The Washington Post
July 26, 2018

We shared foxholes. Now they boo us.

by Martha Raddatz

Like so many of my colleagues, I have covered this nation's wars for decades, working side by side with our soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen. I have shared foxholes and flight decks with these brave Americans, and I have felt our mutual respect for the responsibility that each of us holds in our chosen professions. It has been an honor covering them and the families who support them. I am proud that I can tell their stories.

It is the job of the media to rigorously cover the military and to ask hard questions. But I could never have told those stories if the military did not open its doors to me.

I think of the combat mission I witnessed from the back seat of an F-15 that gave me a firsthand look at the care our aircrews take when conducting those missions. I think back to the summer of 2004 in Iraq, when I heard about a battle in which eight of our soldiers were killed in just a few hours, most trying to rescue a platoon that had been ambushed. If the Army hadn't helped me tell that story, if those soldiers and their families hadn't trusted me with some of the most painful memories they will ever have, the heroics of that battle would never have come to light. There would have been no ABC News stories, no book, no National Geographic series on the battle.

I am proud to have gained the hard-won respect of so many of those I have met over the years. But as I listen to the vitriol aimed at the press by our president, I worry that those days of mutual respect will disappear for the next generation of reporters.

We in the press are all sadly getting used to listening to some Americans booing, threatening and belittling the media at the behest of President Trump. But Trump's rally before hundreds of veterans at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention Tuesday in Kansas City, Mo., was especially disturbing.

"Don't believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news," Trump said, pointing to members of the press there to cover the event.

Have those veterans who booed and taunted the media in response to Trump's cue forgotten that some members of the press corps are combat veterans? Have they forgotten that there are members of the press who continue to cover the military after suffering life-altering injuries while at the side of our courageous service members? Have they forgotten that since the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq began, hundreds of journalists have given their lives for their work, many times while reporting from U.S. war zones?

And when the president boasts that he will fix the Department of Veterans Affairs, have his supporters forgotten the attention that the press has drawn to those very issues? Do they remember that in 2008, an investigation by The Post's Dana Priest, Anne Hull and photographer Michel du Cille was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for public service for "exposing mistreatment of wounded veterans at Walter Reed Army Hospital, evoking a national outcry and producing reforms by federal officials"?

The president may sometimes acknowledge that there are some reporters who do good work. But that is drowned out by his endless, fiery attacks on "fake news." It hits all of us in the press corps, no matter what we cover and how we cover it.

Over time it will take its toll. That will be a shame, and not only for our democracy. If Trump's rallying cry continues to resonate, it will be a terrible loss for the very veterans he claims he wants to help.

Martha Raddatz is chief global affairs correspondent for ABC News, co-anchor of ABC's "This Week" and author of "The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family."

© 1996-2018 The Washington Post