

British journalist killed by American troops

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The tragic death of veteran British ITV News correspondent Terry Lloyd, who was killed by American troops last Saturday on the southern Iraq warfront, raises disturbing questions about how far the Bush and Blair governments will go to suppress independent reporting of the US-led invasion.

Accounts given by a survivor of Lloyd's television news crew, cameraman Daniel Demoustier, who was injured in the incident, indicate that US tanks opened fire on the ITN team after it came into contact with a group of Iraqi soldiers who appeared to be seeking to surrender.

Lloyd's crew, which was heading toward the major Iraqi-held city of Basra, was one of the first non-"embedded" news teams to enter southern Iraq. Previously, the only Western media reports were heavily vetted stories filed by journalists attached to US and British units.

Lloyd was 50, and married with two children. He had just celebrated his twentieth anniversary with Britain's ITN media network, making him ITV News' longest serving reporter. He was also the first correspondent killed on assignment in ITN's 48-year history.

ITN confirmed Lloyd's death on Sunday, stating that his body was in a Basra hospital. ITN said the fate of his colleagues Fred Nerac, a French cameraman, and Hussein Osman, a translator from Lebanon, was not known, but they were missing.

Demoustier, the fourth member of the team, said they had been approached by two carloads of Iraqi soldiers who seemed to want to surrender. He told Barbara Jones of the *Mail on Sunday*, who rescued him: "Immediately the allied tanks started heavy firing directly at us. Rounds were coming straight at the Jeep, smashing the windows and puncturing holes in the bodywork," he was quoted as saying.

"Then the whole car was on fire. We were enveloped in flames. It was terrifying. I'm so angry that we were

fired on by the allies. The Iraqis must have been their real target but I'm sure they were surrendering and anyway they were all dead within minutes."

Demoustier said he had tried to break cover and join an Iraqi farming family who were walking down the road with a white flag. But he was forced to retreat to the ditch when machine guns began to fire again. "I crouched there longing to know where my teammates were. It was impossible to go and find them."

Lloyd's vehicle, a light-colored Mitsubishi Pajero off-road van, was clearly marked with large signs identifying it as a TV reporting vehicle.

A statement issued by ITN seemed to rule out the possibility that US forces had deliberately targeted the journalists. "Coalition forces had seen a number of Iraqi 'irregulars' operating in the area. When they saw four vehicles going down a road in the same direction and saw that one of them contained armed Iraqi soldiers, they took this group of vehicles to be a group of irregulars. We assume that is why they opened fire."

While it is not possible, without an independent inquiry, to state with any certainty whether the killings were intended or not, a number of circumstances point to the fact that, at the very least, the Pentagon is anxious to prevent journalists from operating outside its control.

Lloyd's team was among a handful that crossed the Kuwaiti border without official clearance and began driving north toward Basra after reports that the large city had been secured by coalition troops. These reports later turned out to be false, and US and British commanders announced that they had given up trying to seize Basra, despite earlier predictions that the city's people would hail the allied troops as liberators.

At the same time, Arab-language media outlets, including Al Jazeera, broadcast pictures of terrible civilian casualties from the US-British bombing of Basra, while the Iraqi authorities reported a civilian

death toll of 77.

As soon as ITN confirmed Lloyd's death, tributes began to pour in from other journalists, who described Lloyd as a highly respected, courageous and conscientious reporter, known for his cautious and honest reportage. A number, including former BBC war reporter Martin Bell, noted that Lloyd was highly professional, safety-conscious and known for not taking unnecessary risks.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's office and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon praised Lloyd as a respected journalist and sent condolences to his family, but did not call for an investigation. For its part, the Pentagon bluntly called upon media organizations to restrain their reporters.

Victoria Clarke, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said: "It's very dangerous out there, especially when people are wandering freely between coalition and Iraqi forces. We say again to news organizations that we urge you to exercise restraint with journalists."

In the context, the Pentagon's response can only be seen as an implied threat to other reporters who are endeavoring to provide objective and accurate coverage of the US assault and its impact on the Iraqi population.

This is not the first time that such a message has been delivered. When the Pentagon first unveiled its plan to "embed" journalists with military units, it specifically refused to vouch for the safety of reporters operating outside Pentagon control and in fact warned journalists that using their satellite phones could make them targets for unfriendly missile fire.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) demanded an inquiry into Lloyd's death. "Talk of so-called 'friendly fire' and 'precision bombing' is put into a terrible perspective when we learn of the appalling circumstances of this incident," said IFJ general secretary Aidan White. "There must be a full and searching inquiry into how a press vehicle, clearly marked, can be subject to such an attack."

The IFJ also urged US troops and their allies to protect all media staff covering the Iraq war, including those not formally traveling under military protection. "It is not acceptable to create a privileged group of so-called 'embedded' journalists and to ignore the needs of other journalists from all around the world," it said.

Under the Pentagon's detailed guidelines—which run to 50 pages—embedded correspondents are forbidden to

report any information that would undermine or compromise the US offensive, including reports of military and civilian casualties.



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