

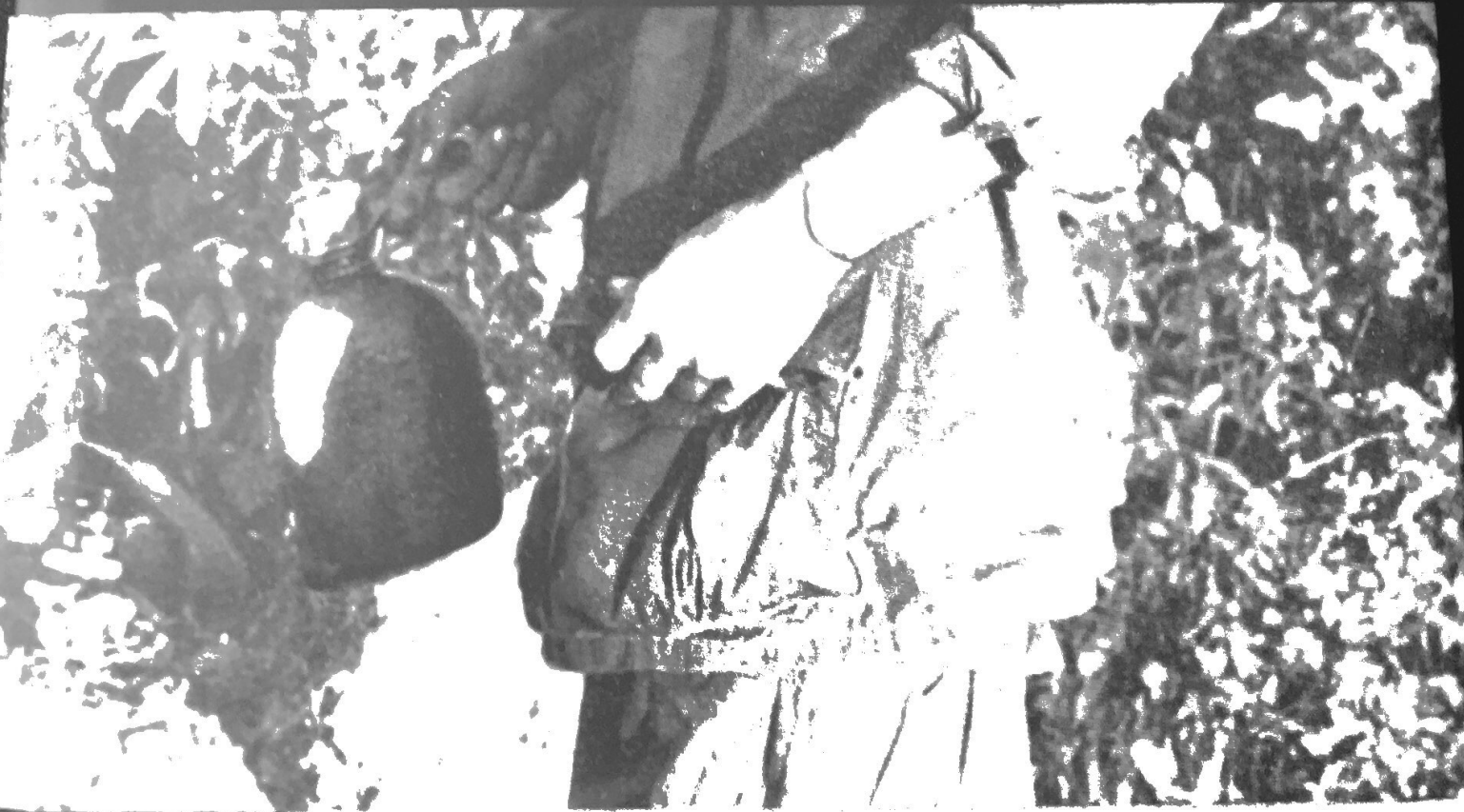


# FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

A M E M O I R

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H . D . S . G R E E N W A Y



U.S. \$26.00  
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great reporter, exceptional storyteller, tells in this vivid memoir what it's like to report conflict up close—from Indochina to the Balkans, Pakistan to Gaza, Iraq to Afghanistan, and everywhere the United States has fought wars in the last five decades. He bears witness to some of the country's most dramatic and often failed uses of American power abroad.

Greenway was at the White House the day Kennedy was assassinated. He was in the jungles of Vietnam in that war's most dangerous days and left Saigon by helicopter from the American embassy as the city was falling. He was with Sean Flynn when Flynn decided to get an entire New Guinea village high on hash and with him hours before he disappeared forever in Cambodia. He was wounded in Vietnam and awarded a Bronze Star for rescuing a marine. He was with Sidney Schanberg and Dith Pran in Phnom Penh before the city descended into the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge. Greenway covered Sadat in Jerusalem, civil war and bombing in Lebanon, ethnic cleansing and genocide in the Balkans, the Gulf Wars (both), and reported from Afghanistan and Iraq as they collapsed into civil war.

This great adventure story—the life of a war correspondent on the front lines for five decades—is an eyewitness report of some of the most violent and heroic scenes in recent history. Equally riveting is Greenway's testimony to the cross-purposes of many of America's failed armed initiatives all over the world.

## Away to War, Home in Hong Kong

My parents were well acquainted with Indochina because they had been collecting birds on museum expeditions between the wars, and I wrote to my father about the rain.

“The northeast monsoon came early this year, and by September it was raining almost every day in the northern provinces. I cannot tell you how miserable conditions became up here, especially in the Marine outposts along the DMZ such as Gio Linh and Con Thien. It became impossible to stay dry. The mud got so thick that it would cake on your boots and clothes in heavy layers. And of course there was a lot of noise up here in September which made everybody very nervous.”

The noise was the long-range artillery that would pour down fire on the marines from across the DMZ. The war of punji-stick booby traps and small-arms ambushes was giving way to a more conventional war in the north.

The North Vietnamese, who had really taken over the war from the local Vietcong in Eye Corps, were masters of terrain and concealment. You saw their dead bodies, turning the color of clay, but I rarely ever saw a live North Vietnamese or Vietcong. On rare occasions you would see a wounded prisoner or suspected guerrillas, their arms bound behind their backs, squatting on the earth awaiting interrogation. Prisoners were treated roughly. Once I saw some Americans set dogs on terrified suspects.

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Often the first you knew that the enemy was even near would be the fireflylike muzzle bursts winking at you from a tree line across a paddy field. The bullets would snap when breaking the sound barrier in the air around you. The sound always reminded me of insects in the air, but the novelist Karl Marlantes, in his celebrated book *Matterhorn*, put it more dramatically when he described them as "cracking like the bullwhip of death."

The bullwhips of death could reach you before you heard anything, and reporters, like soldiers, had to get used to it. Some have said that the soldiers and marines held reporters in contempt, but I never encountered that. They were always amazed that you would be there when you didn't have to. But most of them wanted to tell you their stories, and when you spent time in the field sharing hardships and fears, and humping a pack, you tended to win their tolerance.

And we saw them die. Some would drop just like sacks from a clean bullet to the head. Others would die screaming in agony. So many were so young, still in or hardly out of their teens. I was in my early thirties then, but I seemed like a grandfather to them. From time to time we reporters would die, too. I lost half a dozen friends before the Indochina wars were over. I believe the total number of journalists killed was close to seventy-five.

On one truly horrible afternoon, after a firefight, I flew out in the back of a helicopter filled with dead men wrapped in their ponchos because there had been too few body bags. As the helicopter rose the wind caught the ponchos and blew them away, and I was left in the company of corpses. Soon the effluvia of their drained lives began to spatter me, and just for a moment I had an urge to fling myself out of the helicopter, to follow the fluttering ponchos down into the green jungle below.

We were a generation brought up on the movies, and we often talked about how such and such a situation would be portrayed in Hollywood and who might play the parts. I was cast as a doomed Confederate officer. Ours was also a generation heavily influenced by Ernest Hemingway. I might have thought F. Scott Fitzgerald the better writer, but that did not lessen Hemingway's grip on my imagination. Looking back, had I not gone to Pamplona

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to run the bulls during a college summer as in *The Sun Also Rises*? And why had I gone hunting in the green hills of Africa on summer breaks at Oxford? And, for that matter, what was I doing here covering a war as Hemingway had done in Spain?

"In the fall the Castillian plain is the color of a lion and as bare as a clipped dog," wrote Hemingway in a dispatch from the Spanish Civil War. "Looking across the flat yellowness from the hillcrest where the old front line had run you saw four villages and a distant town . . . the ultimate objective of the great government offensive of July." We all would have given a lot to have written those sentences.

From time to time I went out on operations with the US Army in the Mekong Delta, where you waded through water half the time. War in the Central Highlands could be physically demanding, with steep wooded hills, and in the rubber plantations along the Cambodian border the trees would bleed white latex when the bullets hit them. Sometimes I would go on operations with ARVN troops, "ARVN" being the acronym for "Army of the Republic of Vietnam." I always wondered if they would take care of me if I was badly wounded, not because I thought they wouldn't want to but just because their medical equipment was not as good as what the Americans carried.

But it was the marines that I stuck to the most, always with worse equipment than the army, older and fewer helicopters, and prone to take more casualties given their training in aggressive tactics. Marines were trained to rush in across beaches, not dig holes to hide in. The holes they did dig were dug reluctantly.

Sometimes television crews would ask you to carry big yellow bags filled with film for shipment back to Saigon. Everyone did this if asked because one day you might want a TV guy to carry out some hastily written story when there was no chance of getting to a telephone. I once saw an American soldier toss two rivals' film bags out of a helicopter door and keep the third. Was it that he preferred ABC to NBC and CBS? I never got a chance to ask in the roar of the engines. Besides, he had a funny look in his eye that made me wonder if I might be thrown out the door, too, if I brought it up.

. . .

The Marine Corps kept a press center at Danang, a major port city in Eye Corps. It was right on the banks of the Han River, and you could get a shower, a steak, and a beer. It was pretty spartan, but it was heaven itself after a week in the bush. The press center was where you could telephone your stories down the line to Saigon, and reporters today can only imagine the agonies of filing in those pre-computer days. You had to wait until it was your turn on the telephone. Then you had to build up a series of calls from one operator to another, patching the phone connections together, and if a circuit was broken the whole edifice of phone patches could come tumbling down and you would have to begin again. All the while you had to shout, "Working, working, working," so that operators downstream would not think your circuit was free and cut you off. Once the connection to Saigon was made it was often so bad you had to shout. My friend Jim Pringle of the Reuters news agency had a Scots accent so thick that Reuters in Saigon thought itself lucky if there was another Scot there to take down Jim's story. One time, after spending forty minutes to get a connection, I shouted: "It's David Greenway." But the person on the other end of the line said, "Greenway's not here," and hung up.

Here is another letter to my father, written in May of 1967.

I spent the better part of a week up near the Cambodian border during an Operation called Junction City. One day we camped near an old villa with a French planter still living there in the middle of the war. It is said that the French have their own arrangement with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. I had a drink with him, and a cigar, with the sound of tanks clanking on his driveway and 105 artillery barking amongst the trees. Soldiers shoot at any wild life they come across, you will be sad to hear. An elephant was shot with an anti-tank gun up near the Laotian border not long ago.

I have become very pessimistic about the chances of winning this war. Maybe with 600,000 troops and 20 years we might pull it off, but we will probably lose this one as the French did and go home.

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In November I wrote to him again saying that General William Westmoreland, who was in charge of US forces, was telling people that "by next spring it will be clear to even the worst critics that we are winning the war. But it seems to me that he underestimates the ability and the determination of the Communists to hang in." My faith in the American enterprise was fading fast when I compared what I saw in the field with what was being said at headquarters in Saigon. And by the time spring came to Vietnam again, the war had come back to the cities, and the very opposite of what Westmoreland had predicted had come to pass.

I wrote my father,

In the eight months I have been here we have managed to push most of the main force units back away from the population areas towards the borders. The big fights nowadays take place near the frontiers . . . But I can see no indication that the other side is willing to give up. Meanwhile the social fabric of South Vietnam continues to disintegrate. There is a dangerous apathy, a total mistrust of the Saigon government. Perhaps time and stability will bring them around, but what the villagers want is security and recourse, recourse meaning someone to turn to if their wives are raped and their crops stolen. Security meaning simply to keep the war away from their villages. Everything else, all the social services and other stuff we boast about giving them comes second. I hope I am wrong, but I don't see an end in sight.

PS: Do you remember that rubber plantation I wrote to you about a few months ago? There was a big battle up there last week and, sadly, I went up to find the Frenchman dead and much of the place in ruins. He was caught in the crossfire and by the time I got there South Vietnamese soldiers were washing their clothes in the swimming pool. Others had broken into the wine cellar and were boozing it up. One soldier had smashed the strong box and had fistfuls of French francs. An American Special Forces lieutenant managed to con him into thinking it was all worthless, and the Special

Forces guy bought several thousands of francs for about 30 cents in South Vietnamese money.

I interviewed General Westmoreland often in those days, always a favorite with *Time* magazine, which put him on its cover. He had a quiet, controlled voice with not much inflection. He was always perfectly turned out. Even his fatigues had razor-sharp creases and an excess of starch. There was an amusing, and as it turned out prophetic, article written back then positing the thesis that the best-dressed generals usually lost to scruffier commanders. Think of sloppy Grant and the better-dressed Lee at Appomattox Court House. Think of MacArthur, open shirted and tieless on board the USS *Missouri*, compared to the immaculately dressed Japanese in formal clothes coming to surrender.

Creighton Abrams, who replaced Westmoreland, was an altogether different type. Gruff, down-to-earth, he soon ended the "sweep and destroy" tactics of Westmoreland's command, tactics that were forever leading Americans into well-prepared traps to be killed in large numbers. Abrams told me he was worried about morale, too, which had begun to flag as draftees poured into the ranks. He spoke of the French army mutinies of World War I, when soldiers began to feel they were cannon fodder in useless operations. "Fragging," soldiers murdering their officers, was on the uptick as the war dragged on.

Morale was flagging in the army of South Vietnam, too. I was witness to an execution when a young "aspirant," an officer in training, was sentenced to death for some infraction I have now forgotten. A crowd of people had gathered to see the young man die, and I was reminded about public executions in London a couple of centuries ago when they were occasions for a public holiday. He was dressed in white and brought in by two soldiers, one on either arm. He seemed on the verge of collapse as he was tied to a stake in front of a firing squad, which was standing around talking and laughing, perhaps out of nervousness. He was allowed his last words, which were: "I die for two sergeants," presumably meaning that two sergeants were the guilty ones.

If I had imagined a scene where the victim refuses the blindfold, flips



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away his last cigarette, and faces his end with some kind of dignity, I was quickly disabused. He died in a hail of bullets, having soiled his pants and slumping like an animal killed in a stockyard. I was sorry I had come.

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It was *Time's* policy to allow its Vietnam reporters some time off every few weeks or so. For me that meant a return to what was then the British crown colony of Hong Kong, where my family lived. The flight into the old Kai Tak Airport was a thrill in itself. Planes had to circle in from the sea; drop low over the apartment blocks of Kowloon, nearly taking the laundry off the lines; and bank hard right to touch down on a spit of land sticking out into the harbor.

We lived in a three-story house with a view looking west over the South China Sea and north to the purple hills of China in the distance. Today this view is often obscured by smog and smoke from the great industrial pollution that has overtaken China, but in the sixties the skies over Hong Kong were clear. There were flame-of-the-forest trees on our street, and between us and the sea you could see whitewashed cow barns in the near distance. The cows lived on land far too valuable to be used by dairy farmers for long, and indeed, today there is nothing but walls of high-rises where cows once chewed their cuds. Our old house, too, has long since gone to make room for even taller high-rises.

Our Chinese landlord lived on the ground floor. We lived on the middle floor, and on the top floor lived the four widows of our landlord's father, known to all as the upstairs "*tai tais*," Chinese for "wives." They were amiable ladies without a word of English. Once when one of my children was crying inconsolably on the balcony, a candy came down on a string from the floor above. Enchanted, my daughter stopped crying.

Hong Kong was an island of sanity in those days, with the agonies of the Cultural Revolution convulsing China and the whole restless rim of Southeast Asia brimming with insurrections and worry. Refugees from the mainland would bring lurid tales of Red Guard excesses throughout China, and from time to time bound corpses would float down the Pearl River into Hong Kong waters, testament to what was happening upstream in Canton. "Horror Bod-

ies," the popular press called these unwanted intruders into British territory. We had a small Chinese junk to go out with friends and family on picnics, and we were always worried lest we encounter corpses in the clear waters off the coast.

In the colony itself there were demonstrations by leftist youths waving their little red books containing the sayings of Chairman Mao. Huge red banners with Communist slogans hung down the outside of the Bank of China building overlooking the cricket pitch where Englishmen in whites would play in between cups of tea. From time to time a bomb would go off—nothing too big compared to the bombs used today in Beirut, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, but disturbing nonetheless. In all about fifty citizens of Hong Kong lost their lives in those troubling times.

On one occasion, just back from Vietnam, I was walking on a Hong Kong street when the sound of a bomb several streets away sent me instinctively scrambling for cover. "For heaven's sake, Pop, it's only a bomb," said my small daughter with the insouciance of an old veteran of riot and insurrection.

My youngest daughter, Sadie, was born in Hong Kong, and alas, I did not make it back from Saigon for her birth. I did make it back sooner than I might have, however, because in the middle of the night in Saigon I was awakened by JB's voice saying, "David!" There was an urgency to her tone that concerned me. You may say it was a dream and that I knew Sadie's birth was coming soon, but it was as real to me as if JB had been in the room. I already had the air ticket to Hong Kong booked by the time the cable came through announcing Sadie's birth.

The British ruled Hong Kong fairly and efficiently, and no Chinese subject of Hong Kong in his right mind wanted to be ruled by Mao Tse-tung at that time. The one thing nobody in an official capacity ever talked about was, what if the Chinese decided to take Hong Kong? After all, the British were living "on borrowed time in a borrowed place," as the Australian newsman Richard Hughes had put it. The island of Hong Kong might technically have belonged to Britain in perpetuity, but the rest of the territory was on a ninety-nine-year lease with about thirty years to go. Unlike other colonies, there was no ques-

tion about independence for Hong Kong. When the thirty years were up it would go back to China.

At one point during the Cultural Revolution it looked as though China's "People's Liberation Army" was advancing on Hong Kong, but a British helicopter pilot whom I knew tipped me off that the PLA was digging in facing the other way. Chou En-lai had reportedly decided to send the army to defend the colony from Red Guard hotheads. China would have Hong Kong in its own time, not in another Cultural Revolution spasm.

In 1997, just fifty years after Britain gave up India in bloodshed and tragedy, Hong Kong was returned to China peacefully, with the governor and the prince of Wales there in the pouring rain to see the British flag lowered on their last major overseas possession. The royal yacht was there, too, waiting to take the prince and the governor away, and late that night buses rolled across the frontier carrying the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. I wrote in my rain-splashed notebook that I was seeing the final end to the British Empire, that great enterprise that had so absorbed the world for centuries for good and ill. From then on Britain's largest dependency in terms of population would be Bermuda.

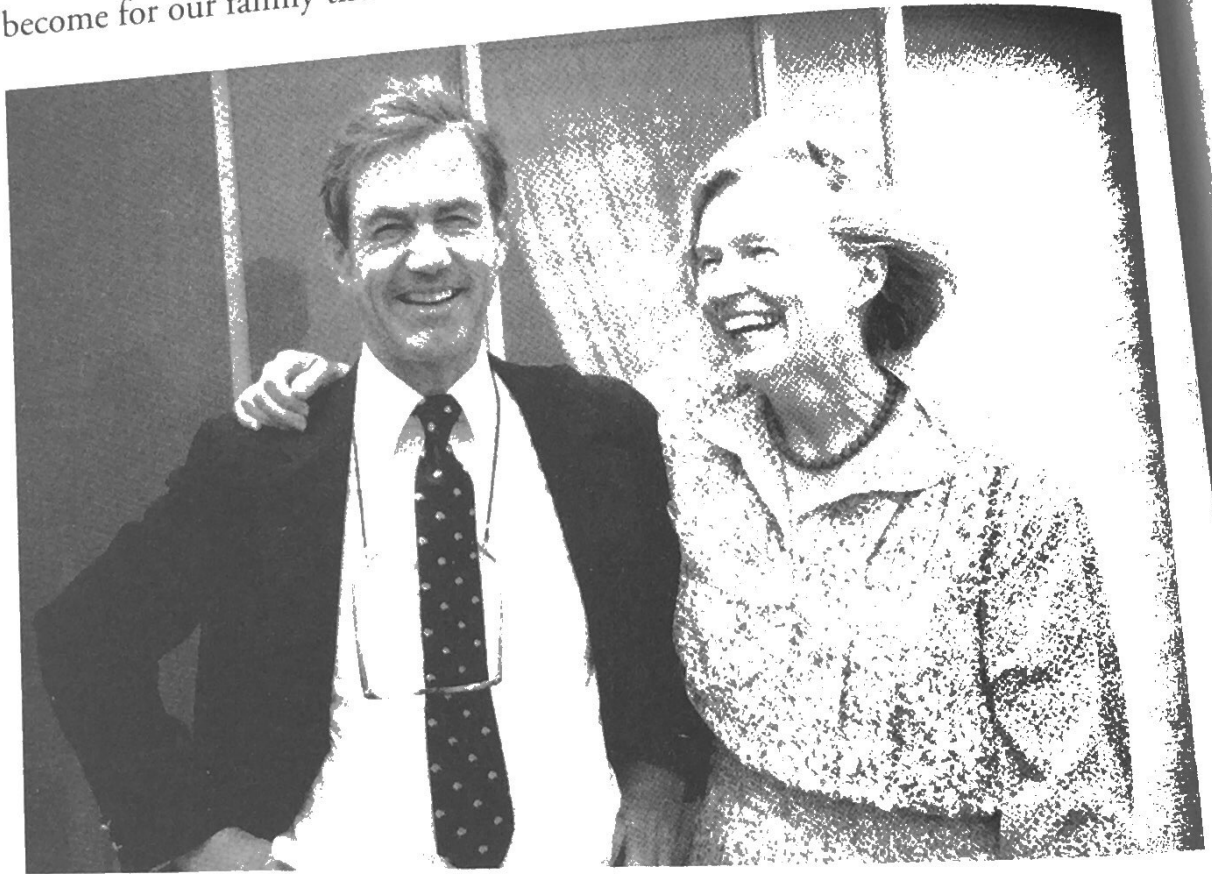
Mao and the British had agreed on a historic compromise, "one country, two systems," whereby Hong Kong would revert to China but keep its own laws, customs, and capitalist system for another fifty years. In 1967, however, nobody knew whether Mao might decide to foreclose earlier.

One time a new British general arrived in Hong Kong and gave a press conference. He started talking about his Gurkhas, tough little soldiers from Nepal whom the British used to fight their colonial wars. He explained how he would deploy them along the border. Reporters gasped. Was the general raising the forbidden topic? Was he suggesting that Britain could actually defend Hong Kong against the overwhelming might of the People's Liberation Army across the border? "Perhaps not," said the general, "but we would give them an interesting afternoon."

Early on in Hong Kong we found our beloved amah, Ah Bing, who remained with us on three different continents until the end of her life. "Amah" on the China coast meant someone who took care of children, and Ah Bing treated ours with love and affection as if they were her own.

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There were some journalists' wives who found Hong Kong boring with their husbands away in Saigon. This was not true of JB, who had majored in Oriental studies at Barnard and Columbia, but it was hard on others who were less resourceful. Once we took the wife of an Italian journalist to lunch at the Repulse Bay Hotel because we heard she was distraught over having to live in Hong Kong. The bay had been named for a British battleship that had once anchored there. The hotel oozed with colonial charm, and we ate on the veranda overlooking the blue waters of the South China Sea and the islands beyond. With fragrant frangipani growing and flame-of-the-forest trees coming into bloom on a bright sunny day, it was for us as pretty a picture as you could find anywhere. "Now, you have to admit this isn't bad," I said to my Italian guest as we looked at the view. She gave a deep sigh and said what has become for our family the ultimate put-down: "It is not Amalfi."



*The author and his wife in Hong Kong, 1976.*

We took wonderful weekend cruises in an old junk for hire, called the *Sea Dragon*, with our friends Nick and Sheila Platt and their boys. We would go out to the New Territories, where there were pristine beaches and clean seas.

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One couldn't find a better way to get away from the war, but the war never completely left my mind. Nick, a diplomat in the American consulate, would go on to help open up America's Liaison Office in Beijing after President Nixon's famous visit to China and before there was a formal embassy. A generation of outright hostility between the two countries was brought to a close.

My times back with my family and friends in Hong Kong seemed all too brief and far between, and it always seemed to me I was back in the airport flying back to Saigon almost as soon as I had arrived. My eldest daughter, who was now in school, was asked by her teacher: "What does your daddy do?"

"He works at the airport," was her reply.

When I came back to Hong Kong as the *Washington Post's* man on the China Coast in the following decade, and when I wasn't traveling, my main job was to report on what was happening inside that great mystery of China during the Cultural Revolution. Americans could not, in the early seventies, live in China, but even European and Canadian journalists who lived in Beijing found themselves greatly restricted.

The Cultural Revolution started when Chairman Mao decided that his revolution was getting too sclerotic and that what China needed was a fresh dose of rebellious upheaval. And with Red Guard youths terrorizing the cities and the countryside, a little like the Brown Shirts in Germany as Hitler was coming to power, upheaval is what Mao got.

Hong Kong was full of diplomats and journalists, and other experts on China, who tried to divine what was really going on among the fractious leadership in Beijing and the provinces. Shanghai could always be counted on to produce factions and personalities more red than even Beijing. We had access to Chinese provincial radio broadcasts, copied down and translated by CIA, and from these texts it might be possible to see one province putting out a different line from another. A master of this was an American diplomat at our consulate named Sherrod McCall. He had a sixth sense about who was trying to do in whom among the Chinese leadership and what each new political campaign, such as the one denouncing Confucius, really meant. It was

McCall who brought to my attention that one of the Chinese leaders, Deng Xiaoping, was saying that it doesn't matter the color of the cat as long as it catches mice. This appeared to be in direct contradiction to what Chairman Mao was saying, that it was better to be red than to be expert in anything.

Deng's statement turned out to be one of the most important pronouncements of the century, for it would be Deng who would eventually become China's paramount leader, virtually dismantling the Communist economic system and putting China on the road to being, at this writing, the second-biggest economy in the world after the United States. Mao had famously said when his guerrillas won China's civil war: "The Chinese people have stood up." But Mao would soon force them to their knees with an ideological tyranny that was worse than what had gone before. It was Deng who finally let them begin to stand.

During the harsh days of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese were always trying to sneak out of China into Hong Kong, some of them by swimming, and it became sort of a game. If anyone was caught trying to sneak in he was sent back. If he made it he could stay in Hong Kong.

Once in a while reporters, even Americans, were allowed to come up the Pearl River to the Canton trade fair for a rare visit inside China itself. You had to take a train to Lo Wu on the border, cross over a rickety bridge, and take another train to Canton. Today the border area is a vast industrial zone, but then it was nothing but open fields and poor farms. We were sequestered in the East Wind Hotel, which had sort of a cruise ship atmosphere, because you weren't really allowed out all that much, and if you were, it would be to some Potemkin industrial site or model commune.

With Deng in power I did get to go along on one of Henry Kissinger's frequent visits to Beijing in 1976. There was almost no traffic on the road in from the airport. The uniform blue suits that both men and women wore were everywhere in the streets. Bits of old China were still left in the byways of Beijing, most of them torn down later to make way for the modern. Visitors to China today cannot imagine how poor and behind the times China was thirty-five years ago. Most people traveled by bicycle and were afraid to even speak to foreigners.

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When I visited Shanghai early in the twenty-first century, JB and I stayed in the old French Concession, by far the most charming part of Shanghai. But I could not help but marvel that China, after almost two centuries of suffering under foreign occupations of their coastal cities, the Japanese invasion, civil war, and Mao's misrule, had finally shaken all that off and was taking the place China held in the late eighteenth century, as one of the richest and most powerful countries in the world.

After five years of living in Hong Kong, it will always have a special place in our family. Our middle daughter, Alice, would return to the former colony to write for the *South China Morning Post*, and her first novel, *White Ghost Girls*, was set in the Hong Kong of the late sixties.

## My Luck Runs Out

During the Indochina wars I was too seldom in Hong Kong. It was Vietnam that obsessed me then, and I acquired a certain reputation for being lucky. Some of my colleagues said that they felt safer on military operations with me. Mike Herr told me once that he could not picture me dead in the rain. Indeed I felt myself to be in a sort of time machine, as in the H. G. Wells story. With all my inoculations and malaria pills, I felt immune to the sickness I saw around me, and I just wasn't going to be shot. I felt as if I had come almost from another century and was walking through an ancient conflict from which I would and could soon return to the present.

In retrospect, 1967 was a fatal year for Vietnam, for it was then that the US command decided that Americans would fight the main force war while the South Vietnamese would take a secondary role in the defense of their own country. It sapped the will of the South Vietnamese, who always should have been at the forefront of their own defense.

In Saigon life was pleasant and safe enough for the moment. There may have been wire mesh on the outside of some cafés opening on the street, to deflect a grenade thrown from a passing motorbike, but that kind of incident wasn't happening anymore. Strangely, I used to wake up in the middle of the night with the smell of dead people in my room. I would turn on the light, and it would slowly go away. It happened often in those days. I am sure a



psychiatrist would have had fun with that one, but I never told a living soul at the time.

There were parties and social gatherings, although the war was always present in conversation. A group of cynical young foreign-service officers sent out invitations saying, "Sir Cloudesley Shovell invites you to a light at the end of the tunnel party." "The light at the end of the tunnel" was a phrase used by an unfortunate French general, Henri Navarre, back in the fifties when France was trying to keep Vietnam French. Navarre, like Westmoreland, had been predicting that victory was just around the corner. As for Shovell, he was an eighteenth-century British admiral who led his entire fleet onto the rocks, losing many hundreds of lives.

Some Americans had Vietnamese girlfriends. There was a restaurant that had been a favorite of the French foreign legion during the last Indochina war. One sat on hard wooden benches and legionnaires had scribbled on the white walls. One hot, sweaty evening, with hot, sweaty customers making too much noise, the room suddenly fell silent. I turned around to see my friend Frank Wisner, a young Vietnamese-speaking foreign-service officer, come in dressed in a white linen suit, powder blue shirt, and black tie. On his arm was a stunningly attractive Vietnamese girl in a flowing blue ao dai, the becoming traditional dress of Vietnam.

In total silence, Frank and his lady mounted a ladder that led to a private dining room aloft. He shot us his signature grin as he rose above us. Once they had disappeared in the "*salle privée*," the crowded room below exhaled in an audible sigh.

One of my friends in the Time-Life bureau, the photographer Dick Swanson, married his Vietnamese girlfriend. He dressed up in the traditional garb of a Vietnamese mandarin, run up by a Saigon tailor for the ceremony. Many of us bought clothes in Hong Kong or Saigon because they were inexpensive. Dick wore shirts with little Chinese characters under the breast pocket. People would ask him, "Is that your name in Chinese?" It was common to get your name translated into Chinese just for the fun of it, but no. Dick's shirts with the discreet Chinese characters said: "No Starch."

Swanson would return to Saigon as the city was falling to get as many of

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his in-laws out as was possible, and later the couple opened a restaurant in Washington that was a regular stop for the old Vietnam crowd.

Another memorable Saigon moment came at a diplomatic reception. *New York Times* correspondent Tom Buckley was chatting up one of the guests when his bureau chief, R. W. "Johnny" Apple, who was quite a bit younger than Buckley, bustled up to remind Buckley that he still had a story to write. Apple wasn't the rotund gourmand and bon vivant he later became. He was a skinny kid with a crew cut.

"Is that your boss?" asked Tom's interlocutor.

Buckley, who considered himself the real writer in the *Times's* bureau, shot back: "Only in the sense that Pope Julius II was Michelangelo's boss."

Apple would become a good friend and a legendary *Times* reporter after the war. Many of the friends I made during the war became friends for life.

Later in the war, Al Schuster would become Saigon bureau chief for the *New York Times*, and under his administration the *Times* rented a new office, which was redecorated with bright Thai cotton curtains and other amenities. My friend Gloria Emerson, the only woman in the *Times* bureau, had complained to me that the previous *Times* office was disgusting. "Helmets, bayonets stuck in desks, jockstraps left in corners, horrible," she had said. So when the *Times* moved to better quarters I asked her: "How did you pull it off?"

"This new man Schuster is such a dear," she told me. "I explained to him that a new office in the same building could be obtained, and that it had two bathrooms instead of only one. 'I can understand how you might want a ladies' room, Gloria,' Al said to me. But I said, 'No, no, Al, one bathroom is for you and me. All the rest of the staff has this dreadful dripping gonorrhea.' Al signed the lease the next day."

Saigon in 1967 was just transitioning from white suits for men to dark suits, probably because of the increasing use of air-conditioning. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who had been a friend of my family, received me in a white cotton suit, and most Vietnamese officials wore the same at that time. But that was changing fast. Journalists, too often, wore silly little safari jackets known as TV suits, because television correspondents seemed particularly drawn to them.

My best Vietnamese friend was Pham Xuan An, who worked for *Time* and was in many ways a brilliant reporter. He gave me many insights into Vietnamese life and ways of thinking. He was also working as a spy for Hanoi, but I didn't know that until the war was over. He could often be seen at Givral, a coffee shop and bakery near the Continental, where he and his colleagues would discuss the latest political gossip. Some said that there was more intelligence exchanged in the smoke-filled air at Givral than at the entire CIA Saigon station. Alas, the old Givral is gone now, torn down along with the entire art-deco-style block, like so much of old Saigon, to make way for the new.

I used to bring An birds from the bird markets of Bangkok and Hong Kong. His thin frame and delicate hands, always with a cigarette between tobacco-stained fingers, made me think of an ancient Chinese mandarin. His deceptions only remind me that we Americans never really knew what was going on in Vietnam. We blundered in and blundered out again without ever really coming to grips with the society we were trampling underfoot.

It was An who suggested I go and see Edward Lansdale, who was attached to the American embassy. I had no idea that Lansdale was in Saigon, or even that he was still alive and active. Lansdale was a legend at the time. Some said that the Republic of South Vietnam was in good part his creation, although my friend and mentor Stanley Karnow, a Vietnam expert, said that Lansdale's role had been exaggerated by both friend and foe.

Lansdale, an air force intelligence officer, had served in the OSS, forerunner of the CIA. His new spy masters assigned him to be the liaison officer to the then-Filipino secretary of national defense, Ramon Magsaysay, in 1950. The newly independent Philippines was facing a Communist-inspired insurgency by a shadowy group called the Hukbalahaps, or simply "Huks." Lansdale specialized in psychological operations using techniques he had learned in the advertising business before the war. He urged on Magsaysay counter-insurgency tactics, winning over the peasants, and was largely credited with organizing Magsaysay's successful efforts in suppressing the Huks.

The Huks were based in central Luzon and never made inroads in other areas. Unlike other leftist insurgencies in those days, the Huks were never fully embraced by the Soviets nor by Mao. Later, with Lansdale's help, Magsaysay

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became president of the Philippines. As it would be in the following century, when General David Petraeus reinvented counterinsurgency for the Americans in Iraq, Lansdale was considered a messiah of how to conduct this new kind of warfare.

Lansdale had come to Vietnam during the French war as part of a Franco-American mission to help train what was then called the Vietnamese National Army to defeat Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh. When the Geneva Conference of 1954 resulted in the partition of Vietnam between a Communist north and the non-Communist south, Lansdale was in charge of dirty tricks, sabotaging facilities in the north that the Communists might use, even pouring sugar in the gasoline tanks of trucks the French were leaving behind. He also organized efforts to frighten Catholics into leaving the north and settling in the south in a population exchange permitted by the Geneva Accords. When a little-known figure, Ngo Dinh Diem, emerged as America's candidate to run what the Eisenhower administration saw as their new anti-Communist bastion in Asia, Lansdale was there to make him into a new Magsaysay.

An himself had been recruited by Lansdale into his intelligence network in the 1950s, though of course Lansdale never knew An's heart was in ridding his country of foreigners, nor that An's loyalties belonged to the Communists whom Lansdale and Diem were trying to destroy. But then neither did anyone else.

Diem was a true nationalist and anti-French, which pleased the Americans because they hoped to create a new order uncontaminated by French colonialism. Diem may have been a nationalist, but he was also a narrow-minded martinet as well as a devout Catholic in a country where the vast majority were Buddhists. He and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu ran the new Republic of Vietnam almost as a police state, suppressing civil liberties and political opposition, and putting Catholic relatives and cronies in charge. When the Americans perceived that their new puppet wasn't all they had hoped for, Washington considered dumping Diem. But before that could happen, perhaps having been tipped off by Lansdale, Diem cracked down on criminal and religious sects whose militias were endangering his authority.

The crackdown was a success, and Washington began to see Diem in

a new light as the strong leader who could build a regime to rival Ho Chi Minh's regime in the north, never mind that Diem became ever more dictatorial and isolated from his people. Diem was seen as Washington's golden boy, a great hero who was performing miracles in the anti-Communist cause. But Diem's repressive policies engendered so much dissent that Ho Chi Minh decided that there were opportunities that could be exploited, especially when it became evident that the election to unite the two Vietnams, as promised at Geneva, was never going to take place. Ho began infiltrating agents and supplies into the south, and by 1959 a new Communist insurgency in the south flowered.

Eisenhower upped the ante, increasing the number of American military advisers and amount of aid, but as the insurgency grew and grew, and Diem seemed increasingly incapable, America again grew tired of their puppet and encouraged a military coup that ended in Diem and his brother being murdered in the back of an armored personnel carrier. President Kennedy had wanted the Diem brothers not to be harmed and was ashen-faced when he heard of their deaths. Three weeks later he himself was assassinated in Dallas.

After that a revolving door of Vietnamese generals took power, and South Vietnam slid farther and farther downhill. America was not wrong to try to distance itself from French colonialism, but the Americans couldn't see that they themselves were becoming the new colonial masters in the eyes of the Vietnamese people, and that Diem and all the other South Vietnamese leaders would be perceived as tools of American power.

But by then Lansdale had long since departed to be deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations, involving himself in attempts to kill Fidel Castro, and now was back in a vague advisory capacity to the American embassy.

I met Lansdale in what looked to me like a temporary building, surrounded by adoring aides. He was a fifties-type American patriot, so caught up in exporting American ideals that some said he was the model for Graham Greene's Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*, although in fact this was untrue. Almost sixty now, he was no longer young and his eyes seemed dull and faraway. He was happy to see a reporter for *Time* magazine because the Luce

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publications had always been firmly in his camp, resisting defeatist talk. He didn't know that I, too, was a growing skeptic. I asked him about his successes in the Philippines and in the early Diem years, which he was happy to talk about, but he seemed to me listless and distant and out of touch with Vietnam as it had become. His glory years were behind him. The Magsaysay figure he had hoped to create in Vietnam did not live up to expectations. The Vietcong were far more formidable than the hapless Hukbalahaps, and it seemed to me that Lansdale was feeling sidelined—a spent force. He spoke very softly, so softly that I had to lean forward. In all it was a disappointing interview, and I went away feeling sorry for him.

He would suffer a further betrayal when his protégé, Daniel Ellsberg, turned against the war and leaked the Pentagon Papers to the press. And so Lansdale passed from the pages of history.

We came to save the Vietnamese from Communism, not exploit them economically as had the French, and there were many, especially among the propertied classes, who feared Communism and appreciated our effort. As for the peasantry in the countryside, they just wanted to be left alone.

The US military was always upbeat, and if you stayed in Saigon you might think the war was being won. If there was one trait that trumped all the others during the long war, it was American self-delusion. As Sebastian Junger would later write about Afghanistan, it wasn't as if American officials were actually lying to you about the progress of the war. They were just inviting you to join in a conspiracy of wishful thinking.

There was a daily briefing famously known as the "Five o'Clock Follies." There you could fill your notebooks with meaningless statistics on how many enemies had been killed that day or how many pigpens had been built. If you had just come in from reporting in the field you could but shake your head and wonder, for the war looked very different up close than it did in these Saigon briefings.

I once had an insight on how the wishful-thinking system worked. Once, following a firefight in thick country, we found three dead bodies after our attackers had withdrawn. The company commander, after talking it over with

his platoon leaders, decided that there might have been twenty enemy killed given the severity of the fight, and that the seventeen other dead bodies might have been dragged away by the North Vietnamese. So they decided on the figure twenty killed to report to battalion.

But when I got back to headquarters in Danang, I found that the figure sent to Saigon for this engagement had grown to thirty-two dead. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara had famously said: "Every quantitative measurement we have shows we're winning the war." And this was probably true, but only you could believe the quantitative measurements. In other instances the statistics might have been correct but they didn't mean anything in political terms. You could build a thousand pigpens for Vietnamese farmers, and they would be grateful to get them. But pigpens did not decide their politics. A farmer with a new pigpen might just as likely be for the Vietcong as against them. We could try to protect the population from Vietcong intimidation but we couldn't protect their minds.

The war was all we reporters thought about in those days, and there was a certain comfort in that. None of the petty stuff of ordinary life concerned us. As my boss and friend *Time* bureau chief Simmons Fentress once wrote for a *Time* house organ:

Saigon is a one-subject town. You work the war, and you have it for lunch, dinner and nightcap. I used to do the civil rights beat out of Atlanta, and I thought that was the all-time topic A. It can't touch Vietnam. You pass a couple of guys at a restaurant table and you're apt to hear one of them saying, "the hell he was Viet Minh." A solid six hours of war talk isn't unusual here, and people seem never to tire of exploring how we got in and how we get out.

It was refreshing in Vietnam that none of us knew or cared about where we came from or what our backgrounds had been. We were all there because of the war, and what had gone before, where you went to school or college did not matter in the slightest.

It was Fentress who took me around to a disreputable joint to play tic-tac-

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toe with a bar girl known as Foul Phuong—so named because of her colorful language. Her English was limited but loaded with expletives of excruciating vulgarity. She would play tic-tac-toe for her virtue. If you lost you would have to buy her a whiskey, known as a Saigon tea because the house would serve the girls tea masquerading as whiskey in order to charge more and keep the girls sober. If you won, Foul Phuong promised to take you home. “You go my how,” she would pronounce it, but as far as I know she never lost a single game.

A Scottish reporter friend took a shine to a bar girl, and when she asked him where he was from he said: “I’m a Scot.” It so happened that she had never heard of Scots or Scotland, so an English rival for her hand, knowing that the average Vietnamese looked down on the hill tribes whom the French called montagnards, quickly spoke up and said: “The Scots are England’s montagnards.” That was it, as far as the bar girl was concerned, and she turned her attention to the Englishman.

No doubt I was too obsessive about the war, feeling that no offensive or battle could go unreported by me personally, although *Time* would often mangle our reporting when it came out in the magazine. *Time* reporters seldom got bylines back then. Their dispatches became material from which *Time*’s rewrite men worked. But I didn’t care. I had to be there. Looking back I think I had a touch of what we now call post-traumatic stress syndrome, and for years later I would have dreams of being trapped in a burning town. JB noticed that I would become nervous and irritable on anniversaries of Communist offensives long after the war was over. It took me years to get over it, if I have gotten over it.

As it had been in the Spanish Civil War, reporters and writers came to Vietnam with differing ideologies and political beliefs. Very few were as far to the left as in Spain, but there had long been tension within the press corps over the war. I always thought there were basically three generations of Vietnam reporters. The first, in the David Halberstam era of the early sixties, was made up of reporters who thought the cause was just but that the South Vietnamese were not pursuing the war properly. The criticism was tactical, not strategic. Later, my generation began to think the war wasn’t worth the cost of fight-



ing it but saw no virtue in the Vietnamese Communists either. Later, as the turmoil of the later sixties and early seventies began to break over the United States, some American reporters came out to Vietnam seeing virtue in the Communist cause just because American policy was so flawed.

Some old Asia hands, such as Joe Alsop, a tremendously influential columnist at the time, would come to Saigon and take a dim view of some of us younger reporters. Alsop was hook, line, and sinker for the war, but his eccentricities were always amusing. One time at a Saigon dinner party he described in his almost-British accent how, from the time he left Harvard until he joined General Chennault in China, he was never without a manservant. He went on to describe how he would hold out his arms in the morning for the manservant to help him into his jacket. An idealistic young foreign service officer, just up from the delta, began to sputter and said: "Goddamn it, Mr. Alsop, I prefer to dress myself!" Old Joe leaned back in his chair and drawled: "That's not quite true, is it? You nevah tried the othah."

Within the *Time* bureau there was often great tension with the home office. We often felt we were in a contest with the Washington bureau, which tended to give New York a rosy picture of the war compared with what we were reporting. But there was a sense of comradeship among us. Don Sider, a very good reporter who shared my obsession with seeing the war up close, became a particular friend. *Time* was good to its reporters. It treated them well, gave them frequent "R & R" (rest and recreation) breaks, paid them handsomely, and made them feel part of a greater enterprise. There were two *Time* reporters named Arthur Zich and Marvin Zim, and the saying was that you could always count on *Time* to stand by its correspondents through Zich and Zim.

In Saigon, one could drop around to the Circle Sportif, the French tennis club that had a swimming pool, and rub shoulders with some of Saigon's French community, which stood aloof from the vulgar Americans. Never mind that many of them were Corsicans; the French looked down on us as if they were Parisian aristocrats.

There were often evenings on the Saigon River. You could hire a small boat to take you out on the river as twilight settled on Saigon, and for a few hours war tensions slipped away.

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There was a puddle duck in the little garden of number seven Han Thuyen, and to amuse my children back in Hong Kong I made up stories about "Saigon Duck." I sent them a picture of me holding up Saigon Duck as if we were in conversation, along with tape-recording cassettes. I found out that the duck would quack almost on cue if you put him in a bathtub. And so, with tape recorder in hand, I conducted long interviews with Saigon Duck in which I would translate for the girls his lengthy quacks, telling tales of mythical kingdoms and old Annamese legends with which Saigon Duck was familiar. When I got back to Hong Kong on a break from the war my daughter Alice, with some awe, asked me how I had learned "bird words."

But those relatively peaceful days in Saigon came to an abrupt halt early in 1968, during the lunar New Year holiday known as Tet. The North Vietnamese struck dozens of towns and cities simultaneously throughout the country, penetrating Saigon and even the walls of the American embassy. The Tet Offensive was a blow from which the Americans, who had been taken completely by surprise, never fully recovered—at least not politically. It would take weeks of bitter fighting before the situation was stabilized. The American public's faith in the war effort would never be the same.

True, the Tet Offensive failed in that the general uprising that the Communists anticipated never materialized. They took tremendous losses. True, also, that the indigenous southern Vietcong forces, as opposed to the North Vietnamese, never fully recovered from their losses at Tet. But on balance, when you consider that the United States then began the peace negotiations that would end its military involvement, and when you consider that General Westmoreland was fired, and that President Johnson himself declared he would not seek another term, then you have to give the strategic victory to Hanoi. It was hard for our military leaders to realize that you could win every battle and yet lose the war.

General Westmoreland would ask for two hundred thousand more troops after Tet, only to be turned down. More than one of the more literary correspondents in our midst recalled that Henry V, at least in Shakespeare's version, had told the Earl of Westmoreland to "wish not one man more" before the Battle of Agincourt.

I was in Hong Kong when the Tet thunderclap struck, and struggled hard to get back to Vietnam via a US military flight out of Bangkok. Commercial airlines were definitely not flying into Saigon for a while. I immediately left for Hue, the former imperial capital where my father had received his decoration thirty years before. Hue was the largest town to have completely fallen to the Communist forces, and the marines were fighting house to house, block to block, in street fighting they would not see again until Falluja during the Iraq War nearly forty years later.

We had been used to fighting in the countryside, even burning villages, but to see fighting in an urban area was something else altogether. In home after home, when we would take shelter with the marines, we would be among the shattered remains of urban life: a broken teapot, an abandoned doll, phonograph records and books, and sometimes terrified civilians in a cellar. Inside the citadel itself, the great enclosure that was imitative of Beijing's Forbidden City, the massive walls had been breached and broken by artillery and even naval gunfire from US Navy ships at sea.

At night there was always the problem of where we would bed down. You wanted to be near the command post so that you could keep in touch with what was going on, and you didn't want to be exposed to fire or an in-the-night attack. One evening we found the perfect place, a not-too-damaged villa right next door to where the colonel had set up command with his radio. We put blankets up over the windows so that light could not be seen and warmed our C rations in the fireplace, and I picked a handsome dining room table for my bed. But to our delight, we found an unopened bottle of Scotch whiskey that the owners had left behind in their flight. We finished the bottle before we turned in.

In the middle of the night, however, I felt a great urge to relieve myself, but the toilet was outside across the courtyard and potentially exposed to sniper fire. So I refilled the empty whiskey bottle and put it away in a cupboard. By the next morning I had forgotten about it.

Some days later, back in Danang, I overheard some of my colleagues having a hamburger at the next table. "Jeez," said one. "These Vietnamese are really weird. We holed up last night in some villa, right next to the command

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post, and I found this bottle of Johnnie Walker in a cupboard. You are not going to believe this, but . . ." I tiptoed away as I knew what the end of the story would be.

It wasn't easy getting in and out of Hue during the worst days of Tet. One time, to get back to Danang, I hopped on a landing barge headed down the Perfume River, which ran through Hue, to the open sea bound for Danang. On board were some International Control Commission personnel, who had been trapped in the fighting and were grateful to leave; some wounded marines; and a couple of correspondents like me. I never carried a weapon in Vietnam. It was against the rules for reporters to be armed. But as we headed downriver we began to take fire from the riverbank. I watched in horror as a rocket hit a boat behind us, which began to sink. Our petty officer skipper gunned his engines and called for every able-bodied man to man the rails and lay down suppressing fire. I could see North Vietnamese running along the bank, halting to shoot at us.

There were plenty of M16 rifles lying about on the deck, which some marines were too seriously wounded to use, and with the skipper telling us it was a matter of life and death, I picked one up and joined the passengers in firing clip after clip at the riverbank, first on the port side and then the starboard, as the captain directed us. I am not sure if I hit anybody. I hope not. But at the time, it reminded me of accounts I had read about China, about American gunboats steaming down rivers with the whole countryside up in arms against them.

I am not proud of that afternoon. My colleague Gene Roberts of the *New York Times*, who was aboard with me, refused to pick up a weapon, much less use it. Years later, Gene and I were having dinner together in New York and he told me he thought I had done the right thing under the circumstances. But I believe it was he who did the right thing. In any case, we were both very relieved to be quit of the river and out in the open sea, heading south in heavy weather with the salt spray breaking over us, and the International Control Commissioners at the rail throwing up.

On the nineteenth of February, 1968, my luck ran out, and the time machine I always imagined was there to take me away from the nightmare of

Hue was nowhere to be found. We had been following the fighting among ruined houses when a marine, standing beside a wall that once was a house, decided to look through a window in the wall. Firing broke out immediately, and the marine slumped to the ground, shot through the throat. A navy medical corpsman rushed to help him but was having trouble carrying the marine to the rear.

Rather than take another marine off the firing line, I got up from where I had been trying to stay as low to the ground as I could to help carry the wounded man. Even the two of us were having trouble carrying him, and a marine combat reporter named Steve Bernston was quick to come to our aid. A few yards farther back, Charlie Mohr of the *New York Times* and Al Webb of United Press joined our rescue effort. Without warning a rocket-propelled grenade came in and knocked us to the ground. I could feel a sharp pain in my leg and blood filling up my boot. Webb and Bernston were hurt worse than I, but, fortunately, Mohr was untouched. We managed to get far enough to the rear where there was an aid station, and the wounded marine was given an emergency tracheotomy, too late, as it turned out, for moments later he died.

My first reaction to getting shot was one of indignation. This wasn't supposed to happen to me! Wasn't I supposed to be lucky? Of course I was incredibly lucky that I wasn't killed or maimed for life, but that wasn't my thinking in the heat of the moment. I found out a long time later that the marine whom we had tried, and failed, to save was named Dennis Michels, a private first class.

My wound temporarily bandaged, I was taken to where a large helicopter was being loaded with wounded. As we took off and rose over the city crackling with gunfire, we could hear rounds hitting the fuselage. Luckily nothing vital was hit and we were soon at Hue Phu Bai, a landing field near the city.

There were too many wounded to be accommodated at the small field hospital, so the lightly wounded, such as myself, were left outside. It seemed like hours, although it was more likely only forty-five minutes. With a gentle rain falling, my teeth began chattering as if to break the enamel as I lay under a thin, rain-soaked blanket.

When I was finally brought inside and put on an operating table, the

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American surgeon was in a white-hot fury. He said there were badly wounded Vietnamese soldiers being left out in the rain, but his orders were to take the Americans first. I feared for a moment he would be less than gentle with me, but he was a professional first and last, and he removed as much of the shrapnel from my leg as he thought advisable. To take out every bit of metal would do too much damage, he said.



*The author, after being wounded during the fighting in Hue during the Tet Offensive in February, 1968.*

For a long time, bits of metal would work their way out, breaking through the skin like boils on my leg. There is still some in there, and I have to be careful with hospital magnetic resolution equipment to this day.

Years later the Marine Corps would give Mohr, Webb, and me Bronze Star medals for trying to save the wounded marine. There was a grand show at the marine barracks in Washington, with the commandant of the Marine

Corps pinning the medals on our chests and the band playing the "Washington Post" march.

Some colleagues took a critical view of our getting involved in the combat instead of remaining observers. At the time I didn't really think about it. The guy was shot in front of me. The corpsman couldn't manage, so I lent a hand. My severest critic was Gloria Emerson, who had definite views on this kind of thing. When she heard about the incident she called up our mutual friend Ward Just and said: "Guess what Charlie and David have done now." I guess she didn't know Webb. Ward said he supposed we had just been trying to save a life, but Gloria would have none of it. "No," she said, "it was male hysteria," and that was the end of it as far as she was concerned. Gloria was one of the best war reporters of her day, specializing in what the war was doing to the Vietnamese. She would, in later life, growing old and sick, commit suicide. For Gloria, even death would be on her terms.

JB got word of my being hurt in a phone call from Lee Griggs, the *Time* bureau chief in Hong Kong. He had a bit of a stutter, and not knowing JB well, he was nervous about what her reaction would be. He hesitated to tell her, so JB said: "Lee, you are calling to tell me David has been hurt but not killed, right?"

"Ye—ye—yes, how—how—how did you know?"

"Because," JB said, letting Griggs off the hook, "if he were dead your instructions would have been to deliver the news in person, but since you are calling on the telephone, and not at my door, I assume he's wounded but not dead." Grace under pressure.

I was not to be the only *Time* magazine casualty of the Tet Offensive. John Cantwell, a genial Australian, went down the wrong street with some colleagues in Saigon, where they were all shot dead. He was married to a Chinese wife in Hong Kong and I was dispatched to bear the bad news. She took it very hard, and I feared it was going to be difficult for her financially because John had not been on staff. She might not receive any benefits. But Richard Clurman, chief of correspondents for the Time-Life News Service back in New York, called to say that Cantwell would be considered as if he had been on staff, and his widow would be treated accordingly. He said he would be

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on the next plane out. Clurman did this without getting permission from his superiors, which was so like him. I have often thought that there are very few Dick Clurmans in the news business anymore.

Clurman used to come to Saigon and ask to be taken out on military operations with ordinary soldiers, which was unusual for big shots, who usually just stuck to generals and their staffs. On one long patrol we stopped for the night near a dry streambed, and I put Clurman in the dried-up channel because it offered a few inches of protection should we be mortared in the night. Alas, a cloud burst with rain around one o'clock in the morning and sent a stream of water down upon my boss. Years later he would tell the story of his night in the field and it would be suggested that I had soaked him on purpose. But it was said with laughter and it added to his yarn.

Dick asked me to come back to New York for a week to talk to the editors. He was always trying to get *Time's* editors to pay more attention to his field reporters. Antiwar demonstrations were building then, and I was also asked to talk to some groups interested in the war. It was an odd sensation, for I soon found that the peace demonstrators, at least the ones that I met, cared nothing about Vietnam for Vietnam's sake. They wanted to stop the war, but they weren't the least interested in the country in which the war was being fought. It was a disillusioning experience, and when it was over I was very glad to be back in Saigon.

Clurman would take an extraordinary step after the Tet Offensive. By this time Hedley Donovan had become editor in chief of Time-Life, replacing Henry Luce, who died in February of 1967. Luce, the old anti-Communist crusader, had always looked at Vietnam as another China, where he was born to missionary parents. To lose Vietnam would be akin to our loss of China in Luce's book. Donovan took a more nuanced stand, and on trips to Vietnam he would often solicit the opinions of his reporters over Saigon dinners. After Tet, Clurman instructed us to do a minimum of reporting and concentrate on writing critiques of the war for Clurman to present to Donovan. Although the turn against the war by CBS newscaster Walter Cronkite, said to be the most trusted man in America, is often cited as the turning point of American opinion, the influence of print was stronger



then than now. The conversion of *Time* and *Life* against the war probably helped mold many an opinion.

Under Donovan, *Time* had begun to change its ever-optimistic view of the Vietnam War even before Tet. A cover story, which I reported from the marine fire base in Con Thien near the Demilitarized Zone in the north, had a photograph on the cover, taken by Dana Stone of UPI, of a marine in a fetal position in a foxhole, under shellfire from North Vietnam across the border. The words "Rising Doubt About the War" were slashed diagonally across the cover.

After a description of Con Thien under artillery attack, *Time* said: "In the US 10,000 miles away, Con Thien dramatized all the cumulative frustrations of the painful war. A long-rising surge of doubt about Vietnam was intensified for Americans as the bloody, muddy ordeal of Con Thien flickered across the TV screen." It was October 1967, three months before the Tet attack, at a moment when TV was well on its way to replace print as the way most Americans gathered their information.

In my post-Tet memo for Clurman, I said that fear of Chinese Communist expansion was a major reason, if not the major reason, we were in Vietnam. But history would suggest that the fiercely independent Vietnamese would resist China's intrusion into Southeast Asia, even though they were willing to accept Chinese help fighting the Americans and, before that, the French. China had occupied Vietnam for hundreds of years and Vietnam's patriotic legends all involved heroes who had resisted China. If one were looking for help containing China, the North Vietnamese Army was probably the best bet. China might have been giving the North Vietnamese immeasurable help in their war against us, but such a close relationship would likely not survive after we had left Indochina.

This became obvious several years later when Vietnam repulsed a Chinese punitive incursion into North Vietnam after the Americans had been defeated.

## The South Vietnamese Hold the Line

In the spring of 1972 the North Vietnamese tried again with an all-out assault over the DMZ, called the Easter Offensive. By that time President Nixon's "Vietnamization" program was in full swing. American combat troops were mostly gone, and it was going to be South Vietnam's big test to see whether they could hold their own with American air and logistic support. A test soon came along the My Chanh River, which separated Quang Tri Province on the border with North Vietnam from Thua Thien Province north of Hue.

The North Vietnamese quickly took Quang Tri City and the entire province, and for a while the road was open to Hue. It looked as if the south was about to lose all of Eye Corps, and perhaps more. I ran into two friends in Hue on my way north, Peter Arnett and Horst Fass of the Associated Press. Peter, a jolly New Zealander, had won a Pulitzer back in the days when David Halberstam was becoming a legend, and Horst's photographs had won one too. Horst had been a boy in Germany during the last days of World War II and recalled being given a single-shot rocket called a Panzerfaust and told to shoot the first Russian tank he saw coming down the street. Luckily for him, none did. Horst and Peter were hatching a scheme to "rescue" Cham statues from the museum in Danang, ferreting them away to the south. The Cham were a vanished race in this part of Vietnam, but their beautiful statuary remained, reminiscent of the Khmer art of Cambodia. As it turned out the statues didn't

need rescuing, as the South Vietnamese were about to hold their line on the My Chanh River.

The next morning I headed north to the My Chanh. I got there just in time for a decisive battle that saved Hue and the northern provinces. As night fell I was huddled next to a lone American adviser among a battalion of South Vietnamese marines. In the darkness we heard the unmistakable sound of tank treads clanking in the darkness. It was my first experience in a battle against tanks. Would the South Vietnamese hold, or would they flee as they had done at Quang Tri? In the next hours, as shells came down on our positions, the American adviser talked softly into his radio. I remember the American saying: "Lend me our assets." And within moments the assets arrived. Naval gunfire from American ships off the coast, planes screaming in from bases in Thailand lighting up the night with explosions. The South Vietnamese marines were armed with new wire-guided antitank missiles, and they used them well. There was no panic. The marines fired and fired again, and you could see North Vietnamese tanks going up in flames.

It was quite a night, but the My Chanh line held. The next morning I inspected the burned-out tanks on the plain ahead of us, littered with dead North Vietnamese. The American adviser told me that the North Vietnamese had not maneuvered their tanks well. They brought their tanks to a halt before they fired their cannons, and that had proved fatal time and time again during that long night. One dead North Vietnamese officer had a belt buckle with a red star. I contemplated taking it, but with a shiver I could imagine myself dead on another plain with someone taking that same belt buckle from my corpse. I left it well alone.

The South Vietnamese's holding of the My Chanh line has been used by revisionist historians to argue that if the United States had not taken away logistic and air support for the Saigon government when the final test came in 1975, maybe Saigon would not have fallen. It is an argument I do not buy.

After a break from the wars to take up a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard, a program for midcareer journalists, I was offered and accepted a job with the *Washington Post*. It was 1972, and the *Post*, under Ben Bradlee's editorship, was considered the writer's paper. It was then in its moment of Watergate glory. I had been unhappy with *Time*-style journalism for some time, and this was my chance to write for a newspaper.