Today we watch live coverage of breaking news events across the globe and we read and listen to local and national events that are updated via internet and satellite transmission. Cable network news and the internet provides newspaper stories and video coverage of news and views 24 hours a day. Being a journalist 150 years ago was much tougher.

The first attempt to send professional correspondents into a war occurred during the Mexican War of 1848. A group of newspapers from New York and New Orleans sent five men into the battlefield. Not much of their writing remains, but they did show the government that free enterprise and initiative is more effective than bureaucracy. The newspapers used a combination of the Pony Express, steamboats, railroads and telegraphs (only short sections of railroad had telegraph lines) to get their reports to Washington long before the official Army reports. The government did not like being shown up, so they arrested
several editors for improper use of the Postal System. (Harris, 1999)

Before and during the Civil War, newspapers were the primary source for news. The number of newspapers was estimated to be more than 2,500 with more than two-thirds being published in Northern cities and towns. (PA official program commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, 2011)

The Civil War brought us press accreditation.

The war correspondent came of age during the Civil War. Newspapers were highly partisan, not just North and South (some Northern newspapers supported the South), but politically as well. Coverage was usually slanted to match editorial positions. This sounds like a lot of the claims about today’s larger newspapers and broadcast stations. During the Civil War the press had lots of freedom to sit in on military planning sessions. Newspapers might have been credited with urging Southern states to secede from the Union, some feel that they actually helped start the war and they also played favorites with commanding generals. Journalists needed support in the field, food, forage for their horses, access to mail and the telegraph; the Army was not required to provide it.
President Lincoln intervened to reach a compromise that would balance the needs of the nation through a process called accreditation. This meant that the federal government certified members of the press to cover the war. Accredited journalists were required to carry press passes issued by the military. (Biagi, 2011)

Because of President Abraham Lincoln’s accreditation of the Press, they were allowed to sit in on planning sessions. The press knew where, when, and how the next battle was going to happen. Many times they were able to get the news into the newspaper before the battle started and sometimes this tipped off the other side. Many commanders would not cooperate with the war correspondents. Some commanders soon found out that the written word can be sharper than a sword. When word got back to government officials of how bad morale was and what an unorganized mess the unit was, many times President Lincoln would remove that commander. As the war went along, an understanding was reached between the press and the military commanders. The press would not reveal strategies before the battle started and the military would provide food and horses. President Lincoln would often seek the advice of reporters and editors in Washington because they were getting news back to Washington quicker than he was getting information from the
field. President Lincoln felt that the reporters’ accounts were more accurate. Newspapers delivered a running report of the war (more or less accurately), revealed mistakes and incompetence, but, above all, served as cheerleaders. (Harris, 1999)

Newspapers were also active in the debate over slavery in the years leading up to the Civil War and remained important primary source material in documenting this debate. Two New York City newspapers, Horace Greeley’s Tribune and Gordon Bennett’s Herald, took opposite sides in this debate, with the Tribune opposing slavery while the Herald criticized abolitionists and supported secession. William Lloyd Garrison of Massachusetts founded his abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator, in 1831, and former slave Frederick Douglass edited the North Star in Rochester, New York. (PA official program commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, 2011)

The Civil War brought us photojournalism.

While photographs from earlier conflicts do exist, the American Civil War is considered to be the first war to be photographed extensively. For the photographers who ventured out to the battlefield, it was extremely difficult and a time consuming process. Photographers had to carry all of their heavy equipment, including a wet darkroom, in a wagon.
During the Civil War, the procedure for taking photographs was complex and involved much effort. Two photographers would arrive at a location. One would mix chemicals and pour them on a clean glass plate. After the chemicals were given time to evaporate, the glass plate would be sensitized by being immersed -- in darkness -- in a bath solution. All of the chemicals used in the process had to be mixed by hand, including a mixture called collodion. Collodion is made up of several types of dangerous chemicals including ethyl ether and acetic or sulfuric acid. Placed in a holder, the plate would then be inserted in the camera, which had been positioned and focused by the other photographer. Exposure of the plate and development of the photograph had to be completed within minutes; then the exposed plate was rushed to the darkroom wagon for developing. Each fragile glass plate had to be treated with great care after
development -- a difficult task on a battlefield. (Photography and the Civil War, 2011)

![Photographer's wagon and tent](image)

Cold Harbor, Va. Photographer's wagon and tent between 1860 and 1865 (Taking photographs at the time of the Civil War, 2000)

**Photojournalism is Born**

At the Battle of Bull Run was photographer Mathew Brady, who convinced President Lincoln that a complete photographic record of the war should be made. Until the Civil War, photography had been confined primarily to studio portraits because of the cumbersome equipment and slow chemical processing. Brady photographed the battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg and sent photographic teams to other battles. (Biagi, 2011)

Newspapers did not yet have a method to reproduce the photographs, but Brady’s pictures were published in magazines, making Brady the nation’s first news photographer. His 3,500 photographs demonstrated the practicality and effectiveness of using photographs to help report a news story, although
newspaper photographs did not become widely used until the early 1900’s. (Biagi, 2011)

Newspaper and magazine illustration artists could draw battlefield scenes from a photo or drawing from the field and carve it onto a wood block engraving. Sometimes it took several wood block engravings, all hand carved, to create a printable plate to print photos or drawings for newspapers. You can see the wood grain in the photos. This tedious process lent itself better to the weekly newspapers or monthly magazines than it did to the deadline printing daily newspapers. Harper’s Weekly was one such paper known for its’ quality illustrations which were a combination of photo and wood carving or an artists’ rendering and a wood carving.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 1861.    PRICE FIVE CENTS.
VIEW OF THE BOAT-HOUSE AND LANDING AT FORT PICKENS, FLORIDA-
March 15th, 1861
MRS. GENERAL GAINES.—[FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY BRADY.]

(Fort Pickens Scenes, 2003-2008)

More common in most newspapers of this era were the lack of photos. Newspapers were able to print maps and other line art illustrations. The following clippings show a typical front page from the New York Tribune the day after President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, along with the actual Gettysburg Address story. (DeSalvo)
The President then delivered the following dedicatory speech:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new Nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. [Applause.] Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that Nation or any Nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We are met to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting-place of those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether
President Abraham Lincoln didn’t write his Gettysburg Address speech until the day before he delivered it. This is one of the most famous speeches of all time and it was also President Lincoln’s shortest speech (2-3 minutes). What is most remarkable is that there were no TV cameras and it wasn’t carried live on radio. The telegraph was invented only a few years before the
The Civil War started. Reporters covered the event and sent their stories to their respective newspapers by telegraph. This was a remarkable speech given without the help of a bullhorn, microphone or even broadcast to millions via a TV screen. This reminds me of a shoe salesman from Chicago named D.L. Moody who became an evangelist and without the aid of a microphone or via television spoke to millions (some estimate his total audience in the tens of millions) at home and abroad.

President Lincoln’s speech was dynamic and rich with word pictures. “Our **fathers brought forth**, upon this continent, a **new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated** to the proposition that ‘**all men are created equal**.’” Some of the word pictures from the scene of the Battle of Gettysburg included **engaged, conceived, dedicated, endure, battlefield, consecrate, hallow ground, increased devotion, gave the last full measure of devotion, highly resolve, new birth of freedom and government of the people by the people for the people.** “that we here highly resolve these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people by the people for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” (Dehoyos, 2008)

The Battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863, was considered the turning point of the war. On November 19th, 1863 President...
Abraham Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address at the opening of the cemetery for Union soldiers killed in the battle. On April 9th, 1865, General Lee surrenders, ending the Civil War. (visit-gettysburg.com, 2007-2011)

As a newspaper photographer I’ve witnessed the evolution of B&W photojournalism into color, then into digital photos and video, and recently into the immediacy of the 24 hour breaking news cycle we have today. With development of digital cameras and computers we now have dry no chemical “darkrooms”. Adobe’s darkroom software is called Lightroom. We also have one-man newsrooms. People known as backpack journalists can carry a digital camera/digital camcorder, laptop, ipad or smartphone with internet access, cover news and send it electronically to their internet blog for the world to read and see. If it is newsworthy, they sell it to the highest bidder. History shows us that we have come a long way. We have a wealth of information at our fingertips. Some people today say that we are a country divided. In some respects that may be true, but take a quick look back at the division and bloodshed during the Civil War era 150 years ago and you will soon realize that we have a lot to be thankful for.

“Ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors to bullets.”
Abraham Lincoln (Abraham Lincoln Quotes, 2001-2011)


