anonymity of the Internet made him believe that "with the Internet and the blog format, it looked like I could write whatever I wanted to, post it, and people I didn't know at all would be able to read what I wrote . . . and I would remain totally invisible and nameless" (110). The *Times* article also informed him that "self-published blogs were becoming an alternative to the media" and mentioned the fact that soldiers were already blogging about the war (113), which made him wonder how the military would allow that. He soon learned

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[6] A term coined by Guy Debord in his 1967 study *Society of the Spectacle*.

that most of the blogs were shut down, except for the ones "saying a bunch of brainwashed rhetoric . . . that everyone could read on "the official U.S. Army recruiting website" (114). Despite being aware of possible and probable censorship, Buzzell continued to blog about his daily routine, his favorite books, songs, poems, and musings about the war up until the ambush in Mosul in August 2004.

This incident challenged Buzzell to write more openly in his blog. In fact, he remembers that before deployment, the Army—together with all the equipment—provided a list of approved responses to the questions the media might ask them, specifically stating what they could and what they *could not* discuss with the media, such as the number of troops and the information about operations, locations, casualties, and Rules of Engagement. These restrictions seemed logical since the information might have jeopardized soldiers' security and endangered the mission. However, Buzzell is enraged when he reads the CNN report on the fighting he participated in:

> MOSUL CLASHES LEAVE 12 DEAD
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> Clashes between police and insurgents in the northern city of Mosul left 12 Iraqis dead and 26 wounded, hospital and police sources said Wednesday.
>
> Rifle and rocket-propelled-grenade fire as well as explosions were heard in the streets of the city.
>
> The provincial governor imposed a curfew that began at 3 p.m. local time (7 a.m. EDT), and two hours later, provincial forces, police and Iraqi National Guard took control, according to Hazem Gelawi, head of the governor's press office in Nineveh province. Gelawi said the city is stable and expect the curfew to be lifted Thursday. (Buzzell 248)

The next day, Buzzell posts a lengthy account of his experience in the fighting on his blog, in which he details what actually happened as he himself took part in a grueling four-hour exchange of fire with the in-

surgents.[7] He reports hearing and feeling "the bullets whiz literally inches" (250) from his head and saying that he has never experienced fear like that: "I cannot put into words how scared I was" (251). His vehicle was repeatedly attacked with RPGs, and they had to leave the "kill zone" to reload:

> We rolled back to the area where we'd just dodged death, and we were taking fire from all over. I fired and fired and fired and fired and fired. At EVERYTHING. I was just 360-ing the .50-cal and shooting at everything. We were taking fire from all over, and every single one of us had our guns blazing. . . . This gun-fight had been going on for 4 ½ hours when the INGs [Iraqi National Guard] showed up to the party (about fucking time) in their ING pick-up trucks, all jam packed with ING soldiers in uniform armed with AK-47s. (252–56)

After the fight, he learns that two of his platoon members were in-jured and in critical condition, and reveals in his blog that he does not believe that the "CNN's report of only 12 dead is accurate" (260). This post was soon removed from his blog, and the full, thirteen-page-long transcript can now only be found in his memoir. The next blog entry quotes "Task Force Tomahawk Press Release," stating that "multinational forces served in a supporting role, providing additional support where and when the Iraqi leaders involved in the attacks re-quested it. No multinational forces were killed" (261). This report, though more detailed, provides incomplete information by not men-tioning that they have severely injured soldiers, and blatantly lies about the supporting role of "multinational forces, who were, in fact, only Americans."[8]

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[7] See: cbftw.blogspot.com/2004/08/men-in-black.html.

Note that the post has been removed from the page; however, the readers' responses shed some light on the experience.

[8] On many occasions, Buzzell detected how the language of war has been appropriat-ed in order to confuse or ease the public. Namely, euphemisms became a part of both the military and media discourse to the point that the original meaning is obscured or entirely incomprehensible to the average consumer of mass media. The purpose of

The next day, Buzzell learns that there is only little press infor-
mation regarding the ambush and fight in Mosul and wonders "what
else goes on here in Iraq that never gets reported to the people back
home" (263). However, to his surprise, Buzzell's entry becomes viral
as he starts to receive emails from all over the world (from civilians as
well as soldiers). Mostly, they thank him for shedding light on the ex-
perience of what it is like to be in a combat zone, as well as for
providing comfort to parents whose sons are serving in Iraq. Several
days later, Buzzell also learns that parts of his blog have been included
in the *News Tribune*, the local Tacoma, Washington newspaper, and
realizes that his "weblog will soon be the next casualty of war" (273).
Soon enough, the Pentagon discovers the article and informs com-
manders in Iraq. Buzzell was not punished in any way for blogging; in
fact, many soldiers, including the commander, were avid readers of his
blog because he was a good writer (275). The commander allowed
him to continue writing if his platoon sergeant approved it beforehand
and emphasized "that he didn't want to censor [him] and that [he] still
had the freedom of speech thing, as long as [he] wasn't doing anything
that would endanger the mission" (275–76). On several more occa-
sions, Buzzell's commanders made it very clear that, even as a soldier,
he had the right to the First Amendment, but that he could not go on
any more missions or even leave the base "until further notice" (285).

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such language was to propagate and support the certain image (picture or simulacrum)
of war, rather than to objectively report on it:

> One day we went on a vehicle patrol through one of the city's main
> arteries, the Tampa route. Vehicle patrols were still known as
> "movement to contact" tasks. The army used to call them "search
> and destroy" tasks, but as we are now a kinder, gentler army, now
> we call them "movement to contact." . . . Just as we can no longer
> call the enemy an enemy. Instead we call them "anti-Iraqi forces. . . .
> Movement to contact is when we would go trolling around the
> streets of Mosul in our Stryker vehicles to see if we could lure some
> terrorists or insurgents to take the bait and attack us" (Buzzell 168).

In other words, he was disabled from writing about the things that truly interested the public under the pretense that his blog might jeopardize operational security. By this time, Buzzell's blog had become quite popular and other non-profit journalists sided with him, claiming that his confinement had little to do with operational security and all to do with "American politics and how the war is seen by a public that is getting increasingly shaky about the overall venture" (291).

The visibility and popularity of his blog posed a real threat so that the authorities might shut it down, and he did not want to waste his "chain of command's time by having them review all [his] writing for 'OPSEC' concerns prior to [him] posting it on the World Wide Web" (300). Therefore, he decided to log off on August 22, 2004, after three months and a total of twenty blog entries.

4. Conclusion: From Alternative Media to the Spectacle

Personal war testimonies, especially those written by soldiers in the midst of war, have always been susceptible to censorship. The reasons for such a treatment are, in fact, understandable since there is always a danger that crucial information might come into the possession of the enemy. However, there are other reasons for such erasures that directly deal with the desired perception of the war in the public eye and consciousness. In the history of the U.S., unfavorable images, reports, and testimonies (especially about the war in Vietnam), fueled anti-war demonstrations and anger towards both the military and the government. Since then, the American military has devised a tactic to provide the media with information about the war, which became a spectacle and a propaganda-fest devoid of any reality. At the turn of the millennium, and with the rise of the Internet, the public gained access to more than just a sanitized version of war reposts. It was the military blogs in particular that seemingly provided a more accurate, detailed, first-hand, and immediate war coverage at first. Early studies reported

that military blogs seemed to have restored the public belief in the democratic process and gave voice to the marginalized. They profiled as alternative media that apparently could not be censored by reporters, editors, or the military and political elite, which was unimaginable during earlier wars.

With those ideas in mind, Colby Buzzell started his blog *CBFTW* during his deployment in Iraq in 2004, and it became one of the prime examples of soldiers on active duty who tried to dispute, challenge, and subvert the mainstream media's coverage of the war. Through his cynical, candid, and unfiltered accounts, he managed to fill in the gaps and downright reveal the shortcomings of official media and military reports regarding specific battles in Mosul. What is more, his writing provided reassurance and comfort to many parents whose sons served in Iraq during that time. However, as Buzzell's blog became viral in a matter of days, and got publicity in the media, it consequently disturbed the highest ranks of the American military—the Pentagon. Despite the fact that his blog did not jeopardize operational security, it did contradict official statements about the war, and the destiny of such accounts was clear—they were to be removed from the Internet. As of 2007, the Pentagon issued "a regulation that attempts to control material before it is posted on the Internet, requiring personnel to consult with superiors and security officers prior to Internet activity" (Peebles 44), which happened to Buzzell three years earlier.

However, since the Internet is "a medium that even the strongest government could not control" (Peebles 44), the officials took the "if you cannot beat them, join them" stance. Thus, "what once had the hint of sassy independence or even underground rebellion has gone mainstream" (Dao) in a sense that the biggest Internet site, milblogging.com, was overtaken by military.com in 2006, and the following year, President George W. Bush met with the milblogging community. Unsurprisingly, "the blogs represented at the meeting are generally

pro-Bush and pro-military, and the ensuing reports were highly sympathetic to the president" (Abramowitz). One can then argue that the vigor of these alternative media was as short-lived as Colby Buzzell's blog. The independent, unfiltered, and riveting accounts of the war present in the first military blogs have become co-opted by the very institution they once desired to challenge and dispute. The fact that they have been transformed into yet another spectacle is supported by the fact that the 2023 milblog conference was held in Las Vegas under the name Military Influencer Conference ("MIC") with a list of celebrities attending and lucrative cash prizes included. The conference that in 2005 was envisioned as a meeting between bloggers and their readers, ultimately metamorphosed into an all-American product—showbusiness.

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