

The Northern Echo

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COMMENT

No time for extremism

THE barbaric murder of Drummer Lee Rigby will rightly occupy the nation's thoughts over the weekend.

The emotional appearance by his family yesterday reminded us how this single act of violence will have a profound and lasting effect. Our hearts are with his family, and we hope in their devastation they can draw some strength from the nation uniting behind them.

His assailants seem to have thought that by using new technology to broadcast their justification for their appalling crime they would gain support for it.

The opposite, though, is true. They are isolated in the face of a wave of revulsion. They have only showed how weak they are and how their violence will never move any of their causes closer to fulfilment.

Which brings us to this weekend's march in Newcastle by the English Defence League. Its members come to the North-East not out of deep-seated concern for local issues. They come only to stir up trouble and cause a ruck.

Other far right extremists in other parts of the country will also be jumping on the bandwagon with hate in their hearts.

They, too, are weak, isolated and desperately unpopular with ordinary people.

With tensions being deliberately engineered, the police in Newcastle face a difficult job to keep law and order. It is to be hoped that it all passes off peacefully – the country does not need any more victims.

For all the barbarity of the last week, Britain is still one of the very best places in the world to live. It does have its problems, but violence and extremism offer no hope for its future because they will not solve anything.

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BREAKING THE NEWS: The front page of The Northern Echo on Thursday after the murder in Woolwich

Irresponsibility – or a duty?

THE man in the black hooded top is shouting, waving his arms in the air and staring directly into the camera. His right hand is stained lurid red. In his left are a meat cleaver and a butcher's knife, still wet with blood.

"You people will never be safe. Remove your governments. They don't care about you." He turns to skulk across the street and the camera pans out to reveal a body slumped in the road.

Wednesday's murder was first reported as a straightforward knife attack – horrible, but not unusual in Woolwich. Witnesses first assumed it was a gang dispute.

By the time ITV had obtained the film, and given Michael Adebolajo the audience he craved, the real story emerged. This was terrorism, the like of which has not been seen in Britain since the London bombings of July 7, 2005.

As a journalist, my first thought after watching the video was clear: run it. As a university lecturer, I had to think about how – or even if – I should show this to a class of 18-year-old students.

Every newsroom in the country faced a similar dilemma.

ITN went first, with the film headlining bulletins on ITV, Channel 5 and Channel 4. At the start of Channel 4's 7pm show, an ashen-faced Jon Snow announced: "This is an important warning. If you have children watching, you may not want them to see what happens next."

Downing Street was apparently furious. At this point, the BBC was still holding the clip back. There was indignation on social media from their journalists. Douglas Marshall, BBC England's head of social media, tweeted: "What people choose to click on online should be different to what viewers passively receive from TV." Broadcaster Sue Llewellyn listed the reasons against screening: "Gratuitous horror. Victim's rights. Watershed. Encouragement. Taste. Decency. Victim's family."

It appeared that the BBC was acting on a point of principle. But later that night Adebolajo's grim video confession was leading the News at Ten.



The media has been accused of playing into the hands of terrorists by screening the video confession of this week's attack in Woolwich. Journalist and Teesside University lecturer **Neil Macfarlane** looks at how the story broke and whether the news made the right call

When the video footage first emerged, it looked like the work of an unbelievably brave citizen journalist who dared to confront a killer seconds after the act. We now know one of the attackers had ordered passengers from a bus to get out their camera-phones and start rolling.

Sir Peter Fahy, the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, said the media had been deeply irresponsible. He warned that publicity was exactly what the attackers wanted and we could now see copycat killings.

The logic of that argument is understandable. This was a callous and brutal murder by people twisted by undiluted hatred. But so was 9/11. Should we delete all footage of the Twin Towers falling for the same reason?

THE idea that the traditional news media still controls the flow of information broadcast to the public is outdated. Everyone with a smartphone can be a journalist now, and anyone with a computer can view their reportage in an instant.

That is not to say that trained journalists are redundant, and that what is good for YouTube is good for the Six O'Clock News.

The Woolwich video shown on television was edited. By all accounts, the full version contains even more graphic detail that was responsibly removed before broadcast. Likewise, the awful filmed decapitation of al Qaida hostages never makes it to our screens.

A reporter's duty is to inform the public about the world around them. It is to tell the truth, whether it is palatable or not. Journalism in its purest form can be seen in the work of war correspondents, who risk their lives to expose the true horror of conflicts across the globe. When they phone London to check that their copy, photographs or film has arrived, they plead with their news editors to show it unedited, in its full gore. The response, more often than not, is that people don't want to see it while they're sitting in front of the TV eating their dinner, or leafing through the paper over a morning coffee. When those reporters hang up the phone, they go back onto the street feeling they have betrayed the victims and let the killers off the hook.

You cannot view Wednesday's attack without considering the wider world. It is more than 12 years since Afghanistan and Iraq began and we are a nation suffering from war fatigue. The public want our troops to be brought home. The Government is desperate to bring our involvement to an end.

The world is sometimes terrifying, and always complex. The more we know about it, the better. This week's attack in Woolwich was horrendous and the footage was repugnant. But this is the threat our servicemen and women face every day. Those awful scenes are played out in the deserts of Helmand and the backstreets of Baghdad, with our soldiers under constant threat from IEDs, suicide bombers and who knows what else. We owe it to Drummer Lee Rigby to remember that.