

April Oliver speaks

Fired CNN journalist on dismissal of Arnett: "They will do anything to stem the flow of information"

Barry Grey
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The World Socialist Web Site spoke on Tuesday with April Oliver, who produced the CNN investigative report "Valley of Death" which aired last June. Oliver and her co-producer Jack Smith were fired by CNN when they refused to disavow their exposé of US use of sarin nerve gas in a secret special forces raid into Laos in 1970 (Operation Tailwind). Peter Arnett, who narrated the TV report, caved in to pressure from CNN executives and repudiated the story. He was publicly reprimanded by CNN at the time, and has now been fired. (See accompanying story.)

BG: *What is your reaction to the firing of Peter Arnett?*

AO: CNN didn't take this action last summer because they felt it would raise too much of an uproar. They hoped they could do it in such a way as to keep it off of the radar screen, so to speak. Peter was a different case from myself and Jack Smith. He was a very prominent personality.

His firing was a direct result of Pentagon pressure. Perry Smith [a retired major general and former CNN consultant who resigned in protest over the Tailwind report] told the *Wall Street Journal* last July that CNN would not get cooperation from the Pentagon unless Peter Arnett was fired.

BG: *What is your feeling about Arnett's refusal to stand by the Tailwind report?*

AO: Arnett is a good reporter who doesn't accept Pentagon disinformation. He is a legend in this business, but he made a Faustian bargain. In saving his job, he destroyed it.

BG: *What is the broader significance of Arnett's*

firing, as well as CNN's cave-in on the Tailwind report and your own dismissal?

AO: It is sad how the CNN executives caved. They will do anything to stem the flow of information and keep themselves protected. There is something so amiss within the executive ranks that nobody thinks there is anything improper in State Department spokesman James Rubin being married to CNN's chief reporter on the Kosovo War, Christian Amanpour.

The military and veterans' groups not only determine what CNN covers, but who covers it. That the military should have veto power over the employment policy of the networks is alarming. The message is: fall in line, otherwise, you're history. Above all, don't mess around with national security issues. It is absolutely chilling. I see the fallout from CNN's capitulation on Tailwind continuing.



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