

content

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News Media Magazine*

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52

**THE END OF
THE VIETNAM WAR:
THREE VIEWS OF
THE COVERAGE**

**A REBUTTAL TO BEN METCALFE
BY PATRICK O'CALLAGHAN**

**BARRY CRAIG WATCHES
THE PRESS WATCH
THE LITTLE FLIES**

**FROM READERS:
MORE NEWSWRITING ERRORS**

HOW TO COVER A WAR AND MISS THE FIVE Ws

By BARRIE ZWICKER

The coverage by the Canadian media of the end of the Vietnam War — to be abusively critical — was exactly what might have been expected on the basis of the shallow, distorted and fragmented coverage the war received all along. An incision into this coverage is justified, however, because of journalistic lessons to be possibly learned.

Although this harsh conclusion applies to *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star* and *CBC* television news (from all of which the documentation to back it up is taken) I would be surprised if anything other than the tiniest pockets of better coverage could be found across the land.

The Globe more often than not has devoted, over the past seven years at least, the best part of the news hole on one inside page to the Vietnam War and related news. It would be conservative to put this at an average of 50 column inches a day and four pax a week.

Yet it is doubtful, in my opinion, that many readers of *The Globe* could give a coherent answer — biased or otherwise — to any important questions about the origins of, or reasons for, the Vietnam War. Few readers could tell with any acceptable degree of accuracy exactly who was fighting, when the fighting started, the nature of the full array of brutalities and their distribution.

In other words, after their morning paper ran at least 109,200 column inches of copy and at least 1,450 pictures, the readers probably could not answer the Five W's about the conflict.

Another question — What might Canadians learn from the Vietnam War? — was not asked by reporters in any war's end coverage I saw, even though it ranks with the Five W's in importance to Canadian viewers and readers.

This writer makes no claim to "objectivity" with regard to the Vietnam War or anything else. But my criticism of the coverage is not so much that I disagree with the values inherent in so much of the "news" that has been run these long years, though that is true.

My criticism is primarily with the coverage as journalism. Journalism that has flagrantly violated the universally-accepted criteria of fairness, specificity, comprehensiveness and the application of normal skepticism. Journalism that has consistently accepted questionable

sources. Journalism that over a 10-year period failed to be illuminated by any of the growing stock of learned books on the subject of the war (newspaper coverage seemed to operate in a vacuum). Journalism that used terms that strained credulity and common sense.

(To take a recent example, *The Globe* and *Star* — up to the time of the win by the forces of the Provisional Revolutionary Government — termed the anti-Saigon forces as "North Vietnamese." So did the *CBC* news special on April 30. If all this labelling was accurate, why did the "conquerors" not declare Hanoi capital of all Vietnam the day they won the war?)

WORDPLAY ON THE HEADLINE FRONT

Even among relatively uninformed readers, the changing terminology applied to the foes of the U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia must be a matter of some confusion, if not curiosity.

After years of being labelled as faceless "Communists" the "bad guys" began to be characterized erratically as the days approached when editors might have to deal with stories involving the variety of political, religious and cultural groups and spokesmen that one would expect to find in any large independence movement.

They began to be "insurgents" or "Communist-led insurgents."

In Vietnam they were transmogrified into "forces of the PRG (Provisional Revolutionary Government)" and in Cambodia the term "Khmer Rouge" supplanted the old standby "Communists."

UPI, however, in the terminology of its final dispatch of the war (below), held doggedly to the simplistic "Communists" right to the end.

One of the more breathtaking breakdowns of the stereotyping machine occurred on the editorial page of *The Globe*

The twists of the labelling we will return to.

What of the light the media shone for readers and viewers once we had all come to the end of the tunnel of the Vietnam War?

The *Star's* end-of-war coverage, April 30, gave the illusion of completeness with an eight-column front page banner 68-point head "Saigon is now Ho Chi Minh," two full pages and fractions of two others inside devoted to end-of-war news, a full "Insight" page and the lead editorial.

I say illusion because with the exception of one article — by staff writer Ron Lowman — material on the news pages was a hodge-podge of syndicated think pieces by U.S. observers. These without

and *Mail* on April 18, the day after the fall of Phnom Penh.

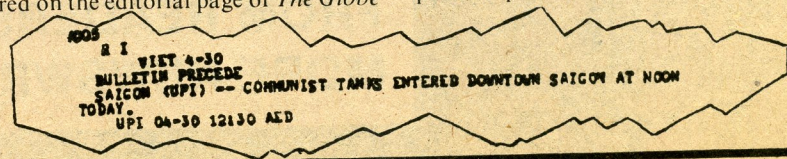
"Although commonly known as the Khmer Rouge," the *Globe* discovered after five years of convenient ignorance, "the insurgents are in fact a coalition, the National Front of Cambodia. They include Communists, anti-Communist nationalists and outsiders. There appears to be no clear over-all leadership."

By mid-May, however, as the Western press apparently began its gradual journalistic pullout from Southeast Asia in search of more lively news, labelling was returning to normal.

The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments set up by these multifaceted independence movements were reverting to being the "Communist government" of Cambodia or Vietnam. Refugees leaving were all "gaining their freedom."

Presumably we can expect a newsprint curtain to be drawn around Southeast Asia, one pre-printed with all the simple labels that save everyone the trouble of really grappling with what may be going on there in the complex and difficult postwar period.

B.Z.



exception went further than 1973 and the less-than-brilliant substance of their fragmentary contributions is suggested by their headlines: "Paris Peace Accord sowed the seeds of final surrender," "Ford lets his aide end war," "Fall of Da Nang marked point of no return," and "How defeat affects neighbors" (a questionable interpretive which managed to omit Laos).

The Lowman piece shows how one competent reporter with good sources all of whom are not tied to establishment views can do more informing on a complicated subject than all the U.S. interpretives you can buy the same day.

Lowman's story was about Vo Nguyen Giap, the "snow-covered volcano" who without, so far as is known, a single day of formal military education, helped vanquish the Japanese, the French (whom he crushed at Dien Bien Phu: French losses were 4,000 dead and 8,000 missing) and finally the Americans with their Saigon friends.

Lowman's source ("a senior military officer, presently serving in Canada," who asked that his name and nationality not be divulged) who has first-hand knowledge of Vietnam fighting and has studied the tactics and strategy used by both sides, said: "The North Vietnamese are a very proud people, with a long history of fighting off aggressors."

Lowman wrote that free elections were to have been held in South Vietnam under the 1954 Geneva Agreement and "When U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower advised South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem against holding an election, nationalists in the south went underground and formed the National Liberation Front, known by the name of its military arm, the Viet Cong."

This was one key to the Vietnam war the vast majority of U.S. journalists did not and still do not understand: that nationalism was the fuel behind the incredible staying power of the ordinary Vietnamese. The majority of the people, in short, were fighting for their land, homes and families.

Lowman's source noted the Vietnamese underlined at all times their desire to be *maitre chez nous*. He also cited their "desire to survive as a race."

All of which, if not a far cry from communism, is at least not the same thing.

The Lowman-anonymous source analysis jibes reasonably well with the analyses painstakingly arrived at by widely-respected observers such as the late Bernard Fall, Jean Lacouture and Marvin E. Gettleman.

It is an analysis stunningly absent from years of newspaper Vietnam War "cover-

age" in which the language tools were the stale, simplistic and misleading stereotypes "Communists," "North Vietnamese" and "South Vietnamese allies."

"The war is over and there is only one Viet Nam, not two," Lowman concludes. "The tough little Giap, in his baggy clothes and sandals made from old car tires, has achieved what he said he would. Napoleon would have approved."

Among other qualities, Lowman's piece displayed color, one of the qualities missing in the *Star's* major end-of-war wrap-up.

This incredible wrap-up should go down in the annals of journalism — down to the very bottom, that is. It occupied the whole Insight Page and affected to be, as the *Star's* front page pointer put it, "A history of the 30-year war the U.S. could not win."

It was typical of "Canadian" coverage of the Vietnam war that the final authoritative word in the *Toronto Star* was an AP dispatch which I understand was widely used across the country.

One can imagine some guy getting home from work and saying to his wife: "Jesus, this Vietnam thing's finally over. You know, I think I'm going to sit down

with this paper and find out just what the hell it was all about."

Well, to establish the context for this poor sap was a 72-point page-wide head: "America's (My emphasis — B.Z.) 30-year war is finished at last." With a piece this long (69½ column inches) we know the headline writer can go for anything. He went for U.S. ethnocentrism. One fact that had seemed to come through even the worst of the "coverage" over the years was that it was the "Vietnam War" not the "American War."

The central tragedy of the war, if the lead of a story has any significance any more, was that "It fell to President Gerald Ford to preside over the United States in probably its most ignominious hour."

Ignominious? There are a few hundred million people around the world — not a few of whom live in Canada — who after sober reflection based on their most deeply-held convictions had decided some time ago that one of the most profoundly moral and uplifting actions the U.S. government could take would be to withdraw all its troops from Vietnam.

EDITORS' SPIKES WERE WEAPON OF VIETNAM WAR

Most reporters sent to Vietnam tried to do a good job by accepted journalistic standards, which may or may not be good enough. More often than not they were frustrated by government and military rules, deception and doubletalk, although reporters and commentators in the U.S. ranging from Walter Cronkite to James Reston have admitted publicly recently that the press corps generally did not do its job properly in the early years. (this is relevant in Canada because we are looking at the source of most of our news.)

On April 20, 1965, George Beebe, managing editor of the *Miami Herald* and president of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, said: "Editors feel the U.S. public is not getting the full story nor the true story of the war in Vietnam."

In the interest of improving future performance it is necessary to ask at which points was the flow of important information being stifled? One answer is that more often than reporters, editors stifled the flow. Example: In June 1967 AP staffer John T. Wheeler filed a piece out of Saigon which stated:

The figures are subject to challenge, but the Viet Cong claims to have seized nearly

2.3-million acres from prosperous landlords and turned them over to the peasants. The power of (the insurgents') slogans is perhaps as great as the "No taxation without representation" that helped turn American colonialists into armed insurgents.

One American source argues that the effect of the Viet Cong land reform has been more dramatic and meaningful than "1,000 Boston Tea Parties."

Billions of U.S. aid dollars, since 1954 have altered little for the peasants. Most peasants are too poor to buy fertilizer and some have to eat their seed to stay alive. The (government-supported) landlord provides it, at a price, or the peasant can borrow money. Interest rates of 10% a month are common.

What happened to this dispatch? "It seems to have died on the spike of most U.S. news editors," I.F. Stone wrote in his *Weekly* of June 19, 1967. "We saw a bit of it buried in the shipping news on page 78 of *The New York Times* June 6 and suspected it was part of a much longer story. A friendly editor on an AP paper obtained the full text for us and we thought readers would like to see it for themselves."

Exactly.

B.Z.

Some of us, among other efforts, took to the streets where we summarized this suggestion with the simple slogan: "Out Now!" I mention it because the important public protests should rightfully be part of any history of the Vietnam War that pretends to concentrate on the war as it was experienced on this continent, but let that pass, as the *AP* story did.

The *AP* interpretive, having elevated Gerald Ford's discomfort to the status of historic tragedy, proceeds to the second most awful element of the war: 56,000 American lives lost. "Balance" might have dictated that the appalling Vietnamese death figures share the same paragraph. But in this *AP* history, the 1,250,000 Vietnamese dead are buried, in both senses, in the seventh paragraph.

"And now, for the first time in their history," *AP*'s third paragraph appeals to our Toronto reader's sympathy — "Americans must learn to taste the bitterness of irrevocable defeat."

With un-wire service-like redundancy apparently accepted as a price of poignancy, *AP*'s fourth paragraph states baldly: "They never lost a war before."

It is a measure of the *Star* readers' collective ignorance of Canadian history (or, one may dare hope, of the small readership of this *AP* tear jerker) that to the time of writing no letter from a *Star* reader has been published to remind the paper's editors of the War of 1812. "...the fury of that war," Stephen Leacock wrote in Canada: The Foundations of its Future, "committed to the flames the frame houses of York..." now Toronto, a city that's told in a self-congratulatory TV promo: "Toronto, it's all in your *Star*."

The magnitude of the inaccuracies of the *AP* piece are matched by the magnitude of its omissions. Never mentioned are the defoliation, the tonnage of bombs dropped on Vietnam (greater than the tonnage dropped by all belligerents in the Second World War and Korean War combined) and a few other tidbits one might expect, journalistically.

The depth of mental repression suffered by the *AP* writer, and all the editors along the line from Washington to our unfortunate's living room, is evidenced by the fact that most of the words to properly describe the key events of the war were not used. Euphemisms were trotted out.

In the spring of 1970, *AP* tells us in the same way my son informs me that "the paint spilled," the war "spread to Cambodia."

"On April 30, 1970," American and South Vietnamese divisions "crashed into" eastern Cambodia. This odd wording is a grotesquely successful effort to avoid the word "invasion." The "crashing into" Cambodia was carried out, the *AP* version asks the seeker after newspaper truth to believe, to carry out "a reduction of the U.S. role." Is it **journalistically** sound to present, without warning devices, a Nixonian version of events?

Some kids at Kent State felt quite strongly about the "crashing into" Cambodia and it is odd that a piece whose whole angle is "America's agony" failed even to mention this particular agonizing twitch. Again, the **journalism** is questionable.

In the *AP* version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, two U.S. destroyers "fought with" North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Thus the infamous Tonkin incident — exposed by I.F. Stone originally and by even such slow learners as the whole U.S. Congress later on — is presented in its original LBJ brand clothing to a Canadian audience in 1975.

The "enemy" is identified after 24 column inches as "the insurgent National Liberation Front, popularly known as the Viet Cong or Vietnamese Communists." A foot of copy later the *AP* scribe has returned to the familiar and simple label "the Communists," as in: "The first major confrontation between the Communists and U.S. technology (sic) came in..."

To maintain equivalents, if the other side in all these wars is always "the Communists," shouldn't the U.S. side always be "the Capitalists?" Why not, I've always wondered, at least "American anti-Communist troops battled...?" No one can deny U.S. troops are trained specifically in anti-Communism, just as the civilian population of North America is trained, through unremittingly one-sided phrasing and labelling, to be instantly suspicious of almost any revolutionary or even reform movement anywhere in the world. George Bain, the *Star*'s London bureau chief, in the April 30 *Star* specifically pointed this out with reference to recent events in Portugal. Wrote Bain:

Terrible word, revolution.

Even in the United States — particularly in the United States, perhaps — it tends to set off little electric currents of alarm whenever and however it occurs, notwithstanding that there was another,

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now 200-year-old, revolution that will be getting some favourable notice there next year.

It is that which makes the point, really. It has been the great failure of the west in the whole of the past 30 years while the United States has been its leader, that it has not known what to do about this phenomenon when it has occurred, but has gone all awkward and rigid, unable to think of anything except that it must be contained, subverted and if possible reversed.

Let any party within touching distance of interests of ours seek to emerge from what anyone of the slightest perception recognized to be a thoroughly nasty and degrading form of dominance for the few over the many, and, ping, they were going Communist.

Which would seem to describe all the U.S.-supported Saigon regimes.

Meanwhile, our *Star* reader, having learned all about the history of the war, turns to the *Star's* editorial to find out what he should think about the years of carnage and suffering.

Not one comma of recognition of, or sympathy for, that carnage and suffering will he find. The *Star's* editorial writers do, however, ask their faithful reader to sympathize for a great nation which only misjudged how to carry out "an effort to preserve a nation's freedom and defend the integrity of the international agreements that originally established the country of South Viet Nam."

Then the *Star* makes up some history *AP* somehow missed. Why did the U.S. fight the Vietnam War? "To prevent a return of French colonialism to southeast Asia." Look it up for yourself, if you don't believe me.

Now it is somewhere between disappointing and depressing that capable and sincere men like J. Patrick O'Callaghan, publisher of *The Windsor Star*, can state — as he does in a piece elsewhere in this magazine — that "Vietnam was ... adequately reported." As a vague generalization it may pass, but under detailed scrutiny, no.

O'Callaghan mentions the excellence of *New York Times* reporters "Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam, Sy Hersh and the others." The others presumably include C.L. Sulzberger, one of whose stories was bannered on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* on Wed., March 10, 1971. Its lead: "WASHINGTON — President Richard Nixon ... said yesterday that the Vietnam war was ending..." That was the big news from the *Times* that day and it did not include any comparison of Nixon's words and deeds.

The *Windsor Star* publisher omits to mention that the *NYT Service* is not exactly the most widely-used service in

ONE STORY THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE PAPER

"Hospitals and schools in North Vietnam have been bombed extensively, according to a Canadian returned from Hanoi," was the lead of a story written by a *Globe and Mail* staffer Dec. 19, 1966.

"In his first interview since returning from North Vietnam on Nov. 27, Frank Dingman, 53, a social worker, told yesterday of talking to children who told him their schoolmates had been decapitated by U.S. bombs," the story continued.

"I have no reason not to believe it. The total situation (scenes of destruction) leads me to believe it and there is no evidence to the contrary," he said.

"Mr. Dingman who served during the Second World War in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps as a conscientious objector, was (a representative in North Vietnam) of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)," wrote the staffer, who got what was then a scoop through his contacts on the religion beat.

"The CFSC has sent \$23,000 worth of medical supplies to Vietnam, north and

south... Mr. Dingman was authorized to find out whether the third of the aid addressed to the North Vietnamese Red Cross had reached its destination, whether it was being used, and what further aid, if any, is needed."

The story went on for four takes with careful quotations of what Mr. Dingman said he had heard and seen of bombing destruction in North Vietnam. He was Simcoe County area supervisor for the Ontario Probation Service for 15 years until 1964 when he became an instructor in social work at The University of British Columbia.

The story never appeared except for a fragment on an inside page in the first edition only.

Why was it turned down? Because it was "Commie bullshit," according to the news editor. I remember well him telling me that about the story; which I wrote.

Four days later the *Globe* began running at the top of its front page Harrison Salisbury's historied series telling of the destruction by U.S. bombing in North Vietnam.

B.Z.

Canada. The bulk of the day-by-day coverage Canadians get of world affairs is through *UPI*, *Reuter* and especially *AP*. It was an *AP* dispatch, for instance, datelined, curiously symbolically, PEARL HARBOUR, which was filed Aug. 3, 1964 and which began: "Three unidentified PT boats attacked the U.S. Navy destroyer Maddox off the coast of North Viet Nam on Sunday, the U.S. Pacific Command reported." Thus readers of *The Globe and Mail* learned from the main front page that Monday morning (I have the page in front of me) that "North Vietnamese PTs Attack U.S. Destroyer." That is far more typical of the Vietnam coverage we've had than Halberstam's reports, welcome though that energetic, skeptical, probing reporter's dispatches were.

As for Seymour Hersh, he told in the recent fascinating and lengthy two-part series in *Rolling Stone* (which series should be required reading for any aspiring investigative journalist) how he left *AP* because of (highly political) meddling with major stories in New York. Read Hersh's indictment of *AP*, all the more scathing because he felt *AP* always treated him very well personally. Hersh got the My Lai story while he was a freelancer and forced it into the open over continent-wide editorial resistance; only his incredible aggressiveness, persistence and luck overcame the gluey decisions of

all those editors who "give people what they want."

One regrets that a publisher of O'Callaghan's merits falls back on the cop-out about "giving the readers what they want" as if (a) It's that simple, (b) These readers have ever been canvassed, in a meaningful way. Even if the cliché were provably true, it would still be true also that every publication should be showing leadership in the coverage of major events.

In any event, if publishers are convinced the readers are so uninterested in foreign news, why do papers run so much of it?

Maybe the readers would be a bit more interested in foreign news if it wasn't a predictable mish-mash of stale clichés and banal stereotypes.

It was Hersh who told the stinging anecdote on a recent Barbara Frum television show (which Patrick can't get, unfortunately, in Windsor) about how — after conversing with the Canadians in North Vietnam — he was moved to ask North Vietnamese military leaders during a dinner the last night he was in Hanoi: "Don't you think these Canadians are playing a rather dangerous game?"

To which his Vietnamese hosts replied with a laugh and shrugs: "Oh, everybody knows the Canadians are more Yankee than the Yanks."

I would suggest that these people whom Gen. Curtis Lemay was unable to

bomb back into the Stone Age may have more insight into the Canadian situation than some of our publishers.

Especially remarkable is O'Callaghan's question: "How could one Canadianize the Vietnam War?" By telling of the Canadian involvement, one would think. For instance, in the *Star Weekly* of May 27, 1967, Walter Stewart reported:

I followed just one of the hundreds of defense contracts placed in Canada every year and discovered how TNT made near Montreal wound up in U.S. bombs being dropped in Vietnam...

This CIL contract is, of course, only a tiny part of the Canadian contribution to U.S. striking power in Vietnam. For instance, Canadian-made de Havilland Caribou aircraft flown by Australians were used on March 15 to drop 880 gallons of gasoline on a suspected guerilla concentration in the jungles southeast of Saigon...

Canadian manufacturers also provide navigational equipment for nearly all U.S. aircraft: small planes like the Caribou and

the twin-engined Otter for ferrying arms and munitions around Vietnam; and propellants for air-to-ground rockets of the type in most strikes against suspected Viet Cong villages.

We are able to make these sales, and turn a nice profit on the rising Vietnamese death toll, despite a firm Canadian policy against shipping arms to any war zone, and despite the fact that we are members of the International Control Commission in Vietnam, charged with, among other things, keeping munitions out of the war-torn land.

None of the facts of the Canadian government's mealy-mouthed and deception-ridden involvement in the Vietnam War (the unworthy episode at the Canadian embassy in Saigon was not an aberration; it was typical) have been so much as mentioned in *The Star*, *Globe* or on *CBC* television news, to my knowledge, from the day the war ended to today (May 13).

I venture that *Southam News Services* has also failed in this respect, which failure can be criticized on the journalistic ground of not getting the "local angle" on the Vietnam War.

Just as there was a massive attempt by the U.S. authorities to re-write the history of the Vietnam War, consciously orchestrated at least at the time of the release by North Vietnam of the U.S. prisoners of war, an attempt, not consciously orchestrated, now is being mounted to convince people inside and outside of journalism that the media played a glorious or at least adequate role in Vietnam.

James Reston wrote the strongest version of this thesis and it just doesn't stand up under examination. Apologists claim the press woke up the people. Well, who woke up the press? Who woke up the million-dollar corps of reporters in Vietnam who failed to discover the Cambodian war for a year, who failed to discover the bombing of Laos? The danger is not, as Reston suggests, that the role of the press will be "despised or forgotten." It is that it will not be probingly examined with an eye to improving future reporting.

I, for one, will not be persuaded that we are doing such a hot job reporting phenomena such as the Vietnam War until I see some reporting of the calibre of Jacques Decornoy's piece in *Le Monde* (from *The Guardian* May 10 airmail edition):

The Vietnamese have always been ready to talk about their history stretching over thousands of years. When the writer-tactician Nguyen Trai helped Le Loi to found the Le Dynasty in 1428, he observed: "We have raised the banner to drive the aggressor out. Our homeland, the land of a civilization thousands of years old..."

...attacks are led by Vietnamese revolutionaries who are plugged into their backgrounds - hence into their tradition...

Pitted against the Vietnamese determination to be Vietnamese, the American (anti-communist) campaign was a total flop. Imported values were... resented as aggression. There is no other explanation for the extraordinary success of Trinh Cong Son's poems (they were banned by Thieu) among apparently Westernized segments of the population.

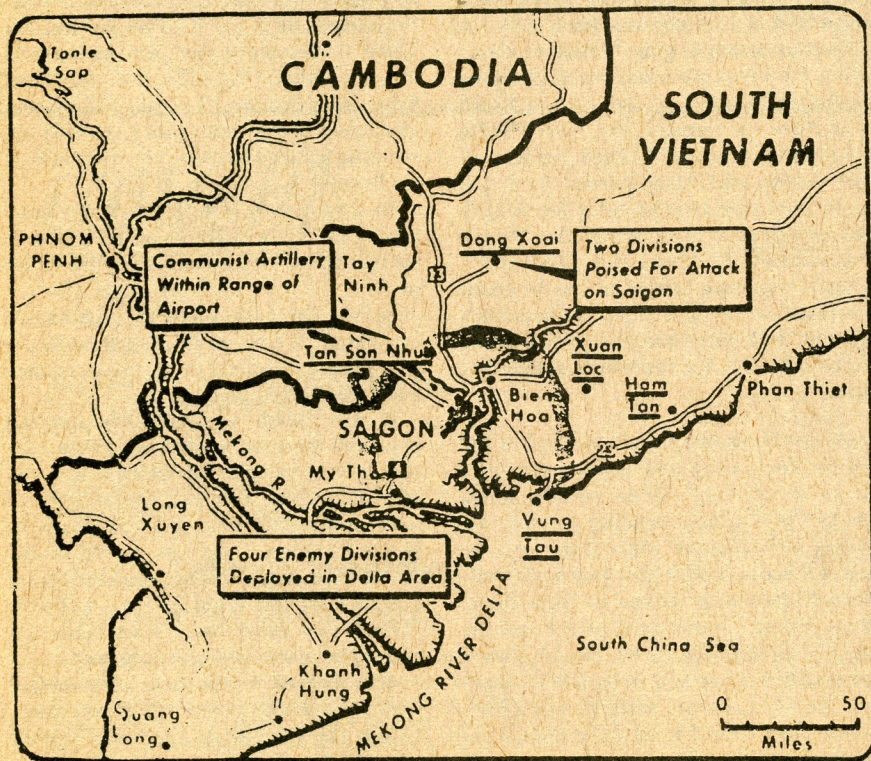
From now on most of the Vietnamese population will probably be subjected to what foreigners will not fail to describe as "a purification conducted by the North's austere cadres." It may be fairer to describe it as a rediscovery of traditional values; the Vietnamese are very straitlaced.

Reconstruction will be necessary, and for this the South will need help, but without political strings. Anyone flying over the 17th parallel to Hue can gauge the extent of the disaster. Vast stretches of forest have disappeared. The soil is unusable in whole districts... Chemicals employed in the war are continuing to cause havoc."

Some of these chemicals were manufactured in Canada. If the story was

THE OLD POLITICAL CARTOGRAPHY

From Jock Bates in Winnipeg came the accompanying map with the comment: "Notice the word 'enemy' used to describe the North Vietnamese-NLF forces. What enemy? Were we at war without knowing it? This map appeared in the *Winnipeg Tribune* (page one) about April 25 and this was the second time in a few weeks that the paper had forgotten to remove the word 'enemy' from an AP map."



Communist forces hold positions which form a tight ring around Saigon.

properly told, it might help Canadians decide what they wish to do about helping Vietnam reconstruct.

Or — again I pose a journalistic question — is Vietnam and its people now to be almost totally blacked out by reporting and editing practices and decisions which normally dictate the need for “follow up” to the extent that almost any aging Hollywood ex-star will be dug out for a “Where Have They Gone?” feature.

MAYBE HE CAN GET WORK AS A TRAVEL WRITER

“The road to Bien Hoa is 14 miles of broad, smooth asphalt, built by Americans homesick for the super highways in the States.”

— From a dispatch by *Globe and Mail* reporter Malcolm Gray, May 6.

* * *

Yes, and the heavy military supplies trucked over it no doubt were sent because the Americans were homesick for heavy supplies. B.Z.

WHICH MEDIA HAD THE GREATEST FIREPOWER IN THE WAR OF WORDS ABOUT VIETNAM?

Will historians be able to credit the media generally, and especially TV, as constituting the key institution which forced succeeding U.S. administrations to veer away from the folly they were inevitably otherwise heading for in Vietnam: full-scale genocide, use of nuclear weapons and possibly land war with China and/or the Soviet Union?

There can be little doubt that TV was a key medium in altering the perception of people living on the North American continent, at least.

But more precisely where lay the impacts?

When the author looks back, it seems to him that it was a handful of TV documentaries that provided the jarring electronic eye-openers. Can anyone who saw Beryl Fox's brilliant *The Mills of the Gods* forget the Alabama-bred jet fighter-bomber pilot? Who snapped his fingers to the rock music on Armed Forces Radio as his war machine zoomed back into the sky after his bombs had, as he gleefully chortled, “smashed the ear drums of those gooks down there.” Beryl and her camera were in the rear cockpit and the audio input was patched into the plane's intercom.

The TV news — “Here's a little glimpse of something nasty that's going on” — presented by the phlegmatic Lloyd Robertsons was only a series of formal and unsatisfactorily-fragmented confirmations of the haunting truths established by the TV documentary.

Radio gave us the silence after Bernard Fall was blown to death in mid-sentence by a land mine as he walked along a jungle path speaking into his tape recorder mike. And there was the exciting 150-station college network which broadcast the early teach-ins.

And what of print? In my retrospection, newspapers completely blew their chances to put the war in any sort of perspective other than the subterranean establishment perspective that permeates most of what they print. A severe generalization, perhaps, but the mind's

eye is augmented by stacks of files and clippings carefully examined.

In print it was periodicals — early on only the non-establishment ones, that created a detailed understanding for their readers. These people in turn became that minority which forced LBJ to step down and all the rest.

It seems to this writer that social change does not usually occur through a mass of people being slightly informed. It is through a “critical mass” being thoroughly informed.

Books, too, played an important role (although, typically they were seldom reviewed or even acknowledged by the newspapers).

In my own case, the watersheds of perceptual change were, in rough order of importance, *J.F. Stone's Weekly*, *The Mills of the Gods*, the book *Air War Vietnam* by Frank Harvey (see excerpt below), and a two-hour edition of *CBC-FM's Ideas* series in which an ex-GI named Jerry told of his difficulty keeping his sanity after his Vietnam experiences. (One of these was when he and a buddy took part in the destruction of a peasant village, burning it down, destroying the rice and then raping two young village girls. When, as the two soldiers were leaving, one of the girls uttered one word in Vietnamese that Jerry did not understand, his buddy whirled and slaughtered both girls with his sub-machine gun.)

The books *Vietnam! Vietnam!* by Felix Greene and eight others, especially *In the Name of America* (director of research, investigative journalist Seymour Melman) and *Vietnam Hearings* by Doubleday would also make useful reading for editors and reporters handling Vietnam copy.

* * *

Some paper somewhere might have made the war a little more understandable if it had serialized a Bantam Book (SZ3653) called *Air War — Vietnam* by Frank Harvey, a military writer and aviation expert who “lived and flew with the men who are doing the job — over the south and over the north, from carriers, from giant air bases, from jungle strips,” as the cover blurb put it. “Here is the way it is, as it has never been told before,” the blurb said.

From Chapter 13, *The Muttering Death*, pages 102, 104:

The American Huey troops at Vinh Long are without doubt the most savage guys I met in Vietnam (and the jolliest!). I was impressed by them. But they scared me. They didn't hurl impersonal thunderbolts from the heights in supersonic jets. They came muttering down to the paddies and hootch lines, fired at close range and saw their opponents disintegrate to bloody rags 40 feet away... They wore flak vests and after a fire fight was won they landed on the battlefield, got out and counted their VC dead. Each man had his own personal sidearm he carried along for mopping up. A Swedish K automatic pistol seemed to be the favorite.

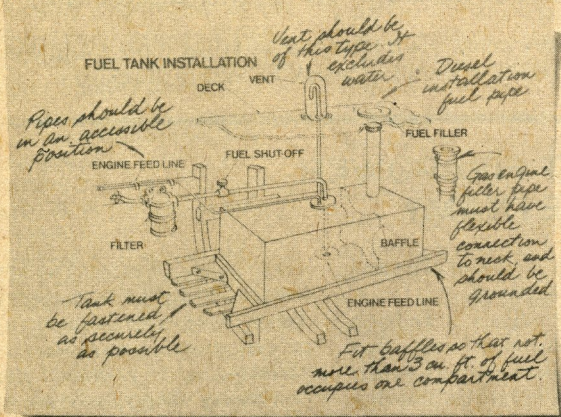
Capt. George O'Grady wears a steel helmet modeled after the old Roman battle helmets. His door gunners were enlisted people and as savage as the drivers. I saw a door gunner who affected deerskin gloves with long gauntlets.

“I shot up a Charlie in the paddies today,” one of (the Huey pilots) said. “I ran that little mother all over the place hosing him with guns but somehow or other we just didn't hit him. Finally he turned on us and stood there, facing us with his rifle.

“We really busted his ass then. Blew him up like a toy balloon.”

B.Z.

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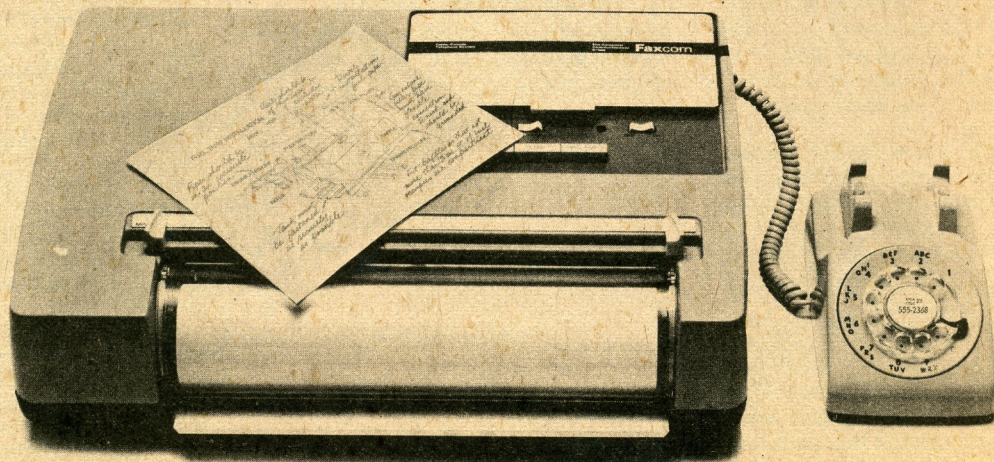
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THE SAIGON BABYLIFT AS A BIG CON JOB: SEEING VIETNAM THROUGH COLONIAL EYES

By DAVID KETTLER and DENIS SMITH

On April 7 the *New York Times* carried an *Associated Press* story from Saigon reporting that the American ambassador to South Vietnam had persuaded the Saigon authorities to authorize the "babylift" because of its potential propaganda influence in the United States. A letter from the South Vietnamese Deputy Premier for Social Welfare, Phan Quang Dan, was quoted as saying that the U.S. ambassador had "stressed that this evacuation along with the millions of refugees abandoning Communist-controlled zones, will help create a shift in American public opinion in favour of the Republic of Vietnam. Especially when these children land in the United States, they will be subject to television, radio and press coverage and the effect will be tremendous."

To the last, the American administration failed to grasp the realities of Vietnam; and the result once again, for a few days, was to impose grotesque and unnecessary suffering on the innocent. After one C5A transport had crashed, President Ford carried the first baby ostentatiously from the next plane on its arrival in California. But American public opinion did not "shift in favour of the Republic of Vietnam." It was too late for that; Congressmen and ordinary Americans knew what was happening better than their leaders did. President Ford needed another two weeks, and the resignation of President Thieu, to admit that America's illusion of a non-Communist South Vietnam was gone.

A Canadian who gets his world news from, say, the *Globe and Mail* and *CBC* television, must have had special problems making sense of Indochina in April. The sparse news about Vietnam that filtered through the foreign wire services into the public view in Canada was disconnected, incoherent and almost completely devoid of thoughtful interpretation. What we received until virtually the point of final South Vietnamese collapse (probably by default rather than by conscious intent to mislead) had an overwhelming "human interest" slant — first the refugees, then the babies, then, for a day or two, atrocity rumours — which served the propagandist purposes of the American administration.

Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford could not get away with such shallow and

pathetic efforts at manipulation before their American audience; it is ironic that they could do so here, in another country, because of the inadequacies of the Canadian media. But typically, that wire service story about the American ambassador's view of the babylift, which would have done something to make sense (or better, nonsense) of the bizarre movement of helpless children out of Saigon a few weeks ago, did not make the *Globe and Mail* or *CBC* television. The material for critical judgment was simply sliced away for Canadian readers and viewers, and we were left with the orchestrated story as the American administration wished it to be told: that a generous western world was engaging in a great act of human charity to save Vietnamese orphans from the black horrors of growing up in a Communist state.

While the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Sunday Times* of London, for example, immediately demonstrated their editorial skepticism and reflected it in their critical news coverage of the babylift, the *Globe* and *CBC* television remained gloriously innocent of the story's unsavoury political implications.

Canadians should not be, and need not be, so badly served by their national newspaper and their national broadcasting network.

The case deserves closer study. During the last weeks of March, the news of the ARVN collapse in the central highlands and in the north was quickly overshadowed by news of the refugees. This is not to say that we were not given the "facts" about the retreats, but that these "facts" were given their significance by association with the massive shift of civilian population. We were offered a frightening moral tale: a faceless blob could be seen on the map, sweeping inexorably forward, while the innocents fled and suffered. Reports about bombarded refugee columns were not complicated by information about South Vietnamese military formations that seem to have organized some of these migrations to cover their retreat, and were mingled among the civilians.

To understand the rout in its complexity, one simply could not rely on

Canadian sources of news. When the refugees took to the sea, we were told that they were being "saved" by American ships, and here, at least, television's eye offered evidence for judgment that the press did not trouble us with. Too often the refugees seemed not to have been saved, but instead, to be thrust into new conditions of horror: pushed aside or into the sea by panicky soldiers saving their own skins, or scorched and starved during the journey south to the next port.

But we were hardly offered the chance to reflect on the dubious wisdom of this rescue operation before our attention was shifted again. Probably the first reference to the babylift came in a story on April 2, when Edward Daly (the same person who had played a central role in dramatizing the plight of the refugees by flying his World Airways 727 into the chaos of Danang airport while brandishing his pistol before the accompanying television camera for our benefit) announced that "he" was withdrawing one of his airplanes from the Cambodian airlift to fly 1,000 babies to the United States and damn the consequences.

If World Airways is not a CIA front, it is the only one of its sort which is not. And so the airlift episode began. The following days gave us a view of events in Vietnam as, essentially, a process of jeopardizing the lives of helpless babies. The media defined our relationship to these events as a personal moral obligation to save these innocent victims. Such an interpretation contrasts, say, with a view of the events as a debacle for American policy, as a potential occasion for a dangerous new American intervention, or as the impending triumph for one of the contestants in a civil war.

The difference between the implicit interpretation that actually was offered and those that were neglected is that all of the latter imply political consequences: judgments to be revised, policies to be reconsidered, actions to be prepared. Like the refugees, the babies had "human interest;" we were asked to respond in our private individual and organizational capacities. The events were taken out of the context relevant to our public, political understanding.

In the United States, fairly clearly, this

interpretation of events was officially sponsored and contrived for political purposes. Perhaps because this was widely perceived, the campaign did not in fact dominate the interpretation of events; at least not to the same extent as in Canada. Even the belated arrival of Canadian correspondents in South Vietnam did not alter the trivialized and personalized style of reporting as Canadians received it. We do not suppose that the Canadian media were more susceptible to this design because they accept the ends of the manipulators: the editorials seem to disprove this. Then what can be the explanation for their guilelessness?

In comparing the historians of antiquity, Adam Smith observed that the Greek historian Thucydides linked events

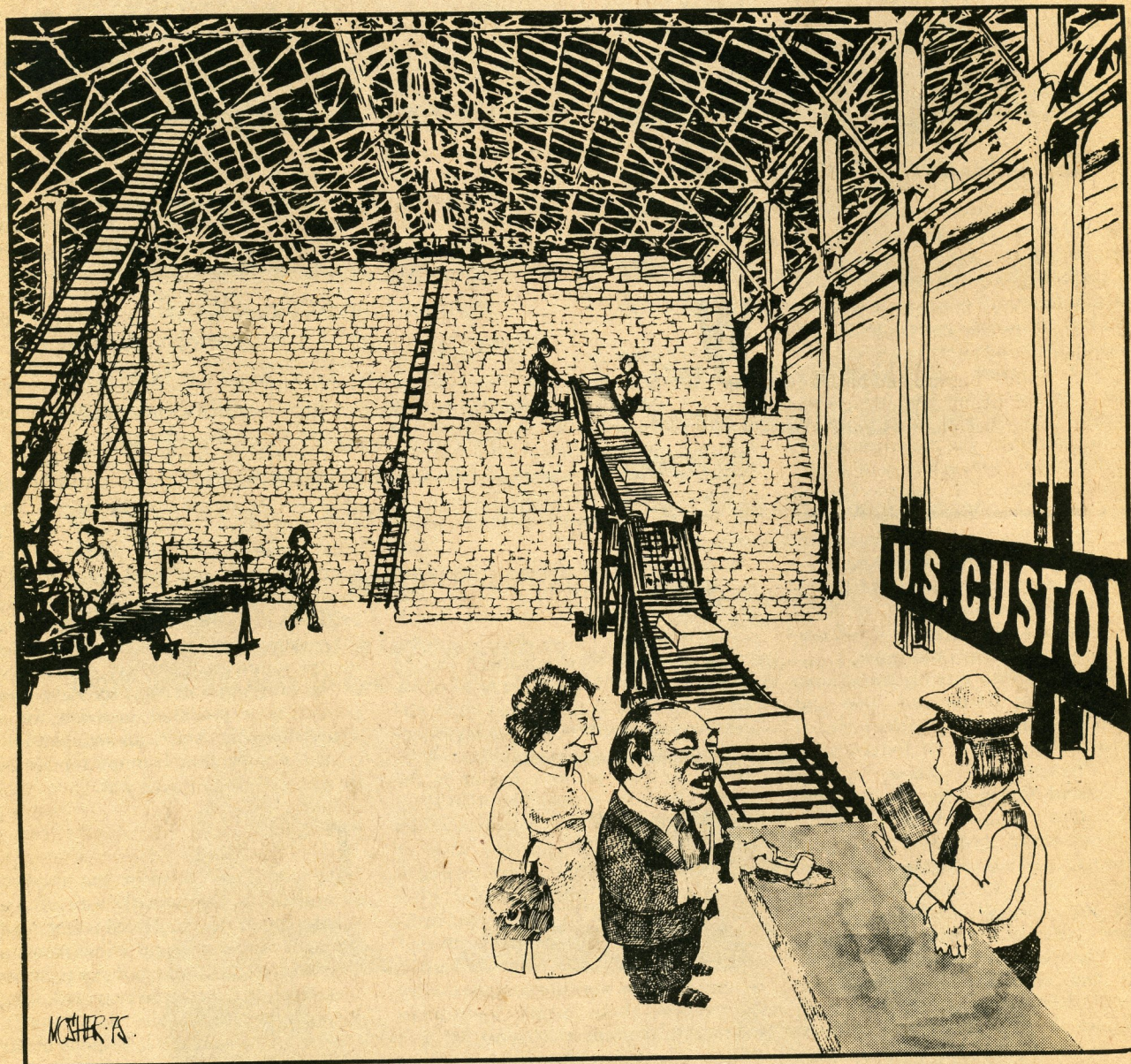
to one another in the way that men of action do, by reference to impersonal forces and constellations of conditions, while Roman historians after Tacitus tended to look for moral and personal significance in the stories they told.

Adam Smith thought that the contrast reflected the difference between the civic activity open to Thucydides and the refined but powerless, prosperous existence of imperial Rome during its most glorious days.

Can it be that Canadian journalists and editors have come so unconsciously to accept a comfortable but powerless existence next to imperial America, that they have accepted, too, a sentimental, moralistic, and politically-impotent view of the world? And one, moreover, that is

taken uncritically from the imperial centre? Unless newspapers like the *Globe and Mail* and the television news service of the *CBC* can demonstrate a much more sophisticated, critical and spontaneous vision of what is happening abroad, that will be an inescapable conclusion about our colonial media.

David Kettler and Denis Smith are members of the Department of Politics in Trent University, Peterborough, Ont. Smith will become editor of The Canadian Forum next month.



"A TOOTH BRUSH, BEDROOM SLIPPERS, 73 MILLION IN GOLD BULLION AND A FEW OTHER PERSONAL EFFECTS."

THE CHASTENED VIEW FROM PARIS COULD BE AN ANTIDOTE TO U.S. VIEW

By PATRICK BARNARD

"This defeat was inevitable. I know them well. I have fought them. They haven't changed. Even if the American effort had been greater, nothing would have been altered. You can't do anything against a unanimous people. Communist or not, the ideal of a country is a drive that cannot be equalled."

—Gen. Marcel Bigeard, former para-troop commander at Dien Bien Phu, commenting to the French paper *Midi Libre* on the end of the Vietnam war.

the French. In reality, the Vietnamese had greater flexibility, moving disassembled artillery pieces to the heights above Dien Bien Phu.

Gen. Bigeard's present opinion strikes one because of its acknowledgement that the French and then the Americans misunderstood their adversaries, as well as the motives for which "they" fought.

Yet even now, when the war is finally over, the old myths live on. In Canada particularly, we have seen the war's conclusion through American eyes.

For this reason, the Paris press has made fascinating reading in the last two months as a point of comparison with U.S. reports.

Contrast, for instance, the papers of record in the two countries, *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*.

The *New York Times* reserved its big headline for the U.S. withdrawal: "1,000 Americans Evacuated From Saigon; Ford Says Departure 'Closes A Chapter.'" The next day a smaller title read: "Communists Take Over Saigon."

But in *Le Monde* the emphasis was just the opposite. The entry into Saigon was the big story: "The End of The Vietnam Conflict, The Revolutionary Forces Have Taken Control of Saigon Which Becomes 'Ho-Chi-Minh City'."

To the end, even the most distinguished American newspaper saw the American connection as more vital than the actual events transpiring within Vietnam.

The point is an important one, because it concerns a fundamental question of fact: what actually happened in Vietnam this spring? Was it a military defeat, or rather, a political victory?

Information in the French press, I believe, helps to interpret these recent events.

On both sides of the Atlantic reporters used a French word — debacle — to describe the collapse of the South Vietnamese army. Observers agreed as well that the decisive turning point was the struggle for Ban Me Thuot, a provincial capital in the Central Highlands.

Preliminary evidence suggests, however, that a battle never took place in that city.

The semi-official story, originating from Saigon and American sources, was that in the autumn of 1974 U.S. advisors had counselled President Thieu to make a tactical retreat from the highlands to the coast. As Drew Middleton reported it in *The New York Times* (May 1):

The advice was rejected, but Mr. Thieu reconsidered after the Communist attack on Ban Me Thuot on March 11, when the 23rd Division there was badly mauled in the first battle.

According to official sources, Ban Me Thuot was the anchor of a drive by the North Vietnamese in the highlands.

Yet another local report from Saigon (*Times*, March 26) said that planes of the South Vietnamese air force had accidentally bombed the 23rd Division, "crippling the army's defence effort in the city."

And still another dispatch from Vietnam (*Times*, March 31) said: "The communists reportedly met no resistance (in Ban Me Thuot), and most of the government troops remained in the town with them."

The March 24 issue of the Paris weekly *L'Express* helps to explain part of the puzzle.

As I.F. Stone and others have repeatedly pointed out in the last decade, the Vietnam war — both in its French and American phases — was based on misperception.

In 1954 Marcel Bigeard and his fellow officers never dreamt that their valley garrison would become a deadly trap. They assumed, incorrectly, that the Viet Minh did not have the logistical skill of

THE WRONG COUNTRY BUT RIGHT ON SCHEDULE WITH THE IDEA

"From now on most of the Vietnamese population will probably be subjected to what foreigners will not fail to describe as 'a purification conducted by the North's austere cadres.' It may be fairer to describe it as a rediscovery of traditional values. The Vietnamese are very straitlaced... They respect the family, old persons in particular..."

— Jacques Decornoy in *Le Monde*. May 3.

to be 'purified'

By JEAN-JACQUES CAZEAUX and CLAUDE JUVENAL
Agence France-Presse

BANGKOK — Under a blanket of total silence, Cambodia is now being "purified."

The Khmer Rouge forces which took over the country on April 17 had long ago prepared a plan to move millions of inhabitants into liberated zones where they could be instilled with the spirit of service to the revolution.

Front page, *Toronto Daily Star*, May 8.

During the middle of March, Paul Léandri, a 37-year-old journalist for *Agence France-Presse*, conducted an inquiry in Saigon into the events at Ban Me Thuot.

According to *L'Express*, Léandri found a Catholic priest who had been in the provincial city at the time of the supposed attack by Northerners.

The informant told Léandri that the local Montagnards in Ban Me Thuot had themselves revolted against the Thieu soldiers, and then aided by Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) troops, they took over the city.

Léandri ended his dispatch: "As far as the North Vietnamese were concerned, according to this source, there were practically none there."

The Saigon police summoned Léandri to the central police station. There he was asked who his source was, and when he refused to say, he was shot three times by a police officer.

Circumstantial evidence, then, strongly suggests that a local revolt did take place at Ban Me Thuot, one that was so well-organized that the Saigon authorities feared the true story would be politically very damaging.

That, too, explains the apparent fiction that bombers flying "too high for accuracy" bombed the 23rd Division conveniently out of commission.

What happened at Ban Me Thuot is a crucial question for one reason: events in that city were supposedly the central point of discussion at a war council held by President Thieu on March 14 at Cam Ranh.

Again, the official story is that the assembled officers agreed, after stormy debate, to conduct a tactical retreat from the highlands to coastal centres. But subsequent newspaper descriptions of the withdrawal indicated that field officers were not in charge of their command structures.

Then Hué and Da Nang fell without a fight. If there was anything like a planned retreat, where were the commanders?

Writing in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Indochina expert Jean Lacouture added new information, although no source was mentioned. The chain panic down the coast really started, he said, with Thieu's sudden decision.

...sudden decision in the beginning of March to withdraw southwards his best unit — the 1st Parachute Division in the Hué zone — as well as a ranger brigade, in order to save his government, which he felt was menaced by a putsch.

Lacouture added that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were "literally pumped by the vacuum."

Repeated in *Le Monde* (April 12), this version of events received fresh confirmation recently when Nguyen Cao Ky told an *Associated Press* reporter in Guam that he, among others, "had actively plotted an overthrow" of President Thieu.

A picture emerges — to use Ky's words — of Thieu as a "lonely man," surrounded by army officers preoccupied, as he was, by the scramble for civil power.

The vacuum apparently was within the very centre of the Saigon regime.

Meanwhile, uprisings, like the one at Ban Me Thuot, took place with such frequency that even the North Vietnamese were surprised.

This explanation is still provisional, but it is far more plausible than the image of the debacle as a military retreat, improperly carried out.

As information becomes available indicating the extent to which the Saigon government was infiltrated, it seems clear that the events of this spring constituted the political, rather than military, equivalent of Dien Bien Phu. Once again, the Vietnamese did the unexpected.

In the North Vietnamese army newspaper, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (May 2), Colonel Bui Tin described how he entered the government palace in Saigon to meet General Minh:

As we waited for the official representative of the PRG, Minh said to one of our officers: "Since this morning we've been waiting for you to come for the transfer ceremony."

The officer replied: "The revolution has taken the whole power structure from bottom to top, with its offensives and uprisings. The army and the administration have completely given way. You cannot transfer what you do not have. You have to give yourself up at once."

Patrick Barnard is a freelance journalist who specializes in international affairs and Quebec politics. Mr. Barnard does a weekly analysis of Quebec newspapers for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation besides an analysis of international publications, especially French, on major developments. We are grateful to The Gazette in Montreal where this piece was published on May 10.

PERHAPS OUTLINES DON'T COUNT!

~~Moncton-1st add DL Combines-016~~ . better
Mass media professor Earle Beattie of York University, Toronto, said he saw signs of American bias in *Associated Press* reports of the Vietnam war carried by *The Canadian Press*. Mr. Dauphinee said a CP investigation in Vietnam found no such evidence. But most Vietnam news sources were Americans who naturally spoke from an American viewpoint.

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TOK 1 QUANG TRI, JULY 25--ARTILLERY ATTACK--South Vietnamese paratroopers, crouched amidst the rubble of destroyed vehicles, take cover during an artillery attack against government positions in Quang Tri City, South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese troops, still fighting in the center of the city, are frequent targets of long-range North Vietnamese artillery attacks. (AP Wirephoto by Cable from Tokyo)
(See AP AAA Wire Story) (gr30500stf/ut) 1972.

(NY 8) HANOI, NORTH VIETNAM, JULY 25--ALLEGED BOMBING--This picture released in Frankfurt by the East German news agency, ADN, purports to show the bombed Bach Mai Hospital in Hanoi after an American air raid. The photo was reportedly taken in late June. (AP Wirephoto by Cable from Frankfurt) (gr30500pw) 1972.

BOOK REVIEW: THE PULITZER PRIZES

By DAVID JONAH

The Pulitzer Prizes, a history of the Awards in Books, Drama, Music, and Journalism based on the private files over six decades, by John Hohenberg, Columbia University Press, 1974. 354 pages. \$14.95.

If you accept that our perception as a nation of our journalism ethics and accomplishments has been developed in the mirror image of the vital, energetic journalism industry in the United States, the year-by-year documentation of excellent reporting offered by the Pulitzer prize awards is of interest to us.

For those who wish an interesting journey through 60 years of American Pulitzer history represented by the selection of the recipients, *The Pulitzer Prizes* is a detailed account of the pressures, political and professional, on the advisory board and judges.

One can readily conclude that the famous journalism awards were a sort of weather vane for the developing democratic nation. Decade by decade the best awards were directly associated with the direction of the United States.

The awards were often criticized by Washington administrations.

The knowledge, however, that the awards were presented for excellence, despite obvious political disdain, lent credibility and prestige to the award winners while delivering maximum publicity. This is all the more apparent today. Society questions most established institutions but the integrity of the Pulitzer prizes grows.

Hohenberg is the 20-year veteran secretary of the Pulitzer Prize advisory board, and the author of several other academically-oriented books on journalism. He writes a factual account. By its nature the book cannot be considered exciting, but it is readable.

The author traces the idea of the prizes and records how the integrity was first injected by the crusty old newspaperman, Joseph Pulitzer. The theatre and arts prizes are covered by the author too. The battles over the awarding of those Pulitzer prizes were more intense and bitter than the battles over the journalism awards.

"The prizes," wrote Pulitzer in his proposal to Columbia University, "are for the encouragement of public service, public morals, American literature and the advancement of education."

By 1974 there were 17 annual prizes of \$1,000 each plus a gold medal worth ap-

proximately \$500 for the 18th award based on public service.

So what have the Pulitzer Prizes to do with Canadian journalists interested in improving their craft?

As each year goes by the Americans' incredible promotional talent increases the value of one's being selected for a Pulitzer. The promotional effectiveness is similar to that of the Academy Awards which bumps up box office profits for any movie winning an award.

What of our own National Newspaper Awards which have been awarded for 26 years? The main value of this book can be found in a re-examination of our own awards.

Do we promote the NNA presentations enough? Do the recipients of the NNA honors get the national recognition and prestige that leaves them filled with a sense of responsibility for continuing to give their best because they are among a select few journalists in this country?

Is more national media exposure needed to promote more understanding of the value of the awards among the most important people in the country, our readers?

None of this should be taken as me-

too-ism in copying the American awards. If this book leaves no other impression, it leaves the distinct message that the United States and the craft of journalism are far better for the awards.

Better national promotion and awareness of the Canadian awards would appear to be in order. It is a far too typical Canadian incident to find that the last NNA presentations were, indeed, covered by *CBC* and *CTV*. The rub was that the provincial politician who spoke to the assembled journalists received the television coverage while the recipients of the awards were ignored by the cameras.

It will be necessary to display respect for ourselves as professionals if we covet respect from the nation's readers, who are unaware for the most part of the true ethics the journalism profession embraces.

The book *The Pulitzer Prizes* reveals clearly how far we have to go to improve our image as professional craftsmen of truth.

David Jonah, 26, as a result of reading the Davey Committee Report and within a month of attending Media 71, started a bilingual weekly paper, still in operation, in Bathurst, N.B. in competition with the local Thomson paper.

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ANYONE KNOWING THE WHEREABOUTS of Ormond Raby, freelance writer, and author of the book *Radio's First Voice*, please get in touch with *Content*, 920-6699.

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KINGSTON, Ont. — A Greek philosopher once said that the law is like a cobweb, where the small flies are caught and the great break through.

Thousands of years later his analogy applies in Canada, for many of the people in jail today in this country are those small flies. Many are behind those awful bars not for ghastly crimes but nothing more than small thefts and frauds. About half of them, according to the Law Reform Commission of Canada, could be better dealt with elsewhere. But they are there, robbed of their freedom, because society demands that police zealously pursue those who offend property rights and public morals. And so we catch the brazen and incompetent.

Ironically, unfairly, most often the offenders who are by far the greatest economic and social threat to society aren't their cellmates. While Canadian law has dangerously over-criminalized conduct — in Ontario alone according to one estimate there may be as many as 35,000 criminal and quasi-criminal offenses for which people can go to jail — studies have shown that most white-collar crime, such as embezzlement, bribery, tax evasion, conflict of interest and corporate fraud, is seldom apprehended or, if the perpetrators are caught and convicted, seldom are they punished by imprisonment. And a great deal of criminal conduct in the upper classes, among the big flies, involves violations of codes and regulations that go unpunished or, if stopped, punished solely by fines or sanctions imposed secretly by colleagues. The public simply never knows.

Where do the media fit into this?

Well, instead of exposing this false public impression of crime, this woefully

incomplete picture of human sins, much of the media tend to reinforce it — by ignoring a great deal of the crime that does the most social harm and instead concentrating on the human refuse that is exposed by the police and conveniently paraded before the country's courts.

It is understandably this way, for it is much easier, much cheaper and much safer to proclaim the sins of comparatively little people as re-run on a regular schedule in the nation's police courts than it is, for example, to investigate the way chartered banks, on stop payments, are violating the Bills of Exchange Act (as some are); or attempt to force some of the provincial law societies to disclose details of their current disciplinary hearings; or dissect in print the sad recall histories of the North American car manufacturers; or debate the merits and sins of plea bargaining; or battle the local commission over the public's right to know about policing; or ferret out conflicts of interest of businessmen and bureaucrats, ad nauseum. Most of the media in Canada often haven't got the patience, the desire, or in some cases, the guts.

There are exceptions to this situation. Most newspapers, some much more credibly than others, can point to instances of investigative journalism, where they and not the police or some government department have done the spadework. So can some local television stations. Radio with a very few exceptions seems a lost cause.

Usually most of the media wait for the police and government to serve up their diet of human sins. But police, like the public, are hidebound. They see only the traditional criminals — the small flies — and presume someone else is watching the other kind. Most of the time no one is.

Where there is, most often it is a government department. Government departments are notoriously tight-lipped about bribery, breach of trust, conflicts of interests and corporate fraud. In fact, they're often sympathetic to the people they're trying to regulate. They seem to think such matters are better handled internally.

The result is that unless the media activate their own investigations — or pressure officialdom — much of our white-collar crime is never exposed. And so most of it goes on unchecked, or is quietly shut down without the public ever knowing.

What do the media print about our system of justice? Too often, distortion.

Because Canadians by and large are conservative, and want to believe in their institutions, including the police, the majority presume that the people police charge with offences must be guilty of them. Otherwise, they ask themselves, would police charge them? Canadians want to believe their police are doing a good job. After all, it is less worrisome to believe that they are than to doubt they are or believe they're not.

The media help nurture this dangerous public bias, by focussing on the visible guilty. This is particularly true, I think, of radio and television news.

To be fair, this is not a deliberate distortion. In part, it is due to the nature of court reporting.

The man who pleads guilty is, to the media, pleasingly manageable. He can be dismissed easily and quickly in a couple of terse paragraphs. According to a study done in 1971 by the Canadian Civil Liberties Education Trust, police (provincial)

THE PATTERN OF COURTS AND LAW COVERAGE IMPALES MAINLY THE LITTLE FLIES

By BARRY CRAIG

courts take 10 to 20 minutes at most to decide the fate of a man before them. Their chief aim seems to be to keep the machinery moving, and a nice spin-off of this desire is their provision to the media of inexpensive, attractive copy.

The man who pleads not guilty is a different animal. For the media he is not easy to handle. To document his fate a reporter must sit through a lengthy ritual called a trial. And, unlike the case of the man who pleads guilty, there is a gamble. The not-guilty man may be a disappointment. He may get off, robbing the reporter of one of the chief ingredients of most good court stories — the punishment.

Many court reporters learn this and it leads some of them to ignore (when they can) the cases where they surmise the accused probably will get off. Instead, they tend to gamble on the best risks: the trials that are likely to end in conviction. As for their lower-court colleagues in the police courts, more often than not they simply ignore the withdrawals and dismissals as simply something akin to administrative routine.

More people *do* plead guilty or are convicted than do plead not guilty or are acquitted, or against whom charges are withdrawn or dismissed. Proportionately, however, I think too many of the guilty and convicted end up in print while too few of the others don't.

All this, I believe, helps to reinforce the public bias that police only charge the guilty.

So much for what goes on in court. But what about what goes on in the name of so-called justice outside those court-rooms? What of lawyers and lawmakers,

of police and government, of their conduct in the administration of justice? What of the laws we have, and the public attitude to law? Is our system doing a good job? Is it exploitive, insensitive, sexist and discriminatory? What about due process of law? Is it being observed or ignored? Do courts protect people's rights, or are they indifferent, preoccupied with guilt and innocence? Is plea bargaining ethical? Does legal aid work? Are we imprisoning too many people? Is the system fair to native people? Has a criminal conviction lost its stigma?

All these, and many, many other issues — such as diversion, prisoners' rights, judges' salaries, separation of powers, class actions, sentencing, the Rule of Law — are highly significant in our legal system. But you'd hardly know it from much of the media.

Some papers are changing. A few major ones have changed substantially. But generally what we get in the media is the same across much of the country: the routine on-the-record court reporting, the documentation of criminal events, coverage of the annual bar convention (nothing is said of the drunks), the odd story on allegations of police brutality, annual reports, announcements of new legislation (suitably trumpeted by government as ending all evil); grumblings, often police-inspired, about how we're coddling criminals, and how the courts are letting them free; the occasional whimsical look inside prison, routine stories from police commission meetings (the controversial or damaging events, usually the most important, are conveniently discussed in-camera), and that's about it.

I would bet that if you went back to the newspapers in England about the time when Henry Fielding, author of Tom

Jones, established the Bow Street Runners — the beginning of our modern police — you'd find pretty well the same kind of stories. Two hundred years ago. Crime and legal reporting haven't progressed enough. Some would say we've moved backwards.

It's easy to blame the police reporter. Usually, since he's mostly around the courts where 90 per cent of criminal charges are adjudicated, around the police and lawbreakers, he's the paper's resident leader in crime.

He's what they call in retail business a loss leader, partly due to the fact that he is human.

Police reporters labor, for the most part, in a trying environment. For a start, they have little time for anything other than the routine court work and the reporting of criminal events. I haven't been such an animal for some years. But I can recall that on some of the papers I worked for previously, any suggestion we look at such heady issues as over-criminalization, or whether the due process safeguards were working was met either with refusal or, if approved, had to be completed within a half-day. This is something like trying to summarize the Nuremberg trials during your coffee break.

Most of the socio-criminal and judicial issues of our day simply can't be explored in a matter of one, two or three quick interviews and three or four simplistic takes. The result is they remain, often, ignored.

When the average police reporter does depart from his routine of court stories and the reporting of criminal events (as all do on occasion) several frightening realities of his or her environment surface. (Continued on page 16)

Barry Craig, an investigative reporter for The Edmonton Journal, recently returned to work after completing a Louis S. St. Laurent Fellowship in Legal Journalism at Queen's University, Kingston, Ont. The fellowship, paid for by the Canadian Donner Foundation, is administered by the Canadian Bar Association.