

DATELINE: BANGKOK

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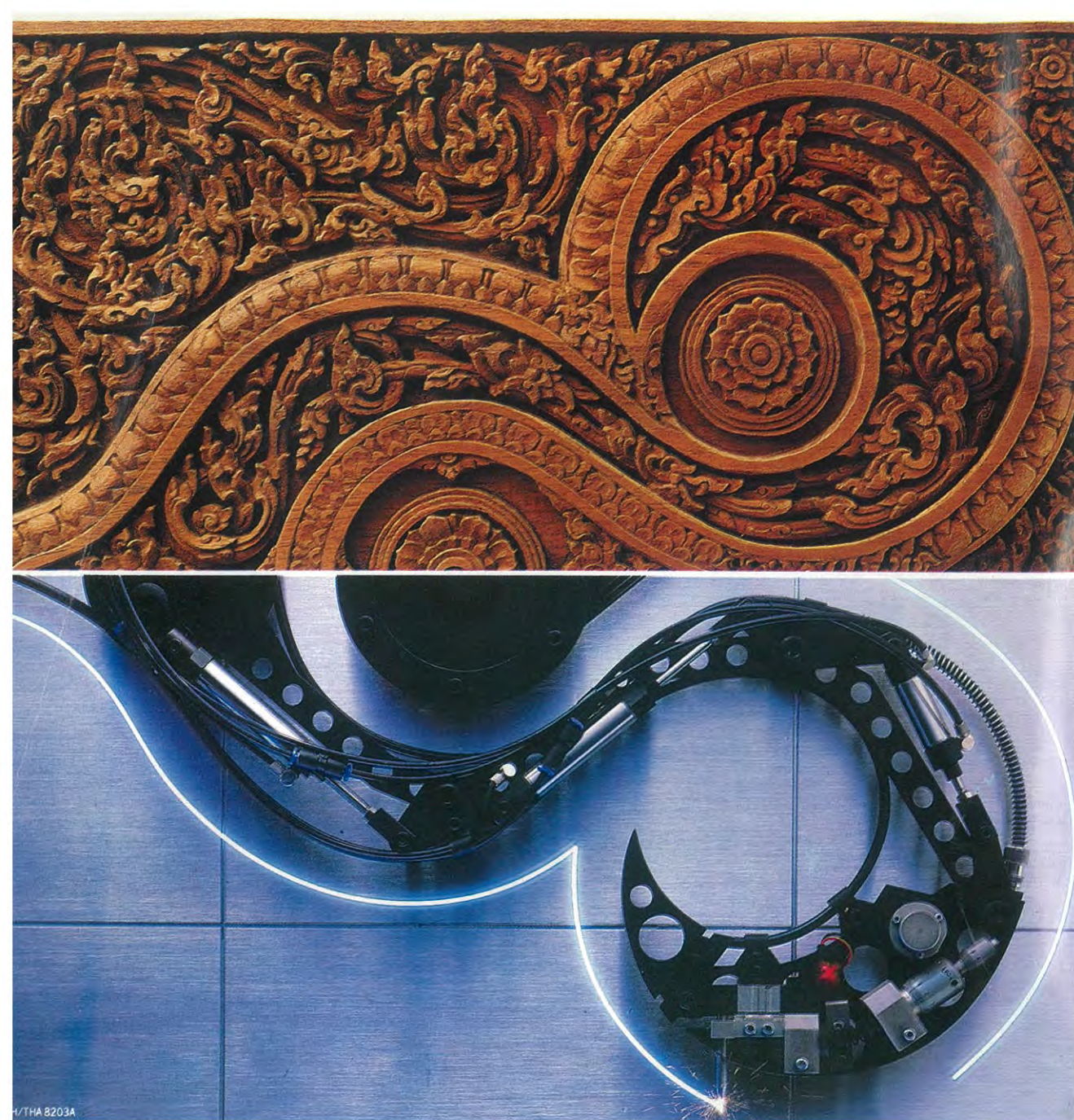
REPORTING AFGHANISTAN CBS Television's Journalistic Jihad

By Mary Williams Walsh

OR THOSE IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD WHO STILL HAVE A TEAR TO shed for Afghanistan, the events of the last 20 months are perplexing. Even the most seasoned journalists on the story, reporting from inside the country as well as from traditional listening posts in Pakistan, waxed confident in their despatches that the puppet regime in Kabul would collapse promptly on the heels of the last withdrawing Soviet units.

Nothing of the sort happened, of course, but why not? The question, large and embarrassing, addresses the quality of Western media attention paid to an important if complicated story. Afghanistan was by any estimation a major war, taking the lives of more than a million people and spawning the world's largest

(continued on page 2)



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CLUB NEWS LETTER FROM THE BOARD

CONGRATULATIONS go first of all to Horacio Severino, a reporter for The Manila Chronicle and winner of the Neil Davis-Bill Latch Memorial (al) Award for 1990. After much deliberation, 'Howie' was the unanimous choice of the judging panel and did well in the face of some strong competition, particularly from his own country and Australia.

The award, which this year amounts to US\$3000, commemorates Neil Davis and Bill Latch, two veteran journalists — and much missed members of the FCCT — killed on 9 September 1985 while covering the unsuccessful 'Black Monday' coup attempt in Bangkok.

The announcement of the award on 5 September was marked by the first showing in a long while of Davis's celebrated documentary, Frontline. That was followed by another film of much more recent vintage about the Thai-Cambodian border by John Swain, the London Sunday Times correspondent based in Hong Kong.

Administered by the FCCT and supported by journalists around the region, the Davis-Latch Award is given to promising young journalists working in the Asia-Pacific region who wish to pursue a specific project. Previous winners have come from Thailand, Malaysia and Nepal.

Severino requested funds for travel in Southeast Asia for a series of articles on comparative experiences in development. Commended by colleagues for his concern, initiative and persistence, his scoops include a story about cannibalism in a Vietnamese refugee boat that eventually led to the court martial of a captain in the US navy.

The third quarter of 1990 has been relatively quiet in terms of club

activities, but punctuated by some notable departures from the correspondent corps. Reuters bureau chief David Storey has gone to London — and the melodious company of his former colleague in Bangkok, Joe De Reinzo — to become a Maggie-watcher in the guise of the venerable agency's chief political correspondent.

Some Japanese bureau chiefs have also winged off in the mid-year outbound migration. Yasushi Tomiyama of Jiji and Hidenobu Okamoto of Tokyo Broadcasting System have both reluctantly returned to Tokyo.

Agence France Presse deputy bureau chief Michael Adler has meanwhile been dragged back to Paris after nearly five years haring around Southeast Asia. Far Eastern Economic Review Indochina correspondent Murray Hiebert has de-camped, with family in tow, to Hanoi. Asian Wall Street Journal staff correspondent John Berthelsen has saddled up (voluntarily this time) for the sunsets of the US west coast to become a Pacific basin analyst.

The Australian Financial Review's Sarah Sargent is now ensconced in Hong Kong as deputy editor of Asiamoney, while Tony Hill of Australian Broadcasting Corporation has returned to home pastures as a senior reporter in Melbourne.

Special thanks are due to David Storey, Yasushi Tomiyama, Hidenobu Okamoto, Murray Hiebert and Tony Hill, all of whom did valiant stints on the executive board. The upside to all these departures are the new faces — Kevin Cooney at Reuters, Erskine McCullough at AFP, Koji Sato at Jiji, Toru Shibata at TBS and Nick Stuart at ABC. Farewell and welcome. □

population of refugees. One super-power was directly involved, to its shame and great cost; another supplied an enormous amount of modern weaponry to a ragtag resistance movement. Yet in the 10 years that the Soviets cast about destructively in Afghanistan not one significant American journalism prize went for print reportage. The only award-winning work from Afghanistan was a CBS News series that was later developed into a documentary, the sole one-hour report on the war aired by a commercial network in the United States. The images were stunning, but did the documentary tell the truth?

From the moment the last credits trailed off the screen, one summer's night in 1987, Mike Hoover's documentary for CBS, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, was under fire. To millions of uninitiated viewers across America the film was brilliant television, but to the practiced eye it appeared to be a con, more or less frame by frame.

The documentary knitted together a number of scenes from Afghanistan:

- the sabotage of a high-tension powerline bringing electricity to the Afghan capital, Kabul;

- the discovery of a bomb disguised as a doll, and an on-camera interview with an Afghan who said Soviet soldiers were planting such bombs as a matter for tactical routine, to maim children and deprive the Afghan resistance of a new generation of warriors;

- a massive but futile attack on the eastern-Afghanistan garrison town of Khost, with a voice-over explanation by top CBS anchorman Dan Rather that the assault had failed for want of proper anti-aircraft guns.

Dramatic content in the film ran high. There were hair-raising scenes of men running through fields pursued by helicopter gunships. There was a daring nighttime firefight in which a guerrilla went one-on-one

MARY Williams Walsh, in a piece researched while she was *The Wall Street Journal's* principal correspondent for South and Southeast Asia, looks into allegations of misbehaviour on the part of a filmmaker reporting from Afghanistan for the American television giant CBS.

Journal editors, who would eventually tell Walsh they were nominating her 1989 work on Afghanistan for the Pulitzer Prize, had given her carte blanche to investigate media misconduct in the war zone. After almost five months of research in Asia and the US Walsh filed a three-part report with her New York editors.

Among her findings was a well-substantiated charge that entire combat scenes in an award-winning documentary narrated by superstar anchorman Dan Rather had been faked. But the *Journal* spiked the

with a Russian tank — and "the cameraman went with him," Rather claimed. There were jets screaming in the sky and bombs falling to earth. Reviewers raved. *The New York Times's* John Corry called the documentary "A powerful statement."

Journalists who know Afghanistan well have challenged the film's details and its overall portrayal of the situation in that country, but they have run up against a stone wall. Mike Hoover turned out to have impregnable credentials. He had originally made a name for himself in cinematographic circles as a maker of gripping adventure films, shot in such exotic locals as Antarctica and Mt. Everest. He won an Academy Award for *Up*, a film about hang-gliding, and served as Occidental Petroleum chairman Armand Hammer's personal video biographer. He came to CBS with exceptional credentials, not the least of which, CBS sources say, was the personal endorsement of ABC News's chief executive, Rooney Arledge. The video product of Hoover's first trip to Afghanistan, a

story, feeding Walsh a series of shifting reasons why.

Walsh found none of these explanations credible. She concluded that a scandal involving CBS was off-limits at the *Journal*, and quit in disgust. She now works as Canada bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*.

What follows is just one portion of the story that never appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*. The original companion pieces included equally detailed and equally damning reports on the CBS contract producer responsible for the network's regular coverage of Afghanistan, and on a charitable foundation that is both less and more than what it purports to be.

The article published here not only makes the case that a prominent filmmaker supplied CBS with grossly misleading material from the jihad but tells a great deal

series aired on CBS in 1984, won the prestigious Alfred I. du Pont-Columbia University award.

Question a man like this, journalists discovered, and his patrons in the industry will try to wipe you off the map. In my case, I learned from various media writers following what came to be known as "Afghaniscam" that CBS men had planted tales that I was a poseur, that the network possessed a smoking-gun "tape" of my activities, and that their best efforts to investigate me had been foiled because I "didn't answer any phone calls." Reminiscent of a passage from a corny spy novel, one CBS executive said darkly about me and, oddly, my husband, to a New York media writer: "We don't know if they really are who they say they are." As rumors washed around me, I realised that CBS's shoot-the-messenger tactics were paying off. Media writers trying to get to the bottom of the charges, working from offices in the U.S., were unable to advance the story beyond the useless level of "Walsh-alleges/CBS-denies." One by one, they dropped the story, and

about mujihadeen manipulation of Western journalists — and about what a media powerhouse was prepared to do to protect itself from disquieting criticism.

Walsh's trilogy of stories on Afghanistan presents a portrait of Americans running amock in Peshawar, the Pakistani town that serves as the Afghan resistance's central base. It argues that normal professional restraints, journalistic and philanthropic, were loosened in the anti-Soviet frenzy the jihad became for a number of expatriates for whom the real interests of the Afghans became secondary.

Readers interested in acquiring copies of the other two articles in the series can write to: Mary Williams Walsh, Los Angeles Times, 890 Yonge Street, Suite 400, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4W 3P4. □

the viewing public was left not knowing whom to believe.

Here is some of what I was able to find out about *The Battle for Afghanistan* and Hoover's responses to the charges.

First, the power-line pylon sequence. Opening the film, a group of mujihadeen is seen carefully demining the ground around the pylons by hurling rocks to explode the hidden mines. Once a path has been cleared, the mujihadeen are shown fixing captured explosives to the pylon supports. The film implies tremendous risks: A plane flies overhead, seemingly on watch for saboteurs, and guerrillas hide under the pylon structure.

From there, the film backs up to show an arduous night march through the mountains, a betrayal to Soviet forces, and a Soviet convoy lumbering out into the countryside to hunt down the mujihadeen. The film shows the mujihadeen waiting for daylight, then ambushing the Soviet column with their simple weapons. A firefight ensues and finally the film moves back to the pylons, showing mujihadeen sappers knocking them out, one after the other.

Then it shows a caravan of peasant-refugees leaving the area with their animals and household possessions, for fear of getting caught in a Soviet retaliatory reply to the pylon sabotage.

One thing is certain: Afghan guerrillas did knock down the electrical lines to Kabul one evening years ago. But whether Hoover was on hand at the time is most doubtful, and Afghan eyewitnesses say no Soviets were anywhere near the scene in any event.

Gulam Hasan Karokhel is a man in a good position to tell what happened on the day of the blackout. He is a *khan*, a tribal leader — a kingpin of rural Afghan society — and the pylons marched across his land. For years he had masqueraded as a collaborator of the communists in Kabul and, because of his position, the regime put him in charge of its posts on his land, manned with militia to guard the power grid.

Karokhel, who wasn't altogether at one with the communists in Kabul, had a brother in the resistance. When he would hear from his mujahid brother that guerrilla columns wanted to traverse his land, he would tell the regime's militiamen to let the guerrillas pass without incident. The militiamen obeyed him, he says. A Westerner would have called Karokhel a double agent.

Karokhel was in on the planning of the blackout from the beginning, he says. There were peace talks going on in Geneva at the time and his brother's guerrilla faction — known in the West as the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, or NIFA — hoped to make an impression on the negotiators by showing the mujihadeen surging from success to success, on television if possible. A key idea, he says, was to show viewers abroad that, so hated were the communists, even tribal chiefs and thousands of peasant-followers enjoying relative peace and prosperity near Kabul were abandoning their homes and joining the resistance under NIFA's patronage.

"They said they would ask this famous cameraman to come and film, and show his film to all the world," Karokhel says. "They called Mike Hoover, but he didn't get there at the proper time."

Karokhel says he pressed ahead with his part of the script anyway. He called together his followers serving in the communist militia, gave them two months' pay and a bonus, and told them they weren't going to be able to work for him any more because he was pulling up stakes and heading for Pakistan. Then, with the militiamen more or less looking the other way, the mujahideen rigged plastic explosive charges to the legs of the pylons, and blew up some of them. Karokhel gave the order to pick up and go, and his peasant-followers — 4,000 of them, he says — formed a caravan and walked through the mountains for the refugee camps of Pakistan. Just as they crossed the border, he says, they bumped into Hoover, on his way into Afghanistan for the sabotage. Karokhel says he let Hoover film the caravan, gave him an on-camera interview (later discarded in the cutting room), and then, when the American said he'd like to film more collapsing pylons, detached some mujahideen to return to the power grid with Hoover to blow up a few more pylons. Later, with his brother, he was involved in other Hoover films, the combat sequences of some of which he said were manufactured in a NIFA training camp in Pakistan, near Peshawar, a locale that closely resembles parts of Afghanistan.

Sher Mohammad Etibari, a well-known Afghan guide and translator, says he was on the pylon re-do team. "When we reached the area, a week had already passed since the actual act of sabotage," he says. "We arranged artificial fighting for (Hoover). The mujahideen were telling him, 'Set up your camera on this side, because (the pylon) will fall on that side.'" He says the men worked all night — the darkness was to heighten the sense of peril the film



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was to evoke — and left the area the following morning.

Etibari, who studied video journalism on a French-funded program in France, had never seen Hoover's finished work until last year. Watching the documentary for the first time on a rented videocassette player in Peshawar, Etibari laughed at Rather's voice-over claim that the team had run into a Soviet convoy on the way. "At that time, we didn't face any convoy," he said. "We had already blown up (the pylons) a week before, so what could (the Soviets) do any more?" He said the film, in fact, interspersed daytime shots of an actual convoy, with nighttime footage of some trucks the local mujahideen already had at their disposal thanks to Karokhel's ties to the militiamen stationed on his land.

For Etibari, the tip-off to the vein of fakery running through Hoover's war film comes when the mujahideen are shown, in daylight, racing down a hillside in full cry — "Allah akbar!" — just before opening up on the purported Soviet convoy. Never, under any circumstances, would mujahideen interested in living to see the end of the day betray their positions before an ambush in such a fashion, he said. "No sound! If there is a convoy, believe me, you can't even ask me a question for me to translate," he said.

When asked for his version of what had happened, Hoover said it was true that he hadn't been on hand for the initial act of sabotage, but not because he was late; rather, he said, he had needed to be at the border at the time to film the caravan of refugees as they crossed over the Durand Line into Pakistan. He said that as soon as the refugees passed, he headed on into Afghanistan and came upon a number of guerrillas still in the area, carrying out follow-up attacks on the pylons. Asked why they might be back at work destroying a power line that had already been put out of commission, he responded that the mujahideen

had wanted to do as much damage to the system as they could, to make it as hard as possible for the communists to repair. He insisted that he believed the mujahideen were blowing up the pylons of their own accord, and not because a cameraman, who wanted to film them, was on hand.

"This is always going to be a subjective answer," he said. "I'm going to say I did what they did. Whether we were there or not, that's what they were going to do."

BUT what of another problem, the appearance of Chinese-made jets in the film? American weapons specialists who have seen the film — including some mujahideen backers in whose interest it would be to endorse the authenticity of *The Battle for Afghanistan* — can identify Chinese jet fighters known as Fantans. The segments showing the Fantans are intercut with separate shots of Afghan farmers gazing toward the sky, giving the arty impression the peasants are apprehensively craning up at these same planes roaring over their fields and villages. But neither the Soviet nor Afghan air forces fly any Chinese-made fighter planes. Pakistani pilots do, however, and weapons-transfer specialists who have seen Hoover's film say his camera had to have caught the planes on training missions over Pakistan. They also point out that two sequences, showing two very different helicopters — one a Soviet MI-8 troop carrier and the other, a Hind gunship — are oddly spliced together, to make it look to the untrained eye as if the cameraman had come under a single, protracted volley of helicopter rocket and cannon fire. For some reason, no single frame captures both an attacking helicopter and resulting action on the ground.

Ordinance experts and others point out further that some of the views of bomb blasts cut in between

the shots of the planes are simply too picture-perfect to be credible. Even when the film is watched in slow motion, examined frame by frame, no bombs or rockets, or rocket vapor trails, can be seen on their way in to detonation on the ground. And the blasts themselves are beautifully center-framed in the camera's lens, one after another. Veteran war photographers, still and video, interviewed for this story, say that such shots are nearly impossible to achieve with real bombs and rockets. Almost always, a cameraman will hear the report of a blast before he has time to compose a shot, he swivels his camera around and invariably is able to capture only a cloud of smoke, already dispersing. So, the photographers argue, a lot of the fireworks in *The Battle for Afghanistan* had to have been ground charges, planted for Hoover's camera.

When told his film had Pakistani jets in it, Hoover had no explanation. "Maybe there are," he said. "I don't know." He said that he had filmed some Pakistani F-16s scrambling in Pakistan, but didn't know how they might have popped up in his film, if indeed they had. "Everybody gets in there and looks at these things and sees whatever he wants to see," he says. "Hell you could have Boeing 747s in there. You could have Apollo taking off."

Hoover, in yet another segment, takes up the oft-told tale of "toy bombs," the exploding dolls and toys the Soviets have been accused of manufacturing and using in Afghanistan. "Toy bombs" are the Holy Grail of the Afghan *jihad*; journalists have tried in vain throughout the war, from one end of Afghanistan to the other, to find hard evidence of an onslaught of Soviet-made killer toys. Even Freedom House, a leading center of anti-communist research and information in New York, was forced to simulate a toy bomb for want of the real thing when printing a poster calling attention to Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan — and said so with an asterisk.

Experienced journalists and relief workers say that a lot of booby-trapping went on in Afghanistan, by all sides; bags of sugar, doors, and yes, occasionally toys were all made to explode. As for toy bombs stamped out by the thousands in some satanic mill in, say, the Ukraine, military analysts believe these reports are probably fueled by the Red Army's use of "butterfly mines," small, colored anti-personnel explosives dropped from aircraft, that have two wings to keep them from exploding on impact with the ground. (These butterfly mines are almost exact copies of the double-wing-configured Dragon's Tooth mine, developed by the Pentagon for air dispersal over Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh Trail a generation ago.)

"No serious journalist who's been to Afghanistan has ever seen (a toy bomb)," says Chris Hooke, an Australian videojournalist who has covered the war extensively. "Every once in a while, you get something that's booby trapped, but there's a big difference between the use of toy bombs as a matter of policy and a few guys in Kabul sitting down and rigging a few things."

Like a number of Peshawar-based journalists who have sought evidence of Soviet-manufactured killer toys for years, Hooke finds it implausible that Hoover, flying in from California, should be the only journalist in a decade to stumble onto one. Yet find one he does. What most bothers Hooke is what Hoover then does with his find: He permits the mujahideen to blow it up at night, filming both the toy and the blast in the dark, with a night scope which blurs the image and washes out all color. "It's not serious journalism to blow up the evidence in the dark," says Hooke. Just the same, he points out, Freedom House has used Hoover's film as proof that toy bombs exist.

(Diplomatic cables show Hoover himself worried that no one would believe that he had found a toy bomb.)

The final portion of *The Battle*

for Afghanistan fixes on the preparations for an attack on Khost, a regime stronghold in eastern Afghanistan. Rather says that the mujahideen had hoped to capture the town, proclaim it a liberated city, set up an alternate government there, and call for diplomatic recognition.

The mujahideen have indeed long hoped to take Khost, and the hills and vast plain around the town have seen repeated heavy fighting since 1980. Marginally involved in the attempt was NIFA, a guerrilla party known not for its fighting profile but for its leaders' wealth, sophistication and understanding of Western ways, including the ways of public relations. To Western journalists covering the war, NIFA high-ups are known as the "Gucci guerrillas." But in *The Battle for Afghanistan*, credit for the attempt to take the town is given to NIFA's Rahim Wardak, a slick resistance figure who was trained at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, years ago. Ordinary Afghans from around Khost say this credit is totally, grievously misplaced.

Around the time Hoover was working in Afghanistan, NIFA took part in a debate then going on inside the resistance over how best to use foreign materiel to wage *jihad*. Resistance groups with good representation in the interior of their country favored deploying the best of the newly arriving weapons deep inside Afghanistan, where they could be used to the greatest advantage against the occupying Red Army. But NIFA much preferred to fight what David Isby, the author of a history of the Afghan struggle, calls "the war of the periphery." This meant keeping the choicest weapons closer to the border with Pakistan, where, certainly, they might be put into service in far fewer direct contacts with the Soviets, but where journalists could have a relatively easy time of it filming the weapons in action, celebrate mujahideen prowess on TV screens half a world

away, and unwittingly help advance the argument, chiefly in Washington, for more and better supplies of weapons.

The strategy was revealed to British still photographer John Gunston, while he was on an assignment for *Newsweek* to photograph Stinger missiles. The well-travelled Briton ran into Rahim Wardak in the field, and the NIFA commander, Gunston says, encouraged him to photograph an action he referred to as "Operation Lightning" which he said was about to begin nearby.

"He (Rahim Wardak) said, 'If you don't get the shots now, we can always stage it for you later. That's what we did for Mr. Mike,'" Gunston recalls. (His travelling companion at the time, British independent filmmaker Ken Guest, says Rahim Wardak put the same proposition to him. Gunston and Guest, who have strong professional reputations after years of covering Afghanistan for both American and British publications and broadcast companies, declined Wardak's offer.)

In *The Battle for Afghanistan*, Dan Rather explains that the mujahideen wanted to take out Soviet posts in the hills overlooking Khost. "Somehow, they scraped together four or five Soviet-style multi-barrelled rocket launchers," he says. "These are a poor man's artillery."

Rather goes on to say that the guerrillas will use the rockets in a day-long barrage to de-mine the steep, barren inclines leading up to the Russian posts, in a strategy conceived by Rahim Wardak. The film then shows the rockets showering a hillside.

But Jadrani tribesmen from the region around Khost where the film was made say that in fact Rahim Wardak's men "scraped together" their weapons by seizing all the Jadranis' rockets and launchers. Not only that, complains tribal leader Pacha Khan, Rahim Wardak's guerrillas weren't really de-mining the hillside but simply shelling the slopes to no useful end.

Pacha Khan couldn't get the

point of this at the time. "Several times, we (Jadrani commanders) asked them why they didn't aim at the positions," he says. "Rahim Wardak knew they weren't hitting the targets. But they were insisting that they *had* hit the targets. They kept firing and missing. We didn't understand their secret." He did notice that Rahim Wardak had brought an American cameraman as his "special guest," and wondered whether the desert was being shelled for his benefit.

At any rate, says Pacha Khan, the interlopers fired off so many of the Jadranis' rockets that they revealed their position. Counter-fire from regime batteries now rained down on them, and by this time the Jadranis had no ammunition left to defend themselves. "A lot of mujahideen were lost," says Pacha Khan. The Jadranis angrily ordered Rahim Wardak and his men out of their valley.

None of this shows up in the film, though. Instead, Rather's narration claims a sandstorm suddenly descended on Khost, obscuring the mujahideen's targets and forcing them to give up the attack.

When the long-standing suspicions about Hoover's work reached print in American publications last fall, Hoover wrote a self-defense for *The New York Times* op-ed page, arguing that if it hadn't been for freelancers like himself, Americans never would have known about the brutality of the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. It is an assertion that rankles the serious journalists who tried to cover the war properly — honestly — and couldn't get big-dollar assignments.

One of them, Edward Girardet, who covered Afghanistan for *The Christian Science Monitor* and is by near-universal consent the most distinguished print journalist to report on the war — Rather once gave an on-air recommendation of Girardet's book on the war — was so incensed that he fired off a letter to the *Times*. "In Afghanistan, numerous European, American and other cameramen

have striven hard, sometimes getting killed in the process, to provide decent coverage," he wrote. "Unfortunately, much of their footage has never made it onto American television, because it portrayed wretched images of humanity rather than helicopter gunships firing rockets, MiGs dropping bombs, or Soviet troops getting killed. Hoover's footage tended to come up with the 'right' images."

News programs today," he added, "have become little more than 'bang-bang' entertainment, demanding dramatic images that often outweigh content or the need to inform." The letter was never published.

In his *Times* piece, Hoover failed to address any of the curiosities that turn up again and again in *The Battle for Afghanistan*. In an interview with a *Times* reporter, however, he said the Afghans may have aspired to stage things themselves without ever telling him. When the guerrillas ran noisily down the hill to ambush the Soviet column, he said, they might have been asked to "ham it up" by his interpreter, whose instructions Hoover would not have understood. "Maybe (the interpreter) thinks he's Cecil B. DeMille," Hoover said.

When I interviewed Hoover by telephone, meanwhile, he said he believed his footage had come under suspicion because he had fallen afoul of the guerrillas' famous in-fighting. Hoover pointed out that he liked to work with NIFA, and reminded me that since NIFA was one of the resistance alliance's so-called "moderate" parties, it was always being picked on by the more hard-line guerrilla groups. Hoover suggested that the hard-liners were behind the rumors that he had staged combat scenes. In a letter to CBS News president David Burke, Hoover wrote, "The accusations ... come out of the vicious in-fighting among the rival Afghan rebel groups based in Pakistan."

But CBS was hearing other accounts that ought to have given sensible people in the New York headquarters reason to wonder about Hoover's work. As early as 1985, Ed Joyce, then president of CBS News, wrote a memo to Rather saying he had read a piece in *Outside* magazine alleging that Hoover had faked scenes in adventure films. According to the *Los Angeles Daily News*, which obtained a copy of the memo — and of Rather's reply — Joyce asked the anchor whether CBS had anything to worry about in sending the athlete-cameraman to Afghanistan. Rather wrote back that he had discussed ethics with Hoover, and come away satisfied.

Suspicious about Hoover had existed in the tight adventure-film community, it turned out, years before the man ever went to Afghanistan. Rick Sylvester, a stuntman and rock climber who did technical work on a recent James Bond movie, says he has long been bothered by "cute-sy things that are totally phony" in Hoover's adventure films: composites of various rock-climbing scenes depicted as a single, ultimate ascent, for instance, and a hang-gliding sequence implying that a glider was able to land on a famous American pinnacle, the Totem Pole, a feat no one has ever brought off.

Once Hoover was on the scene in Afghanistan, his work there raised new questions. John Simpson, foreign-news editor of the British Broadcasting Corporation's television side, refused to use Hoover's film because it struck him as so obviously false. Simpson says that when he saw a 1987 Hoover clip aired by CBS, purporting to depict "the greatest one-day defeat for Soviet forces since World II," he knew at once it was a fraud. The clip claimed the Red Army had "suffered terrible losses, as many as 800 soldiers killed," but, Simpson says, "There wasn't a single dead body" visible. Joachim Maitre, dean of the journalism school at Boston University and a staunch supporter of the mujahideen, agreed with Simpson.

"The numbers did not, and do not, square," says Maitre, who wrote about the footage in a bulletin he edits, the *Defense Media Review*. He points out that, despite the grand claims, Hoover was not able to show a single tank on the battle scene, and that his own British, French and Pakistani intelligence sources doubted any Soviets had been present at all. "Rather, obviously, had produced a hoax," says Maitre.

Maitre had another telling objection to Hoover's work. Under Maitre's leadership, Boston University ran a U.S.-government-funded school in Peshawar to train Afghan mujahideen to be video cameramen and journalists. Maitre says CBS once aired one of these Afghan's video images of a roadside ambush, and gave credit for the pictures to Hoover. (Hoover has said he sent the Afghan a thank-you note.)

As it happens, there were concerns about Hoover's reliability at the lower levels of CBS. One producer, who would discuss his views only on the promise of strict anonymity, said that when Hoover's film started arriving in New York, "it seemed hard to believe."

"There were some questions raised at a producer-editor level when the first material came in," says the staffer. Hoover was questioned, and "He swore that he had never staged anything and that people who had never been to Afghanistan didn't have the slightest idea what they were talking about." Production people at "Black Rock" — CBS's Manhattan headquarters tower — accepted Hoover's explanations, although "some of the more dubious material wasn't used," the producer said.

"One thing you should understand," he added, "is that Hoover came highly recommended. He went straight to the top at CBS. When he came back (from shooting in Afghanistan) it wasn't just as a free-lance cameraman, it was like a person who went straight to the managing editor of *The New York*

Times. This had an effect on people who would have said, 'this man is a liar'."

Some higher-ups did try to assure themselves that Hoover's film was legitimate before airing it. Matthew Erulkar, an American backer of the Afghan resistance who runs a small operation to teach the mujahideen to read compasses and maps, says he was once consulted on Hoover's film but ended up objecting to both the process and the outcome. Erulkar, who speaks Persian and has travelled extensively with the mujahideen, says that he one day received a call at his Washington office from Perry Wolff, a well-regarded producer at CBS. Wolff was working on *The Battle for Afghanistan* as its executive producer and writer, and Erulkar says that that day's call was the first of many from Wolff, who asked detailed questions about the content of Hoover's raw film.

"There was a lot of concern about specifics," Erulkar says. "The type of weapons, 107-millimeter missiles, what (were they) used for, that sort of stuff." Erulkar got exasperated at length, because he was never permitted to watch the film he was being asked to authenticate, and he finally broke off communications with Wolff. When he saw the final documentary, he says, he thought "The whole thing was inaccurate."

"It was almost like they were so concerned about the trees that they lost sight of the forest," he says, explaining that the film may have had the weapons nomenclature down right, but it gave a distorted overall impression of what was going on in the war. "It's almost as if he had decided what kind of film this was going to be, and just wanted to make sure (the small details were) correct," he says.

Wolff, when asked about *The Battle for Afghanistan*, said only, "It's always the same thing from print journalists. As far as I know, there is nothing faked in it, period. Thank you, and good-bye," and hung up the phone.

Last fall, when some of this came to light in the U.S. media, CBS News president David Burke forbade staff, from Rather on down, to talk with outside reporters. *The New York Times* quoted an unnamed CBS News executive who said a "point-by-point" response would be forthcoming as soon as an in-house investigation was wrapped up. Hoover was brought to New York from New Zealand, where he was working on location, and talks were held, but when CBS released its findings, a three-sentence press release under Burke's signature was all there was to be had. It explained nothing, saying no more than that "The CBS Evening News, Dan Rather, and the producers involved with the coverage of that distant war (in Afghanistan) back then met all of their professional obligations and met them with complete integrity." Burke made a single admission, that Hoover's award-winning documentary had "misidentified" a jet.

Back in Peshawar, Karokhel is having none of it.

"If Mike Hoover says something, tell him to come and talk with me," he says. "The thing is, journalists must always be realistic. They must never do anything wrong, especially in the holy war. In this film, there are too many lies."

Hoover's "documentary" and CBS's carelessness in not only broadcasting but celebrating it have gone unpunished. The broader coverage that exalted the prowess and prospects of the Afghan guerrillas, often at the expense of the truth, continued, at least until fairly recently. The prestigious award Hoover's Afghan films won for CBS has not been returned to Columbia University and may never be. Bill Leonard, the administrator of the award committee at Columbia, said in July of this year that the university would abide by the results of CBS's internal review of the charges against Hoover. Leonard is a former president of CBS News.

That's the news. Good night. □

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BANGKOK • HO CHI MINH CITY • HANOI

DESPITE world attention shifting to the Gulf, the past few months have kept correspondents fairly busy in this part of the world, with the ongoing conflict in Cambodia, a fresh outbreak of war in Sri Lanka and mounting pressure in Burma for some way out of military rule.

All in the line of duty, **Nate Thayer** spent five weeks inside Cambodia travelling with Sihanoukist guerillas for AP, and ended up playing hide and seek with the Phnom Penh army who learned of the presence of a western journalist with the resistance and wanted to take him over to their side, presumably so they could stamp his passport with a valid entry visa for Cambodia. Nate eventually emerged much thinner than when he went in and with a nasty dose of cerebral malaria. Now thankfully recovered.

Meanwhile **James Pringle**, in Sri Lanka for The Times, was getting rocketed and machine-gunned by government helicopters, but proudly claims he had the presence of mind to take off his leather cowboy boots before diving into a ditch to take cover. He returned to Colombo with three bullet holes in his rented taxi.

On the Burmese border, a young freelance journalist from Australia, **Ben Bohane**, has taken up residence with the Karen, and says he is waiting for the day when he can establish himself in Rangoon with the blessing of a new government there. So far the only Burmese authorities he has met have been trying to shoot him. Why do so many governments dislike journalists?

Presidentissimo **Dominic Faulder** went into Burma with a visa, was entertained graciously by the charming generals in the military junta in Rangoon, and returned to Bangkok even more pessimistic about the prospects of demo-crazy in Burma.



Slorc public enemy number one, **Bertil Lintner**, has finally brought out his long awaited chronicle of the 18 months he spent traveling in the north and east of Burma, courtesy of the Kachin and other "subversives" so beloved by the Rangoon heel-clicking generals. The book — **Land of Jade: A Journey Through Insurgent Burma** — is available in Bangkok bookshops for a modest outlay. Strangely, Bertil is apparently on a visa blacklist in Rangoon, along with most of the other correspondents in Bangkok who report on Burma. Does nobody love us?

A number of old faces are leaving — **Michael Adler**, after making a strong impression on the journalistic scene in Thailand for AFP, is going back to AFP in Paris. **John Berthelsen** of the AWSJ, and a reknowned lover of Buddhist culture, is chucking in journalism altogether and taking up a job advising the California legislature on things Asian. Maybe a sense of harmony and detachment will be easier to attain in the ascetic atmosphere of the West Coast.

David Storey, Reuters bureau chief here for several years, is going back to London to doorstep Maggie as Reuters chief political correspondent. He is being replaced by **Kevin Cooney**, formerly of Hong Kong. Another new face in the Reuters office is **Angus McSwan**, fresh out of balmy El Salvador and keen to report on the pacifist movement in Cambodia. Spends his holidays being chased by bulls in Pamplona. **Sarah Sargent**, formerly of the

Australian "Fin Review" (not a surfing newsletter but a serious financial journal) has left Bangkok to join Asiamoney in Hong Kong, and **Steve Erlanger** of the NYT is believed to be seeking Russian grammars for a future posting in Moscow.

In search of the bizarre, **Philippe Decaux** took himself off to Mongolia to report on one of the world's most significant if poorly understood democracy movements, and was joined by **Peter Charlesworth** to take pictures of the momentous political development.

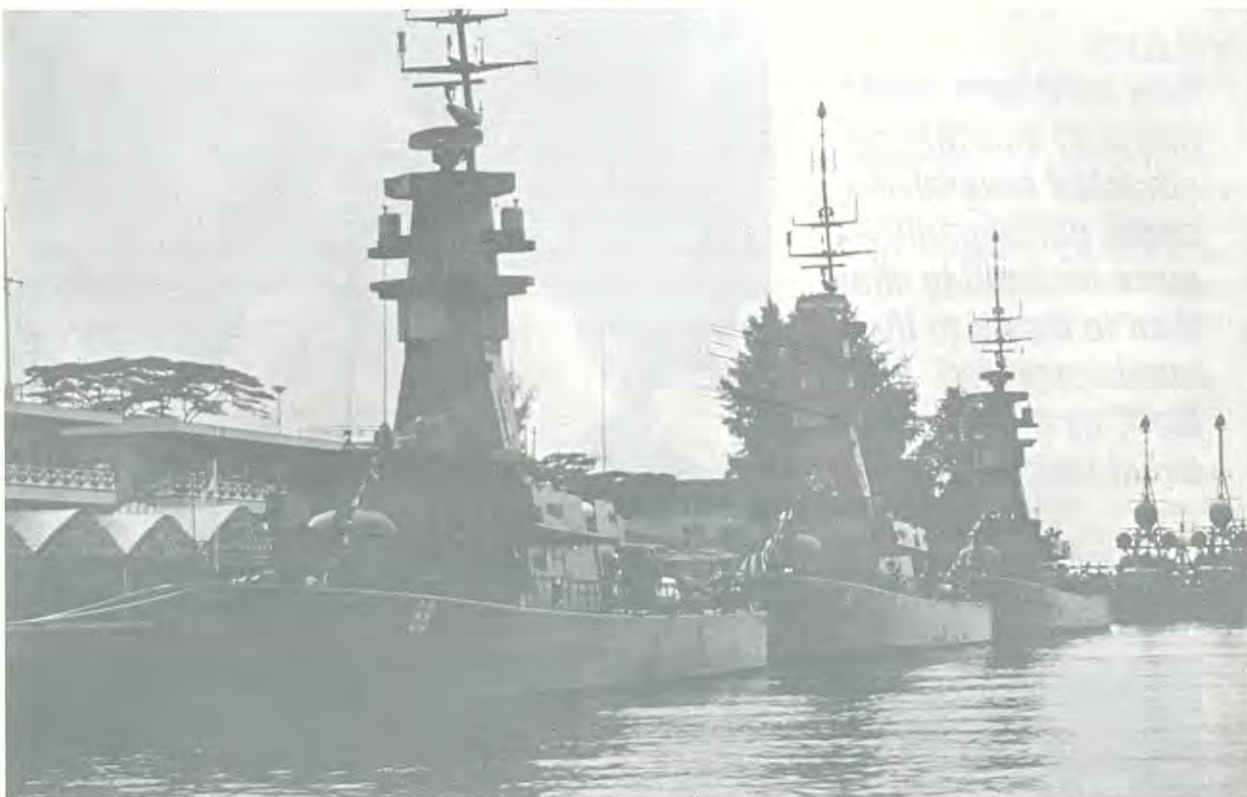
Paul Handley has been spending a lot of time in the south of Thailand, giving up beer and whisky to get a real grass-roots impression of the Muslim separatist problem there for the Review. And former Review correspondent **Paisal Sricharatchanya** in his new position as editor of the Bangkok Post has been conducting psychological warfare against the government here over the press freedom issue.

The Review is also moving **Murray Hiebert** to Hanoi, where he will divide his time searching for vegetarian spring rolls and reporting on Vietnam's jerky progression towards capitalism, traffic jams, street crime and other notable features of western life. Reuters have also just opened a bureau in Hanoi under the chiefdom of **Kat Callo**, and the Vietnamese are already rubbing their hands together in anticipation of the thousands of dollars they will be making from the sudden increase in journalistic interest.

Finally **Phil Blenkinsop**, an Australian freelance photographer most noted for his US\$27 trip from Ho Chi Minh through Phnom Penh to Battambang and back, is now in Bangkok and understood to be seeking alternative travel arrangements to the Gulf (another part of the world where they don't like journalists all that much). □

New members' night this past quarter attracted several dozen participants — more inclined to chat than to dance to the music provided. FCCT staff, as ever, kept the event well-oiled.





Singapore's Swagger

Singapore's policy of deterrence is being softened by the introduction of "defence diplomacy," Robert Karniol reports.

NO longer simply the "poisoned shrimp" of Southeast Asia, Singapore has been striving to temper its previous swagger with an increasingly subtle defence posture.

The city-state founded in 1965 after rejecting a short-lived union with the Malaysian federation is a tasty morsel indeed. It has an ethnically-diverse population of just 2.7 million people living at a strategic juncture of sea and air routes. Further, its robust economy last year

generated a gross domestic product (GDP) worth some US\$27.5 billion at current market prices.

The government has sought to deter potential threats by ensuring that an attack on Singapore would cost dearly, the basis of its "poisoned shrimp" analogy. It has created a fighting force of citizen-soldiers numbering some 55,000 active troops (including 35,000 conscripts) and upwards of 200,000 reservists it says can be mobilised within six hours.

The country's lack of strategic depth has meanwhile encouraged a defensive capability that extends be-

yond its borders and emphasises air and maritime forces equipped with sophisticated technology. This includes upwards of 150 combat aircraft, among them F-16A/B fighters, and a naval guerrilla force of vessels most recently boosted by six missile corvettes equipped with Harpoon and Gabriel 2 surface-to-surface missiles.

An Israeli model shaped by a force of advisors initially dictated the country's military strategy and structure after earlier approaches to India and Egypt were rejected. This is still felt, and a few Israelis continue to provide support, but Singa-

pore has more recently begun to see itself in the more benign image of Switzerland. The shift is most obviously expressed through the adoption of the Swiss concept of "total defence" involving all sectors of society.

Defence spending, which is not detailed in the budget, is estimated at S\$2.92 billion (roughly US\$1.5 billion) in 1989. This represents 5.5 per cent of GDP and 23.1 per cent of total expenditure.

The result appears formidable, and some observers have been prompted to express concern. Notes one locally-based analyst: "The strategy of accenting deterrence has perhaps been too successful in that Singapore is now viewed by some as

was as much an exercise in nation-building as for reasons of security.

The country's leadership, haunted by the ethnic riots that disrupted Singapore (and Malaysia) in the late 1960s, sees the armed forces as a tool to break down communal barriers. The army in particular is further viewed as a medium through which the population can be inculcated with a Singaporean spirit and identity.

"I don't think the army exists primarily to fight, but rather as a conduit to transmit national values to the community," says a foreign military officer.

The discreet changes in defence strategy introduced over the past year or two focus on external rela-

resulted in Singapore hosting the first bilateral land exercise to be conducted by the two countries and may lead to further training cooperation.

Relations with Malaysia, which are often frosty, meanwhile edged towards improvement with the launch last May of the first bilateral land exercise ever held by the two countries. This was conducted in Singapore, with a reciprocal exercise held a few months later in the East Malaysia state of Sarawak. Observers dismiss the military effectiveness of these drills but regard the political dimension as significant.

Singapore seeks to informally explain its defence policies and plans through such contacts, and to downplay any perceptions neighbouring countries may have of aggressive intent. This is in marked contrast to its past unwillingness to discuss defence topics, which led to suspicions that are not easily erased.

"Singapore's strategy aims not at defeating threats but at preventing them from emerging," notes a locally-based analyst. "It has never seen its national security in purely military terms, and it uses its economic strength to forge links that can pre-empt potential threats."

The spider's web of defence relations, though currently accenting its Asean partners, is by no means limited to them. Singapore has maintained an extensive training facility in Taiwan since the mid-1970s and has had a multilateral relationship with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom since the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) was created in 1971.

It further enjoys close links with the US, which this year should begin increasing its use of Singapore's facilities for repair and replenishment of its military aircraft and ships together with boosting the frequency of its rotational deployment there of a range of air force aircraft. Equally interesting, the city-state last year took its first tentative step into the international arena with a commit-

No longer simply the 'poisoned shrimp' of Southeast Asia, Singapore is tempering its previous swagger.

itself a threatening regional power."

This together with a changing security environment appears to be behind the shifts under way in Singapore's defence thinking. Deterrence remains in play, but it has recently been softened with an overlay of "defence diplomacy" that forms an increasingly significant component of the country's foreign policy.

Defence diplomacy, as practiced by Singapore, involves using the armed forces to establish bilateral links that reinforce economic and political ties while lessening the possibility of military tension. One senior Ministry of Defence official describes this as a spider's web of relationships. "We now view defence with more dimensions and more subtlety," he says.

Singapore's defence policy has from the start had an alternative dimension, but with an internal orientation. When universal conscription of males was introduced in 1967, it

tions, with joint exercises and overseas training the main avenues of expression. Singapore has consequently emerged as the only member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to maintain bilateral military relations with each of its five partners in the grouping.

Singaporean ground and naval forces have trained in Brunei and conducted joint exercises there for several years, while Thailand has regularly hosted elements of the army and air force. The country's combat aircraft have also used the (US-operated) air weapons range in the Philippines for some time.

Indonesia and Malaysia are newer elements. Singapore has conducted joint naval exercises with Indonesia since 1974 and joint air exercises since 1980. These tentative relations were boosted in early 1989 with the inauguration in Sumatra of the jointly-operated Siabu Air Weapons Range under a memorandum of understanding that later that year



INSIGHT GUIDES

ARE GOING PLACES:



ment of police personnel to the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia.

Current defence-related thinking in Singapore stresses efforts to strengthen the FPDA through increased joint training, greater emphasis on combined operations and the formation of a contingent combined staff that would coordinate military reaction to a crisis. A potent FPDA, Singapore believes, has a deterrent value through adding an imponderable element that potential aggressors must consider together with the political influence of its partner countries. Another key element it favours is the continued active presence of US forces in the region, which Singapore views as benign in intent and stabilising in influence.

Some observers suspect deeper motives for Singapore's avid interest in maintaining the military status quo, arguing that this would help the country keep an edge over its regional rivals for economic and political dominance.

Singaporean officials contend instead that they believe economic prosperity throughout the region is the key to peace. They further disclaim concern over the recent trend that finds the countries of Southeast Asia expanding their military capabilities, stressing that all must feel secure. "An unstable situation is created when one country feels insecure," says a local mandarin.

Conventional thinking identifies Malaysia and Indonesia as the main potential threats to Singapore's security, and indeed the three countries view each other with some suspicion. There is even a territorial dispute with Kuala Lumpur over sovereign claims to a speck of land called Horsborough Light at the eastern confluence of Johor Strait and the Strait of Singapore to add drama.

But closer to the truth and more complex to gauge are threats born from instability. The potential effects of a resurgence of ethnic unrest in Malaysia, or in Singapore itself, and

the unsettling of Malaysian or Indonesian society through the influence of Islamic fundamentalism are among Singapore's darkest fears.

Similarly, the nation's leadership is wary of a regional power vacuum that could encourage countries like China, India and Japan to assume more active military roles and so create uncertainty. Vietnam too, with its claim to the Spratly islands, is considered a potentially destabilising element.

The Singaporean armed forces are consequently geared to react to a range of threats rather than to one or two easily identifiable enemies.

Singapore's preoccupation with its security, external and internal alike, is nevertheless viewed by some analysts as proportionally distorted. One example is the country's Internal Security Act, a draconian measure introduced throughout the Malay peninsula by the UK's colonial administrators at the height of the communist insurgency and never revoked by either Singapore or Malaysia.

Singapore at the time of its birth as an independent nation had arguable justification for building up its armed forces and keeping a tight rein on its population. In the mid-1960s Indonesia was pursuing an aggressive policy of "confrontation", the Malay peninsula was rife with ethnic unrest, the Second Indochina War was heating up and China was actively exporting revolution.

Twenty-five years later much of this tension has faded and Singapore has emerged as a self-confident economic power. Its current initiatives in defence diplomacy appear to be a concession to the changes that have coloured the security environment but its defence profile remains unusually high.

The nation's population appears willing at present to bear the burden of such a defence strategy and the universal conscription it entails. But Singapore's political leaders must wonder whether the same will be true in five or 10 years if military tensions continue to diminish. □

Thai Economic Push

The Bangkok bureau chief of Xinhua News Agency, Qi Deliang, offers in this round-up a glimpse of what readers in China are learning of Thailand.

THE guidelines for the seventh five-year economic and social development plan (1992-1996) approved by the Thai cabinet recently show that the economy of Thailand should soon enter into a new development period on the basis of progress achieved in recent years, allowing the nation to continue its march towards the status of a 'newly industrialised country' (NIC).

The guidelines, or strategies, for the seventh five-year plan stress that Thailand must maintain stable economic growth, improve income distribution, develop the quality of life and better protect natural resources.

These strategies also stipulate a series of development objectives: an annual nine per cent economic growth rate during 1992-1996, an increase in per capita income to about US\$3000 in 1996 from the current US\$1200, and an annual inflation rate not exceeding 5.5 per cent.

During recent years Thai industry's share in the national production has improved. The country recorded 16.8 per cent and 17 per cent industrial growth in 1988 and 1989 respectively, and this year's industrial growth is estimated at 14 per cent. This would push industry's share of the gross national product (GNP) to 25 per cent.

It is estimated that the production value of agriculture this year will account for 14.8 per cent of GNP.

The guidelines stipulate that annual industrial and agricultural growth targets for the seventh five-year plan should be 9.3 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively.

During the past few years natural gas production in the Gulf of Thailand has cut the country's oil imports, but Thailand is still quite heavily dependent on imported oil and is striving hard to develop new energy resources to meet the demands of its rapid economic development.

The strategies also envisage that the export target should grow about 20-22 per cent annually on average, the import target should be maintained at an annual growth rate of 16-17 per cent and the trade deficit balance should be controlled at no more than seven per cent of gross domestic product.

With an annual growth rate of 14-16 per cent, the tourism industry should remain the main source of income for narrowing the trade deficit.

The guidelines also stipulate that by 1996 the country should realise a balanced current account.

It was disclosed that the 'Southern Development Plan' has also been listed in the seventh five-year plan. Its main focus is to build in southern Thailand a 'land bridge' across the country's isthmus to link

the Gulf of Thailand with the Andaman Sea.

Construction of the 180-km-long 'land bridge' would involve the building of high-speed rail and highway links, pipelines and ports to transport crude oil and containers. This would enable Thailand to become a hub linking Europe, the Middle East and the Far East.

Economic analysts here say that the realisation of the Eastern Seaboard Development Plan, which started during the sixth five-year plan period, together with the Southern Development Plan should lay the foundation for Thailand to become a NIC.

Thailand is also developing in a planned way into a regional financial centre in order to meet the requirements of rapid national economic development.

In May this year Thailand announced that it had become the 68th nation of the 152-member International Monetary Fund to relax foreign currency control. This has been regarded as the 'historical turning point' of the Thai financial system and reflects the stability of Thailand's financial position.

The country's foreign exchange reserve has now reached US\$13 billion.

Analysts who have studied Thailand's economic development since the 1960s point out that political stability, export improvement, successful introduction of foreign capital and the development of tourism are the main factors behind the country's rapid economic growth.

However, the road is not always smooth for Thailand in its efforts to develop its economy. In recent years rapid economic development has caused deficiencies in infrastructure, a shortage of technical personnel and inflation that has proven tough to control.

But economic experts here believe that if these problems can be properly addressed during the seventh five-year plan period, the pace of the country's economic development can be quickened. □

Club member Qi Deliang is Bangkok bureau Chief of China's Xinhua News Agency. His previous overseas posting was in Pakistan.

Ben Bohane is an Australian freelance photojournalist specialising in Burma. He recently entered Shan State to meet opium warlord Khun Sa, and offers the following comments together with the accompanying selection of his photographs:

“Despite growing speculation that his days are numbered, Khun Sa was his ever-casual self when we met at his Homong headquarters near Mae Hong Sorn on the Burmese border.

“Commenting on his indictment last December by a US court on charges of narcotics trafficking, he said: ‘I am not American and the nine points (in the charges) do not concern me.’

“Khun Sa can perhaps afford to be flippant about the pressures coming from the US as there are more compelling problems closer to home. Fighting has escalated this year between his Mount Tai Army and the United Wa State Army, another opium-producing ethnic minority group but one which currently enjoys the military support of Rangoon.

“The two armies are fighting for control of the vital opium transport route into Thailand at Doi Lang. Khun Sa calls this ‘the fiercest battle in Asia at present.’

“Shan State farmers have begun planting this year’s crop, which should yield an estimated 2400 tons of raw opium. During the course of our meeting the Mount Tai leader repeated his earlier calls for international support to finance a seven-year opium crop eradication programme.

“The US Drug Enforcement Agency’s on-going stance? ‘We don’t deal in blackmail.’ ”



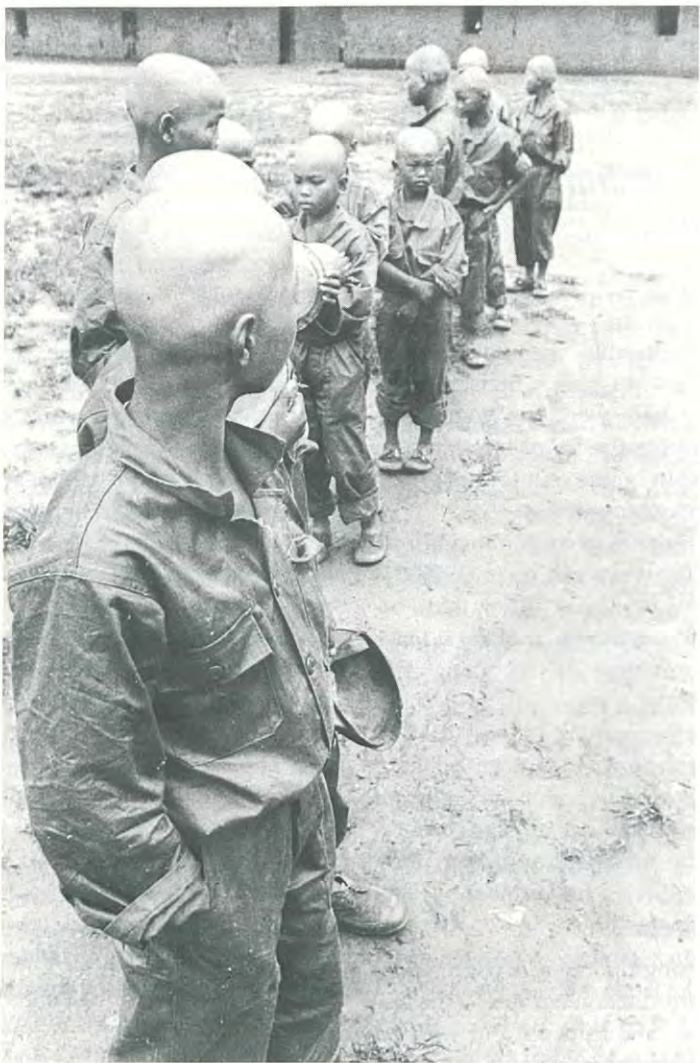
Khun Sa (right), with acolyte



Shan workers in the rice paddy



Troops of Khun Sa’s Moun Tai Army



Young MTA recruits



Shan opium addict, with pipe

Touring Tibet

Overland from Kathmandu to Lhasa, with Philip Smucker

TO BEGIN to retrace Tibet's most recent history, a visit to the sacred stupa of Boudanath in Kathmandu, Nepal is instructive.

Devotees circle the stupa that looks down with the same deep-blue eyes that grace the heights of most Nepali temples. Tibetan pilgrims measure the clockwise course by humbly stretching their bodies along the worn pavement. Vendors sell woollen pullovers, Tibetan phrase-books and prayer wheels. Inside the wheel atop a handle is a long paper prayer, and worshippers believe that by turning the wheel these thoughts will spiral heavenward for the gods to read.

Up the road from the temple, Tibetan carpet-makers in wide-brimmed cowboy hats weave rugs that sell for high prices in New York City, where Dalai-Lama chic is all the rage. Two decades ago such carpet-makers were fighting a CIA —

Club member Philip Smucker reports for diverse media.

backed guerrilla war out of their base at Mustang. Stetson-brand cowboy hats were the vogue, imported from the US or brought over by Tibetan cadres sent for training in the Rocky Mountains.

Overland from Kathmandu to Lhasa for one week costs US\$900 if you pay in Nepal. After that, extending one's visa in Lhasa for a week or more is becoming less problematic.

Our group of 14 had its first taste of the forbidden when Chinese customs officials rummaged through duffelbags looking for illegal literature. The agent was a striking Tibetan beauty, undoubtedly well indoctrinated.

Setting upon a one-page guidebook introduction written by the Dalai Lama, she ripped it out with no compunction. Pictures of the Dalai Lama, by contrast, are no longer illegal.

Summer rains make passing by bus and landrover up onto the Tibetan plateau a slow and arduous af-

fair. Landslides stopped us at one stage, and we watched Tibetan work crews in Mao caps and tennis shoes as they pushed boulders over the edge of a cliff into a racing stream 300m below. At 5000m the air thins, thoughts become hazy for the unacclimatised and dizziness is likely to set in.

The land is rocky and parched in places. Scattered grasslands, wild flowers and terraced barley fields stretch up to green and brown foothills. The traditional Tibetan home, with yak dung used for fuel drying on white-washed walls, blends neatly with the terrain.

The Chinese-built dirt road runs above a rocky stream bed, allowing a crisp view of farming activities below. Yaks are harnessed together to draw simple wooden plows.

The remarkable devotion of the Tibetan people is seen at every bend in the road. Peasants undertake their pilgrimage to Lhasa and holy

A young Tibetan monk (left); Sakya monastery (below).

mountain peaks on foot for lack of money to pay for a bus ride. They dress in sheepskin overcoats and colourful woven boots made of yak hair. Their own hair is often matted and gray, like that of an old yak.

It might harden the constitution of those stricken with a mild case of altitude sickness to reflect on the overland journey of Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Herrer, who crossed into western Tibet after escaping from a British internment camp in India during World War II. The one-time Olympic ski champion trudged through blizzards with winds that cut temperatures to -50F. Herrer drank yak butter tea with hospitable nomads, was robbed by unruly tribesmen and managed to mislead provincial officials concerning his ambitions to find political refuge in his own "promised land," Lhasa.

Yet today there are signs of spiritual decay that might lead Herrer to reflect upon all that is not well on the roof of the world.

At the Sakya monastery, a stronghold of the "Red Hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism, monks came to us begging with no attention to the traditional method of seeking alms. Inside, we learned that the 42nd Patriarch, due to inherit monastic leadership, had abandoned the temple in 1959, seeking a new life in Seattle, Washington.

China claims that the Sakya dynasty, run along familial lines, holds the key to understanding Tibet's political inclusion into the motherland. In the 13th century, at the height of Sakya rule, Mongol conquerors led by General Dorda Nagpo invaded Tibet setting fire to its monasteries and killing more than 500 Tibetan monks.

The Mongols nevertheless forged strong ties with Tibet and asked the Buddhist King Saban to visit their homeland and spread his teachings there.

Saban praised the Mongol khan as the incarnation of Buddha and respectfully called him a *yon bday chen po*, roughly translated as

"mighty benefactor." The bestowing of this title is proof, according to Chinese scholars, that Tibet has for centuries been party to a patron-priest relationship that ensures Chinese rulers, through the giving of alms and respect for Tibet's religion, the unfailing allegiance of its religious leaders.

Any notion that the monks of Tibet are content with their lot was later dispelled for us when our group met a dissident. "My friend Nenwang received electric shock every three days during his recent detention," said the young monk. "He was beaten with bamboo sticks and leather whips, and is prohibited from returning to the monastery."

The monk spoke in hushed tones as he walked through sacred chambers lit with butter lamps that flickered and shed coarse shadows against walls painted with colourful murals depicting the life of the Buddha.

Until the People's Liberation Army announced that it was moving in to "free Tibetan slaves from their overlords" in 1950, the country was ruled through a de facto theocracy headed by the 14th Dalai Lama, who now resides in exile in India.

During the "Great Cultural Revolution" that ravaged religion throughout China, Red Guards demolished the vast bulk of Tibet's temples, disrobed monks and put thousands of local people through "struggle sessions" that required renunciation of all that was sacred in Tibetan life.

Conditions in Tibet have improved measurably since these times.

Before arriving in Lhasa, our group crossed the 2000m Karo Pass, remembered by Tibetans as the site of a fierce battle against an invading British expeditionary force in 1904. Most natives wielded muzzle-loaded small arms against sophisticated Western artillery.

It is worth the altitude sickness and often gruelling ride to arrive in Lhasa. Here is to be found the Potala Palace, the former home of the

"god-king" set upon a natural hill at the centre of the city. It holds within its walls all the magnificence of the Tibetan religion.

Lhasa's three great monasteries — Ganden, Sera, Drepung — are still the focus of religion in Tibetan life. Though they once held a population of 10,000 monks, there are now no more than 1,500, and this has grown smaller still since recent uprisings.

The monks here will greet a foreigner with a pleasant "hello," and, if no Chinese are about, they may invite you into their private chamber for a hot cup of butter tea.

Though Lhasa is the spiritual centre for all Tibetans, it is also the place where Han culture has come to most obscure their tradition. Nondescript concrete buildings and unadorned thoroughfares have been built everywhere. And there appears little relaxing of the police state that was imposed after riots in 1989 left hundreds dead.

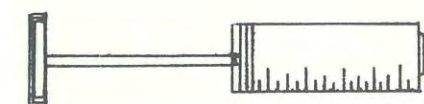
Military trucks parade through the streets of Lhasa. Fleets of motorcycles with machine-gun-toting soldiers buzz neighborhoods, and soldiers practice martial arts on bridges leading into the city.

Members of our tour group spent hours observing the simple devotion of the Tibetans traversing the city centre. One day, the People's Liberation Army, temporarily lifting its eagle-eye for subversives, lined up in a sea of green to sweep the street and give out free head shaves. Meanwhile, old and young Tibetans prostrated themselves before the temple, beating their heads on stones in prayer to the Dalai Lama.

In the spirit of the day a Chinese soldier reached out to a young boy and patted him on the head. The child, in no mood for affection, grimaced, drew a long silver knife from a sheath at his side and began jabbing at the soldier, who backed off in alarm.

This single incident seemed to all of us the best illustration of the sad state of affairs in Tibet today. □





PREVENTATIVE treatment against three diseases is a must for those visiting rural areas in Thailand and adjacent countries, according to Dr Irene Kiatkankul of the Bangkok Nursing Home, with shots to guard against two other illnesses highly recommended.

The basic package of three covers hepatitis-B, tetanus and typhoid. The additional two vaccine prophylactics cover rabies and Japanese encephalitis. In addition, booster shots for polio may be a good idea for those traveling to a list of countries that includes Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Indian sub-continent.

Such protection involves minimal side effects and reasonable cost, Dr Irene notes. However, it should be stressed that other precautions may be advisable depending on the area to be visited and the conditions there at the time of the trip.

Such variables together with an individual's medical history may mean other shots could be required on top of those noted above. If in doubt, says Dr Irene, consult a physician.

Hepatitis-B vaccine, says the Thai Red Cross, should be administered to all newborn children in Asia together with those adults who are at risk. A simple blood test can determine if hepatitis-B (or hepatitis-A) antibodies are already present in an individual, which would make the vaccine unnecessary.

The treatment is administered in three doses, with the second injection given a month after the first

and the third injection five months after the second one. A booster shot is then required every five years. Hepatitis-B is a viral infection affecting the liver.

Gamma globulin treatment to prevent hepatitis-A is normally geared to visitors to the region rather than to those resident here. This is because the 'A' version is a fairly mild disease (unlike the 'B' version), and the gamma globulin has to be administered every two or four months (which makes it impractical for all but short-term visits).

Tetanus toxoid prophylaxis involves three injections, with the second and third shots administered two and six months, respectively, after the first. These are followed by a booster shot every 10 years. Tetanus itself is an infection that may result from an open wound, causing respiratory distress and other fatal symptoms.

Oral **typhoid** vaccine is given by means of capsules taken on an empty stomach once daily on the first day, then again on the third day and the fifth day. A booster is required every 2-3 years.

This treatment is in most cases preferable to the injectable typhoid vaccine, which produces side effects (including fever and headache). Typhoid is described as a salmonella infection that causes high fever and extended illness, with infected food or water as the source of disease.

A preventative programme to avoid **rabies**, which may prove fatal and results from the bite of an infected animal, is recommended for two main reasons: it means treatment subsequent to a rabid contact is simpler and cheaper; and it means the individual has up to a week to get to a hospital for treatment before seri-

ous problems arise instead of a few hours, which is particularly important for those traveling in isolated areas.

Such prophylaxis involves two injections administered over a one-month interval, followed by a booster shot a year later. This should induce immunity lasting several years, with booster shots suggested every three years.

Those who are bitten by an animal are further advised to immediately wash the wound with soap or detergent, then rinse thoroughly under clear running water and apply an alcohol or iodine solution. Booster treatment is then required.

Japanese encephalitis is a mosquito-born viral disease often associated with pig farming. It is described as 'a serious disorder causing brain damage and even death,' and the Thai Red Cross says it is spreading throughout Asia. Preventative treatment is recommended for all those (except pregnant women) who expect to live or travel extensively in rural Asia, including the Indian sub-continent.

An adult series consists of one injection repeated after one or two weeks, with a booster every two years.

An oral booster against **polio** is meanwhile recommended for individuals who have had primary oral or injectable vaccine series previously and who are traveling to polio endemic areas. These include Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

Cholera shots are not normally considered necessary as there is some doubt about whether they are effective. And **malaria** will be treated in a separate column. □

By Robert Karniol

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