



Top-ranked news

Stars and Stripes keeps military informed

This weekend marks the second anniversary of my column. I started on Memorial Day weekend in 2010 with a look at a website that features a virtual Vietnam Wall. For Memorial Day in 2011, I wrote about a site that observed the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

To honor those who have sacrificed in service to our nation, I'll continue what appears to have become a Memorial Day tradition by reviewing another website with a military theme.



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InSites

Stripes.com is the website of Stars and Stripes, the U.S. Department of Defense-authorized news organization for our military community. Stars and Stripes started with a brief stint as a newspaper published by Union troops in the Civil War, and it reappeared in World War I. After a hiatus between world wars, it restarted in World War II and has been publishing continuously ever since.

Modern military press

Stripes.com went online in 1999 as the newspaper followed industry trends and expanded into a multimedia news organization. It now features a mobile site, an iPhone app, videos, podcasts and a digital edition of the printed paper that can be downloaded as a PDF. There's also at least a dozen blogs on the site covering topics from news and weather to rumors and the challenges military spouses face. And, of course, it has the requisite presence on Facebook and Twitter, as well as an RSS feed.

The organization describes itself as an independent source of news

and information with guaranteed First Amendment privileges subject to Congressional oversight. In other words, it's much like a civilian newspaper in its reporting of facts. When the paper started its current run during World War II, Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall reiterated comments made by World War I American Expeditionary Force commander Gen. John J. Pershing, "that no official control was ever exercised over the matter which went into Stars and Stripes. It always was entirely for and by the soldier. This policy is to govern the conduct of the new publication."

A review of the content on Stripes.com seems to bear this out. While there is certainly lots of coverage of the bravery and sacrifices of military personnel, misconduct in the ranks is not ignored or "buried in the back pages." In fact, the headlines on the site as I write this are predominately concerned with negative aspects of military affairs:

- *Jury in Fort Hood plot sees video of GI buying bomb-making items*
- *Leaked memo: Afghan 'burn pit' could wreck troops' hearts, lungs*
- *Angry veterans demand end to backlog of disability claims*
- *Flood of Chinese counterfeit parts put US aircraft at risk, report says*

That's hardly the type of propaganda one would expect from government censors.

Though the site's primary focus is stories with a military angle, it also covers the rest of the news. In fact, because the military is deployed all around the world, there's extensive coverage of international news. There's also sports coverage, opinion columns, classified ads and lifestyle coverage such as travel, video games and education. The print edi-

tion carries some of the same features as The Times-Tribune, including Dear Abby, comics, puzzles, weather and horoscopes.

Uncommon valor

I have never served in the military, or witnessed combat, so I'm always impressed by stories detailing the bravery of those who did. The site has a section called Heroes that features the stories of service members who earned the nation's highest awards for valor. The tales are riveting accounts of action above and beyond the call of duty. Those that survived the ordeals don't appear to relish in the retelling, but instead reveal a sincere humbleness. Their devotion to their comrades in arms, even allied soldiers from other nations, is inspiring.

The design of Stripes.com is similar to many other newspaper websites. A banner across the top features the logo along with navigation tabs. Below that is a section with a half-dozen featured stories. Hovering over the tab for one of the stories brings a photo, headline and the lead paragraph to the front. Clicking on them takes you to the full story. The rest of the page is divided into columns with headings and clickable headlines. Promos for special features and ads fill out the columns. The site is visually unified, but not very dynamic, and the editing needs to be tightened up. There's interesting content and it gives us civilians a little insight into what our service members deal with while defending our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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