



Greg Macek
Director of News Practices

October 19, 2006

Major General Robert Newman, Jr.
Adjutant General's Office
Joint Force Headquarters
202 North 9th Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear General Newman:

Thank you for the letter that you sent to Alex Wallau dated October 13th regarding our recent Brian Ross reports on an ambush of a US Army convoy in Iraq. As the Director of News Practices for the Brian Ross Unit, *World News*, and *Nightline*, your letter was referred to me for my review.

In your letter, you assert that our broadcast was "incomplete and misleading" and that we left an unfair impression with our viewers that members of the Virginia National Guard "abandoned the convoy after being attacked, leaving unarmed American contractors at the mercy of the insurgents." As the basis for those criticisms, you expressed concern about our efforts to contact the US military, including the Virginia National Guard, for the results of any investigation into the incident and a response to the allegations made by the independent contractor we interviewed for our report. We take your concerns very seriously, and I am happy to address them here.

I can assure you that ABC News is committed to fair and balanced reporting on every story that we do. This one was no exception. We recognized the particular sensitivities surrounding the disturbing ambush portrayed in the videotape we obtained from the independent contractor involved in the attack, and we wanted a detailed response from the US military to the contractor's account of the incident. Our producer made repeated efforts to contact the appropriate military personnel for comment on the ambush at the first opportunity after the story came to our attention.

Beginning on the morning before our reports were scheduled to air, our producer contacted the Pentagon who referred us to the Combined Press Information Center for the Multi-National Force-Iraq as the appropriate body to comment on the ambush. She immediately called CPIC-Iraq and informed them about the story, notified them of our deadline for the next day, and inquired about any investigation into the incident. During a follow-up conversation after our producer called again later that day, Major William Willhoite of CPIC told us that there may not be a record of the incident because it occurred more than a year ago and the records may have

been deleted, but he would look into our request. After another call first thing the next morning and a reminder of our deadline for that day, Major Willhoite informed our producer he was still working on her request. After she called again several hours later, Major Willhoite referred our producer to Fort Bragg for comment. After leaving an initial message, she was able to speak with Colonel Billy Buckner at Fort Bragg in the early afternoon who told her the Army was aware of the incident, but it would not be able to give a comprehensive statement for our broadcast because the appropriate records for the ambush could not be located.

Although we followed the channels of communication recommended by the Pentagon, we wanted to make another attempt to obtain a more detailed response from the US military before our broadcast deadline. Despite receiving no official confirmation from CPIC-Iraq or Fort Bragg that the Virginia National Guard was even involved in the ambush, we attempted to contact the Virginia National Guard directly as an added measure based on the independent contractor's belief that members of the Virginia National Guard were protecting the convoy that day. A spokesman for the Virginia National Guard, Lieutenant Colonel Chester Carter, told our producer that he could not comment as the unit in the incident would not have been under the Guard's command and control at the time of the ambush, but he graciously said he would investigate the matter further in an effort to help. Later that day, LTC Chester responded via email to our producer confirming that the 1173rd Transportation Company was deployed in Iraq at the time of the ambush and that "the incident was investigated by the unit's higher headquarters in Iraq." LTC Chester wrote that "since the unit was under the operational control of US Central Command and the Army at the time of the alleged incident, it is more appropriate for them to address this." In effect, our producer was referred by the Virginia National Guard to the same channels of communication and the chain of command at CPIC-Iraq we had pursued from the outset.

We stand by Brian Ross's broadcast reports of the ambush which were based on the first-hand account of the independent contractor who witnessed and recorded the events of that day. We made repeated good faith efforts to obtain appropriate comment from the US military, and we included the response they provided under our deadline which we had to meet due to the competitive nature of the story. When we received a statement from Multi-National Corps-Iraq spokeswoman, LTC Michelle Martin-Hing, the day after our broadcasts, we posted the complete statement on the Brian Ross blotter page online as soon as possible. While we would have sincerely liked to have included such a statement in our original broadcast reports, Brian Ross's online site receives millions of viewers and has the added benefit, unlike television broadcasts, of remaining accessible at any time to viewers where they can see our full reports and all updates like the statement provided by LTC Martin-Hing.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us. We appreciate hearing from distinguished and knowledgeable viewers like you, as it provides us with an opportunity to review and assess our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Macek", written in a cursive style.

Greg Macek