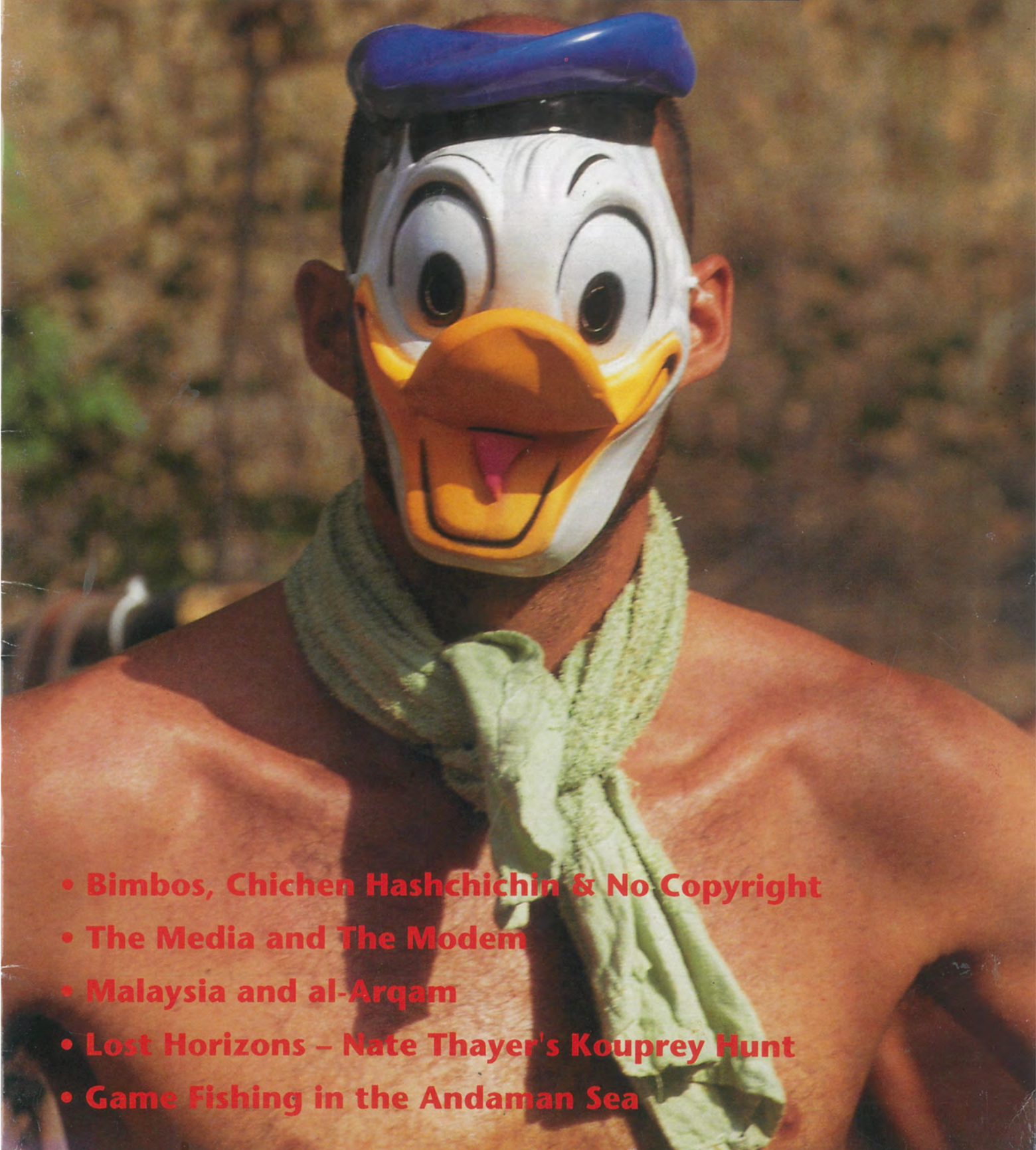


The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Fourth Quarter 1994

Dateline

• BANGKOK •

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- **Bimbos, Chichen Hashchichin & No Copyright**
 - **The Media and The Modem**
 - **Malaysia and al-Arqam**
 - **Lost Horizons – Nate Thayer's Kouprey Hunt**
 - **Game Fishing in the Andaman Sea**

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CONTRIBUTORS

Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes story or photo essay contributions from our journalist and associate members. Please contact Imtiaz Muqbil on 255 1480. Payment is in FCCT chit books.

FRONT COVER

Fearless Leader of the Kouprey expedition, Captain Kurtz, seen wearing a disguise designed to throw fear into the hearts of any lurking tigers and to make Khmer Rouge laugh.



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A Letter from your President

BY BERTIL LINTNER

As 1994 draws to a close, so does my presidency. I have now served two terms, the maximum allowed under our constitution. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have helped out with club activities during my two years at the helm of the FCCT. This year has been an eventful year. Lively Wednesday night programmes, documentaries on Saturdays, feature movies on Mondays and TGIF-priced drinks on Friday nights continued to attract many people to the club.

Press conferences and special events, such as a very entertaining dinner speech by Saudi-Arabian Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Mohamed Khoja, also drew large crowds. I would like to thank Margo Towie, Sonya Hepinstall and Pamela Hongsakul for organising extremely interesting Wednesday night programmes. Our annual ball was this year given a theme — Indochina — and became an instant success. Next year's ball will also have a theme: Tin Tin, The Young Reporter. You can come dressed as Captain Haddock, Bianca Castafiore, Snowy, Professor Calculus, Tin Tin himself or as any other character from Hergé's famous comic books.

Our membership remained stable — slightly above the 1,000 mark — and Philippe Decaux, Patrick Lescot and Whitney Small looked after our new and old members. In order to better serve all resident as well as visiting correspondents, the FCCT has just published a "Handbook For Foreign Correspondents in Thailand" which gives details of how to obtain visas, press cards and work permits. Copies of this new Handbook are available at our office.

Our new, very competent treasurer, Domenica Piantedosi of the Standard Chartered Bank, kept a watchful eye on our finances — which continued to be astonishingly sound given the fact that the FCCT is run by journalists. But, like several executive committees before us, we had to



tackle the most pressing problem which has always faced the club: the fact that our present, one-room premises allow only one activity at a time. The search for a new and better club house continued throughout 1994 — and will continue in 1995 as well. The Professional Committee, headed by FCCT stalwart Dominic Faulder, is conducting the search, so if you have any ideas, please contact him!

Altogether six Author's Nights have also been held in the clubhouse since this new type of programme was introduced in mid-1993:

- 1) FCCT member Jim Eckhardt began the programme series by launching his novel "Running With the Sharks", which, according to himself, is "chock full of sex and violence". More than 70 people showed up for that event.
- 2) S.P. Somtow, a US-based Thai writer came next. He showed us his most recent film and gave a very witty talk about his equally witty books.
- 3) Colin Piprell launched his latest book, *Old Bangkok Hand*, in early 1994.
- 4) Tiziano Terzani came later in the year to give us a very entertaining talk about his book about the fall of the Soviet Empire, "Goodnight Mr. Lenin."
- 5) Barry Petersen launched the latest, updated edition of his classic "Tiger Men".
- 6) Paul Davies and Nic Dunlop

presented their "War Of The Mines: Cambodia, Landmines and the Impoverishment of a Nation" in September, and combined their book launch with a photo exhibition.

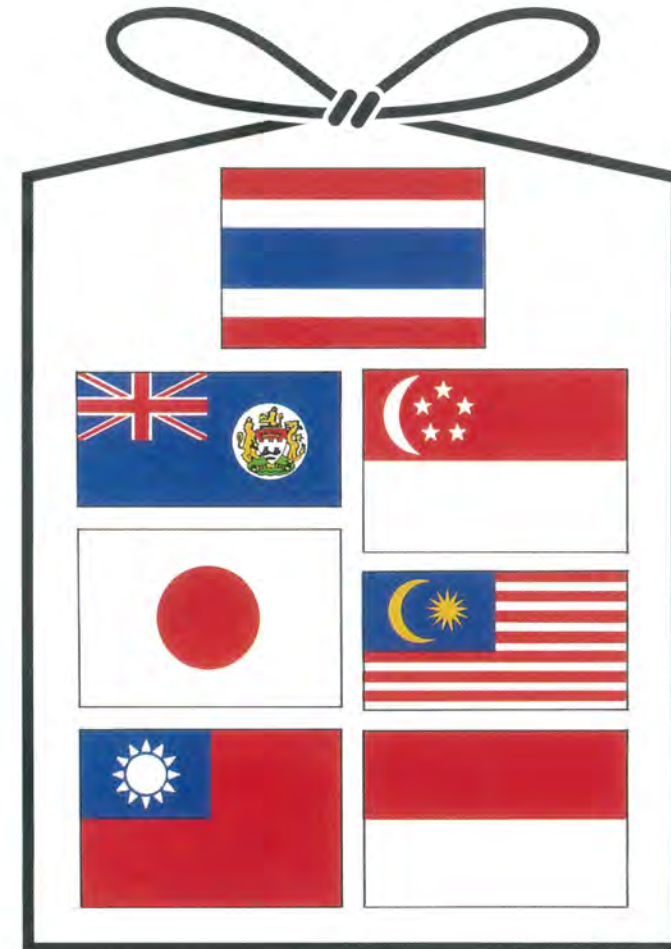
Our publicity directors, Imtiaz Muqbil and Hasan Basar, worked hard all year to put out some of the best issues of *Dateline Bangkok* in the FCCT's history. A new format, colour pictures and more professionally written articles made people actually read *Dateline Bangkok* — not just leaf through it, as often was the case in the past.

It has also been decided to replace our old rather turgid directory with a more lively yearbook which will include articles about the club and pictures from club activities. The first such FCCT yearbook will be produced in 1995 by our very competent publishing partner, Cruaasia.

I would also like to thank Dumras Rodjanapiches for yet another year of carefully selected feature movies for our Monday night video shows — and, of course, a special thanks goes to Eric Brighton, Panjavilai A-Song-In and the rest of our friendly staff in the office as well as the clubhouse.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for helping us make 1993 and 1994 memorable years in the FCCT's history. But much more has to be done to turn the FCCT into the professional press club we want it to be. Thanks to all of you, and I look forward to my retirement — and to your continued participation in club activities.

Bertil Lintner
1994 FCCT President



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Bimbos, Haschichin and No Copyright

BY PHILLIPE DECAUX • PHOTOS BY PHILIP BLENKINSOP

TV NEWS CIRCA 2007 — GRASSE (UNITED STATES OF EUROPE) NOVEMBER 5, 2007

Dear Dateline Bangkok, Since I retired two years ago, and occasionally work as a consultant for private wet-dream channels, I have been kept informed through the various compu-networks on what is going on in the news field. And thank God, I'm off the hook because what I see, daily on my scan-news system looks like a weird monkey on the reporter's back.

Examples as I write and watch my screen today: Through my news-scan joystick, pressing the Asia switch, I select Cambodia for good old sake, and here is the latest update emanating from SinSat (1)

(Clean News for Everybody): King Ranariddh is at Pochentong Airport with Air Marshall Vent Serrivuth launching his latest squadron of model helicopter gunships for an attack on Kompon Speu KR headquarters. The King holds his remote control tight in his hand. So do 12 air force cadets as an old fashioned fanfare plays "Bimbo to Death", the only song the air force band ever wrote and could correctly play. As the Sinsat repor-cam (2) focuses on the King's control screen and the model choppers taking off, we hear, thanks to a connection mistake, the Director in SinCity studio, yelling at the poor reporter:

"Widen the shot, asshole, we have a stand-up to insert!" And on my screen, appears live from the studio and in full battle regalia, but within this pre-battle background, the Great green-eyed Tan Chu Lien (3), founder of Sin School for Clean TV (4), claiming how great this battle is going to become and how we simple viewers can fund more of these great events by consuming Tiger beer without smoking or chewing forbidden fruity

things.

Disgusted by the whole set, and still on Cambodia, I switch to Revo-Chan (9) who on board an APC complete with cannon and transmitting dish, approaches the Central Market while tailing a herd of buffaloes obviously on speed. The reporter sits on top of the cannon, an automatic camera focusing on her with the buffaloes in the background. As the first buffalo explodes on the stalls in an inferno of blood, guts and flesh, and people screaming bloody death, run amok or

pointed at his neck. Obviously, he is going to film the great battle of Kompon Speu from the sky while the Great SinSat anchorman disappears in his wardrobe to select a flyer outfit for his next stand-up.

Switch off the crap and let's look at the skies. Satellites are everywhere, transmitting anything from soap to porn, from opera to prayers, from political leaders to bankers, the list never ends ... and news of course, the best circus of all. But the competition in this field is fierce and the cost enormous.

So while in the last century, news directors were pretty reluctant to involve sponsors in news-casting, they resolved to "exchanges" of tapes to save on cost and keep the nasty accountants away from their operations.

So you had your basic TV team covering some hot-spot of the world for let's say a US network, and while quietly relaxing after a heavy day in their hotel suite they would find on the local TV channel that their story had been obviously lent or pilfered through the good services of World TeleNitwits. Your very upset crew would then call all over and scream bloody copyrights, knowing perfectly well that no extra pennies would come out of this initiative. And of course the next day's shoot would be much less productive. Pretty soon the accountants would put a no-no on the phone bills and condemn the crews to El Cheapo Lodges where tellies never work and phones are only used to order booze or bed company.

Then the networks cut down the size of the TV crews to a reporter and a cameraman editor, and further to a one man band with the possibility of hiring, in hazardous situations a



Retired FCCT member Don Phillipe Decaux scans the skys for more and more disasters.

look for shelter, Tonya La Scavenge screams: "That's it, they've done it again! The KR and their buffalo bombs! Live and without danger for you, dear viewers, and no fear from us thanks to Soft Speed K79 the drink that keeps our armpits and underwear dry and our heads cool during battles." (5) A last toggle on my dish and I access a local military government channel with a picture of the SinSat repo-cam boarding a real gunship with the help of an AK-47

driver-body guard, officially to protect the repor-cam but in truth, to make sure that the expensive gear are safe, should the artist be terminated during the course of action.

Some of those new-style fixers were so well armed that they could force a fearful reporter into real heavy action, extract the gear and footage (on CD-ROM) from a bloody massacre where the reporter shared his guts with the victims, and feed the stuff from a cave away from the battlefield. One of them, a Mongol called Disho Khan even went further during the attack of the Ulan Bator-Peking Shinkansen on February 12, 2004 (6), by roming (taping) himself during the feed with close-ups on his Mac Do hat, medium shots sporting his Puma winter sports outfit and closing with a wide, holding Head skis, and improvising a stand-up in Mongol language. It took five hours for the piece to reach the audience, five hours of a fierce battle in New-York between the network and Mac Do, Puma and Head advertising executives, ending up with a payment of 3 million bucks for worldwide distribution of the news-piece while a UN Mongol translator received a hundred bucks in Mac Dos coupons to give a cleaned-up version of the stand-up to the masses. (7)

This day became a landmark in TV history, a landmark of shame, a landmark of disgust from the old pros, a landmark of grease, greed, hate and stench where only the worst condors in the business dare to sit at the annual banquet to receive their golden puke-bag awards.

So my dear fellows of the FCCT, art in news-pieces is gone and hope for a better future in the profession as well... let's go back to the drawing board and contemplate other alternatives.

Don Felipe Decaux, M.D.M. M.O.D.L.V.D.P. Retired.

Footnotes:

(1) Although highly crammed with hi-tech gear and mega-bucks, Sin-Sat faces difficulties keeping a foothold on the Asian scene with competitors like the much more liberal and free-



A repor-cam hands his story on vid.rom fixer before going deeper into battle. In less than one hour the story will be aired world-wide. While the vapor-cam will sink in the black hole of TV News.

wheeling Thai-Sat, or Phil-Sat which specializes on Tele-marketing cum video-conferencing of maids, nurses, singers and beauty-contest misses.

(2) Repor-cam: facsimile shortening for reporter-cameraman. Helps save the budget.

(3) Tan Chu Lien started as a food reporter in 1996 discovering special Hokkien Mees through the hawkers scene of Sin-City and soon became a hit with bored women. His present salary goes around 5,000 gugus with free use of an HDB flat and free helium for his bicycle tyres. A far cry from 20th century salaries, but adoration from the masses is the best money in these troubled times.

(4) Guarantees to turn any student into a clean-cut, sanitized and politically correct anchor person. A favorite with communists democracies, right wing stations and the like.

(5) Another interesting weapon of the KR is the squadron of chicken Haschichin. Stripped of their feathers except for the wings, starved for 3 days, then fed with Haschich balls and amphetamines, a hundred of them are randomly thrown into a market place or cinema. They are

known to go for people's faces and eyes. Great pictures for this century style of coverage. But this weapon is only used when Colonel Sanders execs forget to pay their monthly dues to the rebel coffers.

(6) A gang of well armed independentists from Inner Mongolia mined the railtrack near the supposed burial ground of the Great Gengis Khan, grabbed all the businessmen on board the train, force-walked them to the holy site and slaughtered all those innocent victims as a blood sacrifice to their hero. Amongst the dead were executives from Mc Do, Puma and Head on a marketing trip and a Sin-Sat reporter whose unfortunate comment, "They stink of vodka", was overheard by one of the rebels.

(7) Disho Khan is now the host of a dirty talk interactive show with a French major.

Journalists' Profile

Phillipe Decaux was a TEI producer-cameraman who overstayed in Thailand for purely visual reasons.

The Media & the Modem

BY ALAN DAWSON

Technology has hardly touched the face of the news business in the past 30 years. Instead, it has massively changed the techniques of it. But most of the important predictions haven't panned out.

The reporter, the copy editor-rewriter and the duty editor continue to decide what most people will receive in their newspapers or see on the evening news, just as they did at the height of the Vietnam war.

The biggest change in the face of news presentations in the past 30 years is arguably that pictures now are mostly in color, and the quality is sharper. TV has crippled the evening newspapers in most places, killed them in many, as the futurologists predicted. But the public has stuck to the reliable, familiar ink-on-paper method of getting the bulk of its news, from morning papers and weekly magazines.

TV has continued to improve the immediacy of news. Vietnam-style "bang-bang stories" now come virtually direct from the battlefields by satellite instead of the tortuous style of the 1960s. Back then, it took a couple of air freight shipments and a developing studio to get kinescopes on the air. It turns out, however, that Bosnian bang-bang is hardly more exciting or interesting for its immediacy than the day-old battles

on the nightly CBS news back then. (Interestingly, today's computer spell-checkers don't even have the word "kinescope".)

In addition, TV and the rest of the media can only give us instant reports on what it can predict will happen. Some argue, therefore, that even this change is perceived as greater than it is. Many people "remember" that CNN carried a dramatic live broadcast of the start of the Baghdad bombing during Operation Desert Storm. In fact, CNN did no such thing. Pilots were back at their bases before the pictures were broadcast.

The print media, including news agencies, worried for decades that television would run it out of business. It seemed logical that citizens would prefer to see, or even read, news on a screen than on paper. Instead, as newspapers and magazines have often prospered, they have discovered a huge untapped market — their morgues. Almost any news source today can make a bundle by throwing together a year-end collection of news and features on a CD-ROM for an unsuspected and large audience of news and research junkies.

Those who have done this well have turned the newspaper morgue into an income earner. The world, it seems, can't get quite enough news and reviews.

If the face of reporting and news presentation remains much the same as it was a generation ago, the technique of it is differently, even massively so.

Middle-aged and older reporters often agree that the largest change is in the size of the press corps. A couple of dozen chummy newsmen covered the important formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at Bali in 1967. At the height of the Vietnam war — the Tet offensive in 1968 — just over 600 reporters, cameramen and others were accredited.

Today, that number is increased by a magnitude. More than 4,000 news people covered the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting outside Jakarta. More than 10,000 reported the World Cup.

The biggest change has of course been wrought by the personal computer. Virtually every reporter, and certainly every person at the home office, is tied into a network of networks.

Nobody but reporters ever cared very much, but being first with breaking news once was measured in minutes or even hours. Today, there is hardly ever a "scoop" on breaking news. The portable satellite dish, the Internet, the fax machine or modem all help to assure that if two people know about a news break, the world will know within seconds.

The powerful personal notebook computer allows the reporter and others in the business to be in better touch. They access dozens of sources at a few keystrokes — not least of all to see what "the opposition" is doing. Some reporters argue that this has created massive mediocrity, and encouraged some to become newsmen who should have gone into other lines of work.

Certainly, the sheer numbers of newsmen have allowed governments to get away with controlling the press by controlling the movements of reporters. The sequestering of newsmen during Desert Storm assured massive dissemination of the allies' story, singular. None of those bothersome Vietnam-type reports on troop morale impeded the military. Will technology change the actual

face of news in the future, as once predicted widely? Perhaps.

The most likely wave seems to be the "personal newspaper," news, features and a comics page, say. Many people already do this, but as a percentage of the world population, they hardly make a marketing blip. After all, you don't have to read everything that's in your newspaper, and it doesn't have on-line charges or the need for a 50,000-baht display terminal.

Desktop publishing in both crude and sophisticated forms also puts a printing press in every home and office, at least potentially. This provides both a freedom of the Press and a freedom from the press never before imagined.

Results of this have been mixed. Many complain of an information glut. On the other hand, companies and individuals have been able to target specific audiences without having to contact, woo, trust or hope

that a reporter will carry their news for them.

It seems unlikely this freedom from the mass media filtering will supplant or threaten the press. In practice, so far, it has complemented it, allowing interested persons to bone up on what interests them more easily and conveniently. Even those publications aiming specifically to blast supposed press ignorance on specific issues have been so tightly focussed as to have negligible effect.

If anything, this home printing press threatens governments far more than the media establishment. Thailand's May 1992 "information underground" of faxes, modems and cellular telephones disappeared almost entirely once its unique purpose had been met but could easily be reactivated at any point in future.

Whatever changes lie in the future of the news business, one seems as unlikely today as it did 30 years ago

when the first computers went on-line in a few newspapers. That is, that the machines won't take over the task of ferreting out, filtering, writing and editing the news.

Machines aren't poised to take over the news. They will only continue to drive its competitiveness.

Footnote: Guns don't kill people. Postal workers kill people.

Journalists' Profile

A former journalist of indeterminate age, Dawson covered Vietnam for UPI between 1967 - 75 and was UPI's bureau chief in Bangkok between 1975 - 80. After four years as assistant editor of the Bangkok Post, Dawson is now director of Bangkok Security Associates, involved in computer security and on-line services.



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PRINTING SOLUTIONS

Malaysia and the al-Arqam Issue

BY USTAZ ABU DAULAH

Citizens of Malaysia and Singapore are familiar with political dissidents arbitrarily arrested under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA) and detained without trial. Some in Singapore have been incarcerated over 20 years. Detainees confessing their alleged "crimes" on TV, to gain their freedom, has become a tradition. Once freed they are rendered ineffective, their freedom shackled by government restrictions. For some the easiest way is to switch camp and join the government.

On the morning of October 20, scores of newsmen rushed to the sprawling National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur on learning that al-Arqam leader Abuya Ashaari Muhammad and seven fellow detainees were having a "muzakarah" — or "brotherly dialogue" — with Malaysia's religious experts and they were to confess and repent for their deviationist belief.

Throughout the three-hour dialogue session conducted by senior government officials and the nation's top security personnel, the press and the public were kept outside in the hot sun, a safe 100 metres away. The entire session was video-taped by government TV and telecast during the 8 pm news that night.

Abuya and his companions appeared in white skull caps and traditional Malay dress. Gone were his familiar bard, turban and green robes. His wife was without veil, something she had not done for over 20 years.

The "dialogue" session was chaired by a Police Special Branch senior officer and moderated by a Brigadier-General and a University Religious Professor. Questions and accusations from the two moderators were directed at Abuya and the other seven. Appearing calm and composed albeit a little pale and weary, Abuya confessed to all the accusations and humbly apologised for misleading his followers with his deviationist teachings. He thanked the police for the muzakarah during detention that enabled him to see his mistakes and get back to the

right path.

Abuya was freed at 4 pm on October 28 on three conditions: 1) he cannot be a member of any organisation; 2) he cannot give any statement to the press; and 3) he cannot preach any longer.

His movements are restricted and he has to stay in a house provided by the government rent-free for two years.

Abuya was brought to Sungei Penchala — Arqam's main commune in Kuala Lumpur — where he told his followers he is no longer the leader

WE ARE DISBANDING AN ORGANISATION THAT DOES NOT EXIST IN THE FIRST PLACE

and al-Arqam is no more.

Abuya's confession is a very minor point. Believing in a messiah or not is no ground for quarrels. Nor are the other charges of talking to the Prophet Muhammed, the practice of polygamy, claiming to have magical



Al Arqam Library, Sungai Penchala, Kuala Lumpur

powers; these are frivolous personal beliefs. They do not violate the basic tenets of Islam, nor do they constitute deviationism.

Al-Arqam has all along requested the government Pusat Islam (Islamic Centre) for a muzakarah in accordance with Islam to settle the issue. The response was the enforced removal of Abuya from Thailand on September 2, the "muzakarah" behind bars and the subsequent circus at the national mosque.

Abuya is a man of peace. He has taught the followers to be self-reliant, always careful and contributing to the good of the community through economic activities that create jobs and income without practicing usury, using bank loans, or depending on government aid or handouts. Above all, he taught that we should cultivate good morals and treat other people as more important than ourselves. He is a true leader who shows us how to put into practice what we have learned.

The teaching of Abuya is in the hearts of his followers. It doesn't matter whether Abuya is dead or alive. His teachings live. Al-Arqam was never a registered organisation in any case. The government has ordered us to disband, but has also been quick to tell us that we can carry on our economic activities without the al-Arqam name and logo. We are disbanding an organisation that does not exist in the first place.

The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad, forbids us to wear our distinctive green robes and turbans. We shall wear other clothes, perhaps white robes and coloured turbans favoured by Pusat Islam. It will be difficult for the government to distinguish al-Arqam members from other Muslims.

It has been reported that our economic assets amount to US\$150 million. Actually, it is a lot more. Our businesses range from small retailing and hawking to multi-million dollar investment in foreign countries. All businesses are registered under the names of individuals

BUT ABUYA HAS NEVER HAD ANY AMBITION TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER. HE HAS ALWAYS SAID THAT ALLAH IS THE BIGGEST POWER

and none in the name of Abuya or his children. He has written 67 books, some poems and songs which have also generated income. This money has been used to propagate Islam as well. Abuya remains poor but al-Arqam is rich.

The confession and humiliation of Abuya may be a personal victory for Dr Mahathir, but it does not actually damage al-Arqam. We are more convinced than ever that the Malaysian public and the outside world are able to see the truth and separate myth from reality. The confession forces the authorities to release Abuya and some members of al-Arqam. But his son-in-law, Sessions Court Judge Khairul Annuar, and al-Arqam secretary Hassan Mokhtar, are still behind bars. This reflects a deep contempt for civil and human liberties.

While these events are unfolding, a sex scandal is gripping the country as well. The chief minister of Melaka state and UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) Youth leader,



Abuya Ashaari Muhammad and two assistants at press conference in Bangkok shortly before his arrest.

Rahim Tambi Chik, who is accused of having sex with a 15-year old school girl, is exonerated and the girl is punished by being sent to a welfare home. Under Malaysian law, even if there is consent from an underaged girl, the accused is guilty of statutory rape.

Al-Arqam and the sex scandal have put the government under great pressure because of impending general elections in Malaysia. According to Sivarasa, a lawyer in Kuala Lumpur: "Though UMNO secured nearly all seats in the parliament in the last election, the party and its alliance won only 52% of the votes. The opposition got 48%. But because of the electoral system, the ruling party has a clear advantage. We can see that al-Arqam may easily tilt the 4%-balance with its influence and following." Thus, if Abuya formed a political party, both the government and the opposition would try to solicit his support. This gives him a very powerful position.

The restrictions imposed on Abuya for his freedom shows that Dr Mahathir is worried about this possibility. It also shows that UMNO has failed to uplift the economic status of the ethnic Malays except for making a small elite rich.

Actually, al-Arqam's structure already resembles a government, except for functioning courts and armed forces. The leaders of al-Arqam have 27 years of experience in managing a mass movement. They can manage a small country like Malaysia. Our leaders come from various fields and all works of life, so it is not difficult to develop it into a prosperous and peaceful country. Moreover, we can manage the country without governmental salaries, as each one of us has his own income from the movement. There will be no corruption.

But Abuya has never had any ambition to become prime minister. He has always said that Allah is the biggest power. Titles



The confession of Abuya being broadcast by RTM (TV1 Malaysia) on the night of Kuala Lumpur.



Al Arqam's school, in Phuket

and dress are not important to Abuya and al-Arqam. We are willing to discard our old robes and comply with the new directives. But we also believe that truth will prevail.

Abuya's confession has eased tension and confusion in the country. It is important that al-Arqam followers should be able to pursue their economic activities in peace and to continue to seek knowledge.

al-Arqam, Thailand
Majid Reya Dissunan, Nonthaburi
November 1994.

Journalists' Profile

The writer, a political analyst in Kuala Lumpur, is a member of the al-Arqam Supreme Council.

Obituary

PETER DIENEMANN BY TONY GILLOTTE

REMEMBERED

1950 - 1994

Shivering cold, I'd been trying all night to make the skimpy towel-like bedspread stretch to cover my entire body — but with no luck. Finally, I kicked it to the floor and decided I'd had enough of the Inter Hotel's "fan room".

It was a characteristically cool, damp January morning in Aranyaprathet on the Cambodian border, 5 am to be precise. I was due to be "picked up" in an hour by a representative of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front for my first trip "inside".

The Inter always reminded me of sleazy, third rate motels along the highways of rural northern Minnesota. Its chief claim to fame was its weird assortment of international guests: from CIA and DIA types to well intentioned NGOs and academics who wandered in to volunteer their services to Cambodia, all with plans to enter the war-torn country "to have a look for themselves".

After an icy shower and shave, I stumbled outside into the predawn blackness of the gravel strewn parking lot to see who was present. The dim lights from the Inter's lobby beckoned. The tiny outdoor "lobby" consisted of a small counter which overlooked a number of oversized Chinese style chairs, a telephone and a TV. It appeared empty but for one large figure in blue jeans with shoulder-length, streaky black and grey hair and wire-rimmed aviator glasses. He was sitting hunched over something.

As I drew near, I thought he must be either a petty smuggler, an aging hippie backpacker looking for excitement, or a journalist. Who else would be staying at the Inter and stirring at this ungodly hour? When I approached, he glanced up from his steaming cup of instant coffee and our eyes met.

After a pause, he burst into an infectious knowing laughter that seemed to imply he'd been through all this a thousand times before. "Couldn't sleep, huh?" I nodded and asked if he was there for the same reason I was. He offered me one of his Gauloises, and nodded back. I didn't realise it then, but as the man in the movie said, this was going to be the beginning of a



beautiful friendship.

Journalists are not necessarily known for being optimists, yet during the five years that I knew him, I found Peter Dienemann to be the most thoroughly upbeat, uncomplaining reporter I had ever met. It's a well worn cliché to say that a particular journalist will do whatever is necessary to get the story. In Peter's case, the cliché didn't apply since he did whatever was necessary to get the story behind the story.

From the time the tight-lipped Khmer guerrillas eventually arrived — over an hour later — till we crossed the Thai border at the "secret entrance" near Ta Praya and spilled out of his pickup at the resistance headquarters ten kilometres inside Cambodia, I had learned the essential outline of Peter's extraordinarily eventful life.

Beginning with an extremely close relationship with his father, he moved on to a four-year stint in the German Army; a failed marriage in which a five-year-old daughter tragically died after a heart operation; a career as a Formula Two race driver in the European circuit (an accident caused back problems which plagued him to the very end); and a carefree entrepreneurial effort in India (the Fastest Bus to Nepal Co.), which he swore turned a tidy profit by operating illegally between New Delhi and Kathmandu before the authorities closed him down for not having a license.

Finally, after a period of freelancing, Peter became Die Welt's regular correspondent in India for over nine years, launching himself into a whirlwind of travel and reporting throughout the subcontinent which included exclusive interviews with Rajiv Gandhi and the Dalai Lama. During a recent controversial visit to

Bangkok, the Dalai Lama personally greeted Peter to the amazement of journalists gathered at the FCCT.

After a briefing by the Khmer guerilla general Pan Thay, Peter and I piled into the back of yet another truck for a trip to the front, this time in a Thai-made lightweight agricultural vehicle minus the front cabin, the kind used to deliver farm produce in Thailand.

On this trip, however, the flat bed rear area was loaded with four large barrels tied together by rope. Six Khmer guerillas bearing M-16s rode shotgun. They were assigned to escort us over some pretty rugged and hostile terrain to the frontline area, or so I thought.

As we lurched and bumped along the road (a dried-up stream bed) at less than ten kph, Peter never once complained of his bad back. Instead, he managed to learn that our guards were there to protect the cargo, not us. The barrels we were sitting on contained fuel oil for military vehicles and generators and, incidentally, the road may have recently been mined by rival guerrillas from the Khmer Rouge.

I had heard stories of what had happened to other journalists venturing to the front and had visions of being blown skyward and instantly vaporised. "Never mind," he laughed, patting me on the shoulder, "there's nothing to worry about. I've spoken with the driver and we've got a good one. He's not on any drugs."

We reached Kandol, the new medical and trading centre of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, where we were greeted by Nget Sapon, the Harvard-trained Cambodian administrator who sat us down to a dinner of rice, some type of stew meat and a bottle of Johnny Dumm (Peter's favourite). Sapon answered questions about the military and civilian situation in the liberated zone, especially at Thmar Pouk, Banteay Chmar and Ampil, areas we would be visiting the next day.

That evening, as we began to prepare for our first night's rest under Cambodian stars, I suddenly heard that infectious laugh rumble out over the quiet of a nearby rice field. I looked up to see Peter nearly doubled over in

laughter pointing at my inflatable pillow, camp stool, mosquito net and lotion. "You must be CIA," he said, breaking out his flask filled with Johnny Dumm. "This is my mosquito repellent."

After that trip to Cambodia in January 1990, our paths crossed several other times, the next being India. We both were going to the small city of Ayodhya to cover the initial religious explosions and rioting over the Ram Temple/Babri mosque dispute in Uttar Pradesh. We flew to New Delhi and by nightfall Peter had arranged for us to rent an old Ambassador, with driver, to take us down to Lucknow and then to Ayodhya.

During the first leg of the 13-hour drive, the Ambassador ran as smooth as a top. Then, in Lucknow just after lunch, the sedan suddenly showed its age and refused to turn over. Peter hustled over to the nearest garage and started rattling off some Hindi.

After some laughter all around, the next thing I knew several grease splattered mechanics were hovering around the Ambassador saying they would yank the engine out and have it running again in no time. Yank the engine block? We'll never get to Ayodhya in time, I said.

Little did I realise, however, that Peter had been through this many times before in India and that pulling the engine block out of an Ambassador is as routine as changing the oil. Within hours, we were back on the cluttered highway bound for Ayodhya, finally arriving in the early morning with enough time to spare to interview victims of the conflict, the police and other local officials. We had our story.

In 1992, during the first evening of Thailand's infamous four days of protesting the government led by the non-elected Prime Minister Suchinda



Kraprayoon, Peter called and said "I'll be over to pick you up in 30 minutes." As we sped toward Sanam Luang in his old 1975 BMW, it was obvious that something big was in the wind. For the next four days, we nearly camped out at the Royal Hotel, Sanam Luang, Pan Fa bridge and the immediate surroundings gathering interviews, taking photos and ducking hot lead. But, exciting as these events may appear, they certainly do not constitute the defining qualities of a man's character — or of a special friendship. These must come during other more personal moments.

When I was having yet another blood clot attack, this time in my stomach, my wife, Wanna, woke up Peter at 1 am with the news. Jumping into his "new" 1975 Pontiac (old cars and motor-cycles were his two personal conceits), he was at my door in ten minutes. We sped down the expressway, the Doors wailing from his tape player, and pulled up to Bumrungrad Hospital's emergency entrance 15 minutes later.

While I agonised and acted like a fool during some pretty stiff pain, Peter held me tight while we waited for the morphine, stared me in the eyes and said, "Look, you'll get through this all right. Now, just hang on." Then a warm smile broke out across that big Bavarian face.

I felt privileged to know and work with Peter — a complicated man, who often looked for love in all the wrong places. He was one of the better reporters I have known and crammed more activity and journalistic output into his abbreviated life than most. He had seen and reported on natural disasters, wars and civil unrest in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia and Thailand.

Whatever journalistic success Peter achieved, and it was considerable, he was always careful to credit his beginnings with the Augberger Allgemeine, a small but reputable paper famous for its strict apprentice programme and sound journalistic fundamentals. It was located near his hometown of Ulm near Bavaria's border in southern Germany.

In private moments,

over one too many bottles of Johnny Dumm (a private weakness along with some very strong pain pills which he used to blunt his physical pain and personal agonies), he railed against uncaring editors and the injustices of the world, especially governments who deliberately held their populations in poverty, ignorance and disease. But through it all he was the first one to offer help, whether to a struggling journalist or someone who simply needed a job.

During one of the last times I saw Peter, he was in the bleak intensive care unit at Wippawadee-Rangsit Hospital. That particular day there were a lot of very old people hooked up to life saving equipment. I remember thinking how ironic and unfair it was that this 44-year-old, intense and vital man, who knew so much about how the world operated, seemed to be so near the end.

The attending doctor said that his liver and kidneys were only partially functioning and he was in a great deal of pain. I walked over to his bedside to say goodbye and thought of what he might say. "You'll be all right," I lied, trying not to look into these deep piercing eyes for too long, but noticing that the strapping body looked somehow puffy and frail. After a pause, he simply smiled — the impact of which was as devastating as his usual infectious laughter.

Peter was cremated at Wat Tawasunthon. His father arrived too late from Germany to say goodbye but bore the burden with dignity and grace. It was a simple ceremony with only a few close friends in attendance, along with some local children, a few chickens squabbling in the dirt nearby and the sweet, haunting sounds of a Thai traditional musical group which had gathered to play for another ceremony.

His ashes were taken by boat from Samut Prakan to the mouth of the Gulf of Thailand where they were sprinkled with perfumed water and flowers. That was the way Peter wanted it.

Journalists' Profile

Tony Gillote has been correspondent for South-North News Service in Bangkok for many years.

Obituary

Treasures of a Kingdom

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WIRUCH THONGCHEW — BUREAU BANGKOK.



The Dusit Thani's small ballroom was packed to overflowing with members, their guests and the press. In keeping with FCCT tradition, the programme was open to responsible media coverage and was subsequently televised. While no fresh light was cast on the whereabouts of the missing jewels, at least no more went missing thanks to special security provided by Securicor.



From left, Former Police Director General Sawasdi Amornvivat, Saudi Chargé HE Mohamed Said Khoja and FCCT President Bertil Lintner just before one of the more controversial dinner programmes in recent FCCT history got under way on the evening of 6 October.



A highlight of the evening was the spirited challenge made to Khoja by FCCT Associate Member Nanthana Chansithipongse, who immediately became something of a national celebrity as "The Lady in Jewels". Having a mite irreverently dismissed the stolen jewels as baubles, Nanthana in the following days pursued her inquisition of Khoja in the press, suggesting that to avoid further carnage full compensation could and should be arranged on the basis of "science, equatibility and honour". "This is a peaceful kingdom," she reasoned, "and we do not wish more bloodshed, whether it be precious Saudi or humble Thai."

Treasures of a Kingdom



Among the many distinguished guests in the audience were HE the Ambassador of the Russian Federation HE Mr Oleg Bostorin, seen here with the distinguished speaker.



Plenty of police had their ears close to the ground that night. Foremost among them were former Police Director General Pratin Santiprapop, who has since been cleared of charges made against him concerning the murders of a prominent jeweller's wife and son.



The FCCT, as always, was open to many elements of the press — even dissident correspondents Neil Kelly, third from right, and Nick Cummings-Bruce, right. While generally denigrating the club at every opportunity, the pair nevertheless usually contrive to turn up for key events.



Khoja, talking here with FCCT Past President Dominic Faulder, was most anxious to get a sounding on how his presentation had been received.

APOLOGY

BECAUSE OF THE VERY LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF FUNCTION SPACE AROUND TOWN AT THIS TIME, ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EVENING WERE MADE AT EXTREMELY SHORT NOTICE. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ONCE AGAIN APOLOGIZES UNRESERVEDLY TO ALL MEMBERS WHO MISSED OUT ON THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND.

Lost Horizons: Nate Thayer's Kouprey Hunt

BY ROBERT K. BROWN AND ROBERT MACKENZIE • PHOTOS BY TIM PAGE



Lurch, jolt, lurch, jolt. Riding elephants for 12 hours a day at three clicks an hour was proving to be a mind- and butt-numbing experience as we moved through the desolate Cambodian savanna-type jungle. Ant-covered bamboo slapped our faces in rhythm to the lurching gait of the elephants. Thank God and Gargoyle sunglasses we still had our eyes.

It was becoming another pointless, painful misadventure. There had been a point to it all, but at this juncture, after hours on the back of a "lurch, jolt" elephant, we found the purpose growing less and less noble.

Like most adventures, it initially sounded more intriguing and glamorous than it was turning out to be — like jumping from a perfect airplane, where, while shuffling to the door, the bile trying to claw its way up your throat, you ask yourself once again, "Why am I doing this?"

It all started a few months ago when Nate Thayer, a young journalist whose career Soldier of Fortune helped launch, called the office.

"Brown, how ya doin'? How'd you like to go on a scientific expedition...to locate a species of cow that was thought to be extinct for 50 years?"

Well, we always thought cows were for eating, or if wild, eg Cape buffalo, for shooting and then eating. And a scientific expedition? Ho, hum. Dullsville. Maybe we're getting along in years, but the notion had as much appeal as kissing Hillary Rodham on the ear.

The ever-resourceful Thayer has been pushing the envelope for years: He's had malaria 16 times; keeps a motorbike hidden on the Thai-Cambo border and periodically drives unannounced into Khmer Rouge country. He also managed to get blown up when his truck hit a land mine, killing 10 of the 12 passengers; and when he positioned himself to the right-rear of a recoilless rifle shooting Burmese from a Karen bunker, instead of a Pulitzer-winning photo he got a snap of the bunker ceiling and lost 95% hearing in one ear...you know, that sort of envelope-pushing. Thayer must have sensed we were less than enthusiastic. So he started upping the ante.

"Brown, we'll chopper into the base camp; use elephants to recon."

On an interest level of one to ten, that's at about a two.

"We're going into KR country in Cambodia, near the Vietnamese border, along the Ho Chi Minh trail."

Interest level now at five.

"We'll be carrying AKs and whatever else is necessary. Interest level six."

"Our trackers will be former FULRO [United Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races] Montagnards who fought the NVA for 17 years after Saigon fell," he continued.

"If we find that 'extinct' cow, we'll all be famous."

Thayer sensed Brown wavering.

"And there are marauding tigers in the AO. We'll need someone to deal with that threat. An AK, even on full auto, won't do the job quick enough. We need a big calibre gun and someone who knows how to use it."

Bingo! Level 10.5. Brown bit and Thayer sank the hook, but now, as our elephantine convoy continued to lurch and jolt through the bamboo like a sailor on leave, we both wished he had spit it out.

After losing several thousand dollars' worth of camera gear to thieves who work the pricey Sukothai Hotel in Bangkok, we arrived in Phnom Penh to be greeted by Tim Page, a crazy Brit film shooter who made his bones big time as a combat photographer in the 'Nam, and Thayer, whom we quickly labelled "Colonel Kurtz."

Lost Horizons

We headquartered on the second floor of an old mildewy French villa that serves as an office for the English-language daily, the Phnom Penh Post.

As we dumped our gear on the floor, Thayer popped beers and said, "Welcome to the freest country in the world!"

Our puzzled glances prompted him to open a large cabinet containing an old French MAT-49 sub gun, a selective-fire Chinese M14, several AKs, an M79 grenade launcher and cases of ammo. Obviously no 4473s required here.

Thayer's prior planning primarily consisted of drinking, smoking and banging the local bimbos. Even though Tim Page has assumed S-4 responsibility and acquired a fair amount of equipment, there would be considerable delay. Food, weapons, communications and air transport were among "minor details" not resolved for our 25-man foray into the KR-controlled, tiger-infested jungle.

Over the next days we cleaned weapons and scrounged equipment in

Phnom Penh markets, and met other expedition members. An experienced Italian veterinarian and author of the definitive book on camels, Maurizio "Mo" Dioli, was the scientific member. Mo, Phnom Penh Post publisher Michael Hayes, his reporter and a Thai TV cameraman were ready to go. We awaited the four-man team of FULRO Montagnards with American escort from stateside.

We marked time visiting the battle zone at Pailin and catching some rays. As we tanned, the plan evolved to final form. Alternative transportation had to be organised: The three Cambodian choppers Thayer promised were not to be — the Cambodian army only has three choppers. But continued shopping/scrounging had us at operational status when the Montagnards arrived.

Thayer had convinced Cambodia's prime minister of the expedition's merit, so we had a government airplane. The first staging point was Sen Monorom in Mondol Kiri province, where the governor



organised a truck for the next leg and provided a 12-man detachment of Cambodian para-military police because of Khmer Rouge in the area. The governor issued the Montagnards AK-47s to increase expedition firepower. The Soldier of Fortune team members brought their own.

For the real kouprey story and others...read the Phnom Penh Post

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Lost Horizons

Next morning our party and supplies boarded a clapped-out truck and headed north on a dirt road. Most Cambodian roads boast only dirt and potholes. This road ran more to potholes and less to dirt. The plan was to drive until we ran out of road, to be met by elephants arranged by the provincial governor.

But, no elephants. By the time some showed up, we'd lost another day.

We hung out at the trail head in hammocks, impressing local villagers. They were so impressed the headman invited us for rice wine (as Third World vintages go, it could have been worse) and a pitch for American aid, lest his village vanish. The chief had three wives and the village was knee deep with children and pregnant children: Vanishing didn't seem imminent.

At daybreak we continued north. All walked except the overweight American who escorted the Montagnards. By mid-afternoon it approached 100 degrees F. We became separated into two groups, since elephants walk more slowly than men. The command element, an English-speaking Montagnard and Thayer, were two hours behind. We were told to expect a river a couple of hours out. By 14.00 there was still no river, so we stopped and waited for the "leaders." When they appeared at 16.00 the priority was water, so we moved toward the nearest watercourse.

An hour of bush bashing brought us to the blue line on their map, and huge pools of water. Soon elephants were in one pool, Cambodian soldiers an another and the expedition was drawing water from a third. A Third-World car wash was underway in the elephant pool with much splashing

ands frolicking as the mahouts scrubbed their charges.

We reached the proposed base site the next day and pitched camp. The following day we split into two groups to search for the cow. Both groups saw herds of banteng, another wild ox with which the legendary kouprey often cohabits. One group also saw packs of wild dogs and wild boar but no cow, yet. The next morning as we were getting ready to leave our overnight site, Thayer's walkie-talkie crackled with the words we didn't want to hear — a sentry had spotted a Khmer Rouge soldier, who had also spotted him. The sentry returned to camp firmly convinced the KR was not alone and that this did not bode well for our mission.

Despite Thayer's assurance from the KR representative that the area commander was aware of and approved of our mission, there as no certainty all local KR guerrillas had the word. On return we had a hurried conference to discuss options.

We could continue stumbling through the bush seeking the kouprey; we could try to talk to the KR and assess the situation; we could bugger out. The Soldier of Fortune contingent opted for the second choice since the KR surely knew we were there and showed no hostile intent. Prevailing sentiment, however, was that no one wanted to get killed looking for a cow, so everyone upped sticks and returned to base camp. The KR's reputation for ferocity and unpredictability was enough to tip the scales in favour of flight.

Things were not well back at camp. Suffering from the heat, Tim Page had convinced himself he was in serious danger of dying and needed a helicopter casevac. News of KR in the area corroborated his premonition and strengthened his demand to go home. The American Montagnard adviser was also down with heat and excess poundage — another candidate for casevac. With no radios to call the non-existent helicopter, we sent them out by elephant

the next day. The TV shooter, with several hours of footage already, and the Post reporter with a deadline, also returned with three of the elephants and four of the Cambodian cops.

The remaining crew spent the next several days looking for kouprey in an area clearly devoid of any animal life (but far from the KR), as there was neither hoof print nor cow pie anywhere in the barren landscape. But, as we could not convince the semi-intrepid Montagnard leader to go back where we had seen herds of cows and the lone rifleman, we ended the futile search and returned to base. We broke camp in the evening in order to get an early start back toward Sen Monorom.

Late that night, the dry season ended and in the next hour more than three inches of rain inundated our campsite, now devoid of tarps. Amid curses and mutterings around the camp, our hammocks took water in at a slow but constant rate and did not let it out.

As the noise of the storm faded, it was replaced by a din such as we had never heard during many campaigns on many continents: The rain was reveille to all the frogs in Cambodia, who had been waiting underground for the monsoons. Hundreds of thousands of frog voices in varying tones, timbres, pitches and strengths joined in a vast jungle cacophony loud enough to elicit sympathetic vibrations in the intrepid expeditioners' chest cavities. It was an incredible, surreal experience — National Geographic should have been there to record it.

Musing on the phenomenon, MacKenzie tipped more water from his hammock and wrapped himself in a sodden but still effective poncho liner, finally drifting off into a broken sleep to dream of giant frogs. We won't be back for a second try.

Journalists' Profile

Robert K. Brown is *Soldier of Fortune's* (SOF) Publisher/Editor. Robert MacKenzie is an SOF Contributing Editor for *Unconventional Operations*. They're still friends with FCCT member Nate Thayer. This article is reprinted with permission from *Soldier of Fortune*. Our version has been edited for length.



Beyond Cow Central: The Kouprey Follies

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TIM PAGE

NOBODY LIVES IN THE ZONE, AND FEW HUNTERS EXPLOIT THE RESOURCES IN THESE INHOSPITABLE TRACTS

I still haven't quite figured out why I accepted Captain Kurtz's mission proposal. It was totally whacked out and hadn't been planned to any degree — a 'go with the flow' kind of operation. Not exactly what you would think necessary to go plunging around the Ho Chi Minh trail at the height of the dry season. I suppose the mission itself was the fascination. Kurtz (aka Nate Thayer) himself had already assumed friend status, albeit a crazed one. Anyway the heart of darkness was again back in Cambodia and that was allure enough.

The logistics were only the tip of the nightmare preparations. "Cow Central" our base camp, was the second floor of the Phnom Penh Post building. (Incidentally, it is the only paper published fortnightly which is readable cover to cover, ads included. The centrefold is a wonderfully useful street map of the Cambodian capital.) From Cow Central, a flight of stairs led to a semi-covered rooftop giving a 360 degree panoply of the exotic skyline. To the east, the hated Vietnamese liberation memorial backdrop by the Cambodiana Hotel on the bank at the confluence of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers. Across the street, the stupa spires of Wat Botum and beyond of the Royal Palace. Flowering trees compete with rooftops at eye level. Dry season fullmoon nights are wondrous up there. Being in the heart of senior government housing, the newspaper can guarantee a fairly steady power supply, a vagary elsewhere in town. The editor and publisher, Michael Hayes, and his wife Kathleen live on the ground floor, the paper emerges from the first, and Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent Nate Thayer lives on the second.

I should explain Cow Central. Headquarters for the "Cambodian Kouprey Research Project" to support the Royal Government of Cambodia as "a non-profit project to preserve Cambodia's endangered National Heritage". The kouprey is a rare bovine, the 'Bos Sauvelis', and we were unsure whether or not it still survived. There is a good chance that a few live on in the northeastern quadrant of undeveloped Mondul Kiri province. The capital is Sen Monorom, a shanty town of five to six thousand mainly ethnic



peoples that has but one road out of town to Ban Me Thuot in Vietnam. The only connection to the Cambodian capital is by light plane from the downtown dirtstrip.

The mission was to locate, and hopefully document on video and in photographs, this elusive ungulate, which numbered a guesstimate of thirty to seventy beasts in 1986. The last study had been conducted in the early sixties when Viet Minh insurrections had restrained the operations. In 1988, the Indochinese nations clubbed together in Hanoi to protect the species and conserve it. The beast was not even discovered as a separate species until 1937. Only last year, the Vietnamese discovered another sub-species, a cross-jungle cow with elan horns and goat-like attitudes. In this recently designated National Park live some of the last Asian tigers, hopefully the one-horned rhino, banteng and gaur — other bovines — and large herds of wild elephant. Nobody lives in the zone, and few hunters exploit the resources in these inhospitable tracts.

During the Vietnam conflict, the north Vietnamese ran their weblike supply line, the Ho Chi Minh trail, through here. Faint trails of old truck tyre tracks were occasionally spotted. Now mellowed-out bomb craters line the landscape. Then, Special Forces' Special Operations Group (SOG) and Delta teams raided cross border. Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LURP) penetrated the sacred supply line. Indigenous, dissident ethnic minority groups were levied as anti-guerrilla strike companies at mercenary rates and led by 'free-world' SAS types. Above all this ground interdiction rained down apocalyptic strikes from an armada of aircraft based in neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam, or from offshore carrier-borne navy jets. Though this campaign was absolutely awesome, the men and material continued to flow south, complemented finally by a five inch fuel pipeline. Now only MIA [missing in action] resolution teams in their Blackhawk jet turbine helicopters and madmen venture into the area.

For guides and trackers, we were to take four indigenous mountain folk, part of the last FULRO army that had surrendered to UNTAC, the UN peace force, sixteen months earlier. In 1975, rather than submit to their lowland Vietnamese masters and enemies, they had taken to the jungle in open revolution. There were nearly eight thousand men, women and children then. By 1992, they were down to 472, most of whom had some form of maladies and malaria. They had been hunted almost to

Beyond Cow Central

extinction by the elite forces of Hanoi and its client state in Phnom Penh, and were unaware that their leader had been lured to the capital by Pol Pot and executed in the year they went underground. Down to the last few rounds for their prized weapons, an M14 and an M79 grenade launcher, they used my man Nate to interface with the Uruguayan and Russian UN contingents on their disarmament. The entire tribe was eventually resettled in North Carolina, vowing to follow only a peaceful path. They now came back to their old stamping ground to be issued nicely refurbished AK47s by their old adversary, the provincial governor.

It was strange to witness First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh's erstwhile bodyguard, who had been rewarded with this obscure gubernatorial appointment, providing the requisites for our hunt. The letter from his ex-boss on palace paper helped but the envelope of green Madisons worked a treat. The snappily dressed, governor fresh from a year of training in North Korea, also supplied us with a section of security. Since our montagnards — or 'yards' — still had refugee status, they required a chaperone. Enter Charlie, alias Fat Freddy. He had gotten intrigued with the ethnics during a one-year spell with the army paymaster corps in the highlands in Pleiku in 1972, the last year of US direct involvement in Vietnam. Charlie likes his six-pack and Mac plus fries. He came in country at a confessed 275 pounds fresh from his swing shift job at the Lorillard cigarette machine assembly plant in Greensboro', North Carolina. His accent was almost as difficult as the mixture of ethnic languages we were trying to communicate in: Lao, Thai, Khmer, M'nong, Rade and French.

Sen Monorom was the start of the go with the flow. Due to an offensive being waged against the Khmer Rouge at the gem capital of Pailin in the west, there were no helicopters available. They had all been committed to the front. We would walk and ten elephants would serve as camera platforms cum trucks. The 'we' had now expanded past the small manageable unit I had originally been asked to logisticize. We were now a regular platoon of 26. The cast of characters for the three-act play was composed somewhere out in the bone dry jungle on a Thai technology folding lounge chair. Captain Kurtz, our leader with newly shaven head, was packing a folding-stock Czech AK. Then there was the Editor-Publisher of Soldier of Fortune magazine (a fifth of whose circulation goes to law officers). A charming ex-army officer, he came complete with a mercenary US paratrooper bodyguard,

Mac. Mac's story was one of novel proportions: from 101st Airborne in the Nam, DOA [dead on arrival], then to the SAS in South Africa and Rhodesia. Unnervingly, he said to me the second day after we met, "I prefer to shoot people rather than pictures." One of his guises was that of a photographer. The entry into the country for 'The General', as the SOF editor likes to be known, of an HH 375 magnum elephant rifle had been finagled. It never fired a shot, and why we needed this I did not ask. Someone mentioned tigers. Protection against them would be ensured by wearing masks on the back of our heads. Large cats never attack from the front, they pounce on the neck and disembowel from behind. I had brought out John Major, Margaret Thatcher, Miss Piggy and Donald Duck. The US hit squad had George Bush, Hilary Clinton, Warren Christopher and a celebrity unknown to anyone.

Considering this was a mission dedicated to filming and photographing this rare 'bos', we seemed to be accumulating and packing an awful amount of heat. The pile of weaponry accrued at Sen Monorom could have fronted a small revolutionary movement. Maurizio Dioli, our only concession to science, a trained vet-zoologist with ten years Africa experience, was horrified by the armoury. His mission was to preserve the cow not hunt it.

Documenting all this were a Thai cameraman from Reuters TV, Praparn, and Ker Munthit, a Khmer journalist par excellence, hot from the Pailin trail and six years in Patrice Lumumba University. Nearly everyone had a camera happily snapping everything, except Munthit who had a laptop computer. The laptop and the Betacam needed electricity, so a small generator was humped in. We were not however in possession of light or a radio. We could communicate with no-one outside. Presumably cosmonauts might possibly see our smoke signals and phone Phnom Penh for help.

We lurched out of Sen Monorom in a truck, Zil vintage '72, a Ho trail runner veteran that could only be jump started in reverse. The spaghetti junction dangling from the dialless dash ended in a Yale lock. Occasionally a red light would glow whereupon the driver's assistant would hop overboard and juggle the battery in its rotting compartment. It took three plus hours to arrive at the elephant village rendezvous of Phum Chas. The pachyderm 4x4s did not arrive until late in the day, only six instead of the promised ten. A fullmoon lit the eerie gong banging ceremony accompanying our yards and team guzzling at bamboo straws that emerged from large urns of potent rice wine. Fewer of us would be riding than



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originally planned.

Without unboxing our walkie-talkies, we plunged off into the forest, the column straggling quickly back over two kilometres. Our trackers, erstwhile fearsome guerrilla fighters, had grown accustomed in sixteen months to white bread and MTV. We were not exactly lost, just slightly offtrack. With no more than two canteens of water per person, we were quickly evaporating in the 35-40 degree heat. The rough trail undulated along a spine between two dry rivers, scrub forest, savanna that occasionally thickened and shaded. Other times it snared and snagged with thorn and bamboo while insects of myriad species all appeared to want a chunk of the action: our flesh. Groups of us became separated, lost, the elephants plugged on by unseen. The middle of the day arrived. No water hole. No refill for our canteens, no traditional break during the hottest period. Insanity, only mad dogs and Englishmen venture out at this time. We plunged on visibly drooping. We passed The General twice, his feet bared, a veritable advertisement for mole skin and Bandaid, unbroken-in Desert Storm boots discarded for decrepit sneakers. Fat Freddy was burning up and was boosted atop a 4x4. The TV walked, the photographer humped, we stumbled on, the beauty of the forest obscured by a film of sweat.

The few kilometres I traded off with Freddy to get some pix was almost as uncomfortable as stumbling along the rough rock littered animal path. To be perched in a rattan and wood box atop an elephant is akin to a pram dinghy in a choppy sea. A series of incalculable lurches, lunges, and jolts, never in the same motion twice. Their independent suspension system is only terrific, but plays roller coaster with the spinal chassis. One is pitched and yawed against the solid chunks of the baggage while the thighs are pinched by the leading edge of the howdah. One is admonished for moving one's feet on the elephant's neck as the beast might construe this as an alien order independent of the mahout driver perched atop its head. Trying to make a straight-horizoned photo or a backward one is verging on the impossible. You are also brain-broiled alive, perched out in the full blast of a tropical sun.

"Some people would spend thousands of dollars to be in this place," quoth The General. The rallying call, "Thousands of Dollars!", continued to echo round the camp or along the trail whenever discomfort was reached. A half dozen echoes could be heard around base or trail whenever the urge to protest was felt. We caught up with the transport and collapsed. The rest of the column staggered in over the next two hours. It was two thirty. Our Magellan ground position satellite fixer refused to pinpoint our locale. The yards were blamed for our position. Maybe we should head west and hope for the O Rovei river. Their old base camp had been ten clicks north of where we might find water. The jungle thickened with tangles of dense bamboo, underfoot vines tripped and dust puffed from the dry litter. I think it was about then that I started to hallucinate about freshly-squeezed ice-cold

orange juice. The thought went down the column like a bush fire. Could have made a million with a gallon or two. We almost fell down the bank to the stagnating O Rovei, a series of rock separated, scum-edged pools with a trace of current. It looked good and simultaneously somewhat threatening.

The security and the yards plunged right in, some fully dressed. The elephants headed downstream to draught. We had marched, lurched and stumbled thirty-five kilometres. We were not at our intended destination, though it appeared we would only have to go another 12 to 15 kilometres in the morning. Anyway, we were at water. Collective sighs of relief. To reverse overheating in a hurry (a scene I had witnessed with overloaded prostrated marines on the DMZ in the sixties), immerse the body in water and administer rehydration solution orally or intravenously. Hundreds of grunts in flak vests had died flopped out like beached whales back then, and their shadow was now upon us. Making camp was forgotten. To get cool, chill out, was the only goal. Sitting on the water's edge on razor-edge rock, fatigues down to the knees with only jungle boots to come off, it felt as though a bullet had punctured my chest and heart. My diaphragm jerked and spasmed, my left side went numb. Bum-crabbing across the sharp stone, I edged past the scum into clearish waist-deep water. It was like finding religion. Blessed water. The occasional animal turd or nibbling fish was barely remarked upon. A semblance of humanity returned.

For the next three hours, all that is imprinted on my memory as blurringly I cooled out are endlessly gulping canteens of tea and excruciating cramps in both legs that left me howling louder than the monkeys in the surrounding bush and thickets. The MREs (Meal Rations Emergency) were indigestible, the cold rice unappetizing. Somewhere in between screaming and tiger-balming, the lounge chair got opened, the mosquito net got hung. Dropping from fatigue to sleep was prevented by ripples of pain down the legs and continual reaching for the water bottle flavoured with MRE base powder, grape flavour. The jungle came alive with the dark. Most of the sounds we would associate with power tools on full rev and hammer, or electric razors gone haywire. A whole kitchen full of appliances cacophonizing apparently inches from the protective Chinese-made net. The moon was full enough still to grab strange forms out of the shadowy bamboo and trees. Rustlings became vaguely menacing, the conversations and flashlights round the base flickered out.

Then the apprehension set in, blowings and loud grufflings started followed by clanks, clinks and the sound of bush being crushed and ripped out. The hobbled 4x4s were on the move, grazing and foraging for what little there was to consume. On the consumption level elephants are notoriously inefficient using only 40 per cent of the herbage they stuff aboard. Even on the move their trunks switch and search about for inflight refueling morsels, barely hesitating when uprooting young papaya trees three inches thick. Their mahouts had laagered them

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a hundred metres down from our encampment but they had hobbled upstream in the search to satisfy their bottomless appetites. Initially they appeared to be foraging around our perimeter, but the clank of their chains and tearing up of bush edged ever closer. Flashlights clicked on, candles flickered and maglite beams stabbed the eerie darkness. We illuminated only the surrounding bamboo. The crashes and humpings grew closer. Alarmed conversation broke out from neighbouring clumps of campers.

My lounge chair was between two clumps of bamboo four metres from the fire and the tarped baggage heap. Should the beasts get inquisitive I would, I fantasized, be trampled. Munthit and Praparn, ten metres adjacent now sounded agitated, spot beams coursing their surroundings. I picked out a fluorescent eye — the wily pachyderms were heaving the roots out of our camp. Sleep was not on. Munthit finally alerted the drivers to come and repark their vehicles suitably far away. Needless to say, I spent the next hour it seemed listening to every noise, flicking on and doing a sweep with my torch every five minutes. It was warming and lightening too early for comfort, Munthit was already at the hearth blowing at the embers to get the next canteen of coffee going.

Being too far west, we had to head north and east across country. Much of the ground had been blackened by bush fires. It was baking hot with few trees for shade. Today, however, we were disciplined, we had a whole procedure of march formulated, radios distributed, weapons were slung less aggressively. The yards took charge. Fat Freddy rode. It felt good to step out, the first morning cool dissipating as we gobbled distance, eager for base camp promised at less than fifteen kilometres march. I faded fast, staggering in to kilometre nine to be boosted up on the 4x4 for the remaining downhill, past numerous bomb craters into the O Tea river base camp, our home for the duration.

For reasons of security, all the team has been sworn to secrecy about the exact co-ordinates where the search was conducted. There are too many nutters who would love to



bag any remaining kouprey. So even the locale of the base camp beside four pools on the almost dry O Tea in northeast Mondalkiri must remain vague. Our yards had had their camp upstream a few miles, and Y-Hinnie, the leader, wished to return to the grave of his son, dead from pneumonia at nine months of age. Although none of our patrols actually spotted a kouprey, they did see gaur and banteng, two other rare bovines, and saw tracks of a third. Since no wild buffalo exist in the area, it can be presumed the surviving bos is in this fastness on the Vietnamese border. So are tigers and elephants, mouse deer, wild dogs and hopefully the one-horned rhinoceros. The new Royal Government of Cambodia has declared the zone a National Park, the Vietnamese have done likewise with their adjacent wilderness. Being without human habitation this could become one of the last refuges for wildlife in Asia and the world, hosting a gamut of the most endangered species. Plans are already laid to push a road up here and put in a ranger station to discourage hunters and poachers.

The cow tracks were spotted by Maurizio, our zoologist-vet, on the day before a lone Khmer Rouge hunter was encountered. Luckily the guerrilla saw the elephant with the camera, vet and Phnom Penh Post editor aboard, and did not even bother to unsling his weapon. Should he have seen the other part of the scouting party, with Mac the Gun and Captain Kurtz, he would no doubt have thought that this was a replay of 25 years ago, and reacted in a different way.

I witnessed none of these sightings, having become totally unraveled and delirious with heat prostration, which confined me limply to my lounge chair, close to the base camp kitchen. Staggering the fifty metres to our bathing pool for a splash became a major effort. Anyway, the sighting of the Khmer Rouge hunter had sent the scouting teams scurrying back to base to reappraise the situation. In a serious encounter we would undoubtedly have come off worse despite our conglomeration of weaponry. Our security were nothing but an undisciplined collection of provincial police riff-raff. The RPG (rocket propelled grenade) gunner had fired but a single round in his entire military career. All of the weapons were in a woeful state of maintenance, and no-one fancied a last-ditch stand at this dessicated gulch. Five of us would retreat on elephant back down to a rendezvous with the truck at Phum Chas, the remainder would scour the terrain diplomatically west of the presumed Khmer Rouge hunting territory. The next expedition would have to liaise more thoroughly with the 'fourth faction', possibly getting their co-operation and assistance. For this trip they had willingly filled in their sightings on 1:50,000 large scale maps to compare with those from FULRO mountagnards. It was a question of setting up hides and blinds at appropriate water holes, salt licks and game trails, and letting patience rule.

Five of us moved out at just after seven the following morning aboard three elephants. We took most of the

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photographic gear, the video system and generator, and just enough rations and water for the forty klick trek. It took ten and a half hours of agony being jolted and broiled, dehydrating constantly, and being spewed over with the bile elephants secrete in one of their stomachs to act as a coolant — pachyderm glycol. Back at the forward base I slithered from the howdah, staggered and fell, rising to totter with classically Chinese-bound feet, the nerve at my spinal base pinched from the sharp edged baggage in the howdah.

The Cessna 172, a twelve-seater short strip single-engined plane arrived at Sen Monorom early, and Co-Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh's Nomad also turned up. We had used the latter to ferry the expedition upcountry, provided free compared to the US\$600 per hour charged by Aviation Sans Frontieres for their bird. As executive officer of this now foundering cow hunt I had to make a heavy decision: which craft to load. Now Sen Monorom is not exactly a metropolis, but the Cessna pilot was nowhere to be found. Besides our crew, there were only two other foreigners in town, French volunteer medics. There was only one cafe-restaurant, and the market was four alleys of wooden shacks one hundred and fifty metres square. Various folk hanging around the strip and marketplace pointed in diverse directions. After an hour of toing and froing, the pilot, Christophe, was found lunching in the Vietnamese-run cafe. Yes, the Phnom Penh Post had booked the plane to get the five of us out. He thought the Nomad had come up for the Governor and his entourage.

A phalanx of minor wives and comfort girls had gagged down at Sen Monorom International. There was no hurry, après déjeuner we would leave, booked for 1400 hours. A leisurely lunch and a plod back to the airport. We were already loaded and had collected two more passengers before Christophe sauntered out looking as though he was ready for his siesta. His whole attitude was that of a Parisian approaching his Peugeot GTI at "Le Parking Champs Elysee": casual, laid back, debonair. He threw on the ignition, gunned the motor, sort of looked around, and tested a few controls. The Khmer co-pilot adjusted his baseball hat and Ray-Bans. We started to taxi, one presumed to the end of the strip since the 'terminal' was halfway along.

Early afternoon is the hottest, worst time to fly. Little lift, the heat denying the turbine its kick, the air thin. We started to pick up speed, bumping and jolting. I turned to Fat Freddy and shouted at him, "At what speed does an elephant get airborne?" We both giggled nervously as the bumping increased, the speed picking up. The panorama started to flash by, but we were not getting into the air, simply jolting and hopping, jarring down the rutted runway. It was impossible to see forward over the engine cowl and spinning prop. We were still at a taxiing angle, and it was dawning on us that we were not going to make it. Everyone, except the two ethnic hitch-hikers on their first plane ride, was now flicking nervous glances at



each other. Then the brakes went on, like slamming into reverse on an automatic Buick Wildcat while pulling on the hand brake. We hurtled, tail-dropping, exaggerating the bumping again, the pilot threw the reverse on the prop and started into a 40 kph U-Turn. Skidding, kicking up dust and almost tipping over, I got a glimpse from the inside of the U of the end of the runway a mere ten metres away. That morning we had come back into town down the strip, the end of which terminated in a 45-degree boulder-strewn incline before the jungle started. The nut-brown co-pilot was ashen grey. Christophe screamed back, "Not enough speed!" I screamed, "Wait till later!" No. We now had a gunned-up GTI, and were trundling, lurching back the other way, the dusty kilometre stretched out to the town's perimeter. It took three-quarters of the length to grab dubious thin air, another ten minutes to grope up to cruising at five thousand feet.

Back at Pochentong, Christophe got a dressing-down from his 'chef', a St Exupery lookalike. Fat Freddy turned to me and said cartoon copy with his deep Southern drawl, "Ya know Tim, hope will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no hope." Out of the anxious jungle and the grips of Captain Kurtz, we paused to light up a ready-roll, and kissed the kouprey goodbye.



Journalists' Profile

IMMF founder Tim Page has covered Indochina since the Vietnam War. He now lives in Kent, England, with his wife Claire and their young son.

High Noon at the OK Coral

BY BERTIL LINTNER • PHOTOS BY HSENG NOUNG LINTNER

When Gene Lamb retired from thirty years in the oil and construction business, he knew exactly what he was going to do. "I love the sea, my interest is fishing, and a retired man should not sit at home and do nothing," the sun-tanned, 67-year old American says with a broad smile. Instead of rotting away in a retirement home in his native St Louis, Missouri, Gene spends most of his time guiding anglers out in the Andaman Sea on board the Andaman Angler, a 60-foot, well-equipped hardwood boat.

Owned by the wife of his Scottish partner, Andy Watson, the Andaman Angler is based at Ao Chalong anchorage on the southern coast of Phuket. This proud vessel was built in Malaysia some 15 years ago, and now has become extremely popular with big game anglers who flock to Phuket. In fact, Phuket is developing fast into a prime destination for gamefishing in Southeast Asia: there are more than enough fighting fish down here to thrill any visiting angler.

Gene came to Southeast Asia during the initial stages of the Vietnam war in the early 1960s. Working for Pacific Architects and Engineers, or PAE, he built air strips, roads and buildings for the army in South Vietnam. He remained there until the communist takeover in 1975, when he was evacuated to Guam on board a C-130 transport plane as guerrillas were closing in on Tan Son Nhut air base outside Saigon. His Vietnamese wife and their two daughters also made it out in time, and the whole family moved to Singapore.

After a few years working for Union Oil in Indonesia, Gene left the tropics for the North Sea oil fields. It was on an oil rig off the coast of the Norwegian towns of Stavanger and Bergen that Gene became convinced that cold and windy climate was not for him. "I missed the warm weather — and the warm sea!" Gene grins. He packed his belongings and went to southern Mexico, where he also worked offshore, but under much more pleasant conditions.

However, Asia was in his blood, and following shorts stints of work in India,

Saudi-Arabia and Indonesia, he made Phuket his home in March last year. "But I have been coming to Thailand since the Vietnam war days," Gene says over a drink at a beach hotel in Phuket. "And once I discovered Phuket, I knew I was going to retire here."

Boarding the Andaman Angler, we set off for the outlying islands west of Phuket. It was a clear, sunny day and Gene's assistants rigged up a set of six rods with artificial lures — plastic jigs resembling giant squids — trawling behind the boat. We relaxed in the shade under the canvas-covered rear of the boat, as we were keeping a steady course out towards the open sea.

Suddenly, and without prior warning, one of the reels whirled as the line raced out. A fish was diving deep and the struggle was on. A few minutes later, I landed a 2-kg barracuda. This was followed by almost a dozen tunas, the most common game fish in the sea off Phuket. But the fish we really wanted to catch was the mighty Sailfish, which may weigh up to 50 kg and often put on real acrobatic shows for the onlooker. A strong strike — he got away — was enough to convince us that it was really as strong as Gene and others had told me.

Other species in the Andaman Sea include giant King Mackerel, the colourful Trevally, Wahoo, Rainbow Runner, Long Tom, and the odd-looking Dolphin Fish — which is known as Dorado in mainland United States and Mahi-Mahi in Hawaii. Oddly enough, the Phuket variety is also known locally by its Hawaiian name. This beautiful — and exceptionally delicious — fish may weigh up to 10 kg, is golden in colour and looks like a big dagger with a slim body and a sharp, curved head.

The actual fishing grounds in the area extend to the smaller islands to the west of Phuket. From Ao Chalong on the main island you may explore, for instance, the waters around the Ratcha Islands — Koh Ratcha Yai and Koh Ratcha Noi — with their pleasant,

secluded anchorages and good beaches. Here, giant Sailfish are abundant and you may even catch the odd shark lurking in the reefs off the islands' rocky slopes. Koh Ratcha Noi is uninhabited, but Koh Ratcha Yai has a few make-shift Thai style restaurants by a fine, white sand beach.

The most dedicated anglers head for the so-called "Drop Off" out at the edge of the continental shelf near the Similan Islands. This is the home of the fabled Black Marlin, which may reach a weight of several hundred kilograms. Famous for their clear, uncontaminated water, abundant marine life and as a place for big game-fishing and scuba diving, the Similans are located approximately 100 km or 10 hours by boat to the northwest of Phuket.

In 1982, the nine islands — Similan is derived from Sembilan, which means "9" in Malay — were declared a national park, and they are rapidly becoming one of the leading attractions for travellers in southern Thailand. For many generations, the only visitors to the Similans were the so-called Sea Gypsies who went there to fish. Now, however, the Royal Forestry Department has established stations on the main Koh Similan as well on nearby Koh Miang. The Tourism Authority of Thailand described the Similans as "Thailand's most beautiful and unspoiled marine national park" and, for once, it is not an exaggeration.

The actual islands may not be that spectacular, but hundreds of species of colourful fish swirl around underwater peaks, canyons, caves, coral reefs and passageways under the sea, providing scuba divers with some of the most



OK Coral

breath-taking sights anywhere in the world.

But there is also another side to the beauty of the Similans. Bangkok-based writers Denis Gray, Collin Piprell and Mark Graham state in their excellent guide book, *National Parks of Thailand*, that "within the past few decades, however, the islands attracted such new and destructive newcomers as dynamite fishermen who did not hesitate to destroy hundreds of years of coral growth with one bomb, collecting the dead and stunned fish which floated to the surface before moving on to new grounds." Additional destruction has been caused by commercial trawlers and careless yachtsmen who have anchored on the reefs.



of the Similans also attract large numbers of yachtsmen from Phuket and beyond. For those who don't want to spend the night on board, there are camp sites on Koh Ba Ngu, Koh Similan and Koh Miang. The last island also boasts bungalows of native design and a simple restaurant.

There is no doubt that Phuket provides excellent fishing opportunities. Some hotels may also prepare the fish for you, like the Boat House where we stayed. Designed and owned by renowned architect ML Tridhoshyuth Devakul, the Boat House is a pearl on Phuket's scenic and private Kata Beach. Moreover, the hotel's chef is one of the best on the island. We had fish for dinner every night at the Boat House: deep fried with garlic and pepper, broiled over glowing charcoal, or in strong, spicy tom yam soup with chillies and lemon grass.

Thailand's environmentalist movement may be in its infancy. But apart from the obvious — to save offshore coral reefs and what's left of the forests on land — many people now also want to preserve Thailand's fishing waters: excellent fishing waters full of fighting Skipjack Tuna, giant Barracudas and elusive, ferociously strong Sailfish and Marlin.

Guide to the most common game fish in the Phuket area

Tuna is the most common game fish in the sea around Phuket. The Bonito variety is everywhere, but rather dull to catch compared with the much stronger, striped Skipjack Tuna, or the giant Dogtooth Tuna.

Barracudas are also everywhere and seem to strike on everything that moves. They are usually 2-5 kg, but specimens weighing 10-20 kg are not uncommon.

Wahoo is another popular game fish that weighs 2-10 kg and is abundant in the sea west of Phuket.

Mahi-Mahi is called Dorado in Florida and Mahi-Mahi in Hawaii. The Phuket variety is also — curiously — known locally as Mahi-Mahi. They weigh up to 10 kg, are golden in colour and look like a big dagger with a slim body and a sharp, curved head. Long Tom is — as the name suggests — a long and slender, ugly-looking fish which also is very bony. But it puts up a good fight and when it strikes you may mistake it for a barracuda.

Sailfish and Marlin are two popular

varieties of billfish which have become the trade mark for many fishing tour companies in Phuket. They are big, strong and, it should be added, not as common as they used to be. Therefore, most tour companies recommend "catch and release" for all kinds of billfish. Sharks should also be released unharmed.

Game fishing charters

There are several tour companies in Phuket that offer game fishing. The Suk Chai Game Fishing Charters is one of the most popular which, in addition to day charter, offers trips for up to five days to the Similan Islands from November through May. Charter for up to seven passengers costs 9,000 Baht/day during high season — 1 November through 30 April — and 6,000 Baht/day from 1 May to 31 October. Charters include lunch, soft drinks and all equipment. The rate for the Similans (maximum six passengers) is 12,500 Baht/day including all food and accommodation on the boat. Bookings can be made through Suk Chai Game Fishing Charters, 12/101 Soi Pudtan, Chao Fa Road, Phuket 83000. Tel & fax (076) 282 084.

Accommodation in Phuket

With room rates ranging from Baht 3,200/night for a single room and Baht 6,200/night for a luxury suite, the Boat House may not be the cheapest hotel in Phuket. However, with just 33 rooms and 3 suites, you can bathe in the rare luxury of individual service. Travel writer Mark Ottaway of the *Sunday Times* in London called it "a gem, an intimate, simple, somewhat stylish hotel in which wood is more evident than concrete." Moreover, the hotel's chef is one of the best on the island, and will be most happy to prepare your catch for you. For reservations, please phone (076) 330 015-7, or fax (076) 330 561.

Journalists' Profile

In order to preserve fish stocks in a certain neighbouring country, officials there continue to deny Bertil Lintner a visa. His last application was as roving correspondent for the *Angling Times*.

Wandering Eye



for having the temerity to expect such an eventuality. "Well, if you're really that close to the edge, maybe you should consider a career in another profession," she was told. It's always nice to be wanted ...

No prizes for guessing the former FCCT supremo who recently got himself hopelessly lost in a Phnom Penh suburb, Tuol Kork, while careening around on the back of a motorbike. He was on his way to listen to Co-Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Just as he was beginning to fear that he would miss the speech, a magnificent cavalcade appeared with flashing lights and outriders on the other side of a dusty roundabout. All was not lost. The intrepid journalist urged his disbelieving driver to "follow that Mercedes" as it agonizingly negotiated the potholed road. A few kilometres further on, and something was clearly amiss. The cavalcade ground to a halt. The prime minister, it transpired, was equally lost. Outriders whizzed in all directions amidst the astonishing spectacle of a prime ministerial convoy performing a U-turn in the most difficult of circumstances. Finally, the leading outrider set off again, this time in the right direction, his face a wall-to-wall smile of total embarrassment. And as if to prove that they had all been totally lost, when the story finally appeared in print the mini drama was reported as having occurred in the "northeastern" suburb of Phnom Penh. All FCCT members in good

standing of course know that Tuol Kork is a northwestern suburb of Phnom Penh. You really can't believe anything you read in the press these days.

Inspired by the co-prime minister system in Cambodia, Presidentissimo Bertil Lintner (when he is not amusing himself penning essays for *Dateline* on his latest fishing trip) has been taking soundings on the idea of introducing a co-presidential system at the FCCT. The response has been pretty underwhelming, not least because the FCCT actually has presidents coming out of its ears — a President, a Past (Past) President, a First Vice President and a Second Vice President. Unperturbed, two-term Bertil (whose foundation policy statement was that he would only stay for one year) has been rooting around in search of a worthy successor to this exalted and prestigious position. It is probably a complete coincidence that Victor Mallet, Mary Kay Magistad and Sonya Hepinstall have all decided to flee Bangkok permanently in December. They will certainly be missed come the elections in January.

Great Leader Kim Il Sung might still be alive today but for a violent summer storm — at least according to an exclusive story in Britain's *The Independent*. In November, former FCCT stalwart Terry McCarthy scooped the world with a report that North Korea's elderly strongman was holidaying at



Wandering Eye

his beloved Mount Myonang resort 110 miles north of Pyongyang when he suffered a heart attack late on the night of Thursday 7 July. A special medical team was immediately dispatched by helicopter but crashed into a clouded mountain as it



approached the retreat so favoured by top party cadres. By the time the clouds had cleared for a second airlift attempt, "the greatest leader of Korea in 5,000 years" had already succumbed to the sure destiny of all mortals. North Korea News Agency reported that he had "suffered from a serious myocardial infarction owing to heavy mental strain, which was followed by a heart shock the heart shock took a turn for the worse and he passed away". Officially, he died at 2.00 am on Friday, but the news was not made public until midday on Saturday — a delay that some conspiracy theorists seized upon as indicative of something untoward having occurred. But if anything, it seems bad luck not foul play guided events that dark and stormy night in one of the world's most secretive countries.

The only Thai prime minister in many years not to address the FCCT was Suchinda Kraprayoon. He did, however, recently almost make it up to the clubhouse for a tippie. As all good marketing folk know, image is everything. Anheuser-Busch International Inc., producer of Budweiser 'King of Beers', has mapped

out an aggressive policy in Asia to help grab its target of 5 per cent of the non-US beer market globally. In Thailand, the campaign is being executed with almost military precision thanks to local distributor Thai International Products Company. Guests of honour at the glitzy 'Night of Fun' launch party at The Dusit Thani's Tiara included Suchinda and former Supreme Commander Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananil. The two disgraced military men were key players in the self-styled National Peacekeeping Council that overturned the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Chatrachai Choonhavan in early 1991. Their disastrous play for power ended in bloody carnage on the streets of Bangkok in May 1992. Unlike his main opponent, Phalang Dharma leader (and now deputy Prime Minister) Chamlong Srimuang, Suchinda has kept pretty much out of the public eye since soldiers killed — by the conservative official tally — nearly 50 pro-democracy demonstrators. Their ghosts recently returned to haunt Suchinda when it emerged that he had earlier this year been quietly awarded the honorary chairmanship of Charoen Pokphand Group's Telecom Holding Co. Ltd. As the general found out from the outraged reaction in some quarters, it's not all beer and skittles when you're engaged on telephone business.

One dark night in that supposed pearl of the Orient, Pattaya, international publishing and media tycoon Neville Pick suddenly felt a basic urge. Selecting a suitably dark and anonymous side soi, this very substantial personage was unzipped and in full flow when he was in receipt of a mighty blow behind the ear that rendered him even more senseless than usual. When he eventually came back around, in considerable disarray but family jewels happily still in hand, 'Khun Pig' found that he had been relieved of all his cash. Fortunately, being a modest and disorganized soul, he never wears rings or a watch. A companion swiftly shipped him off to the nearest casualty ward for five neat stitches. Neville (affectionately

described by FCCT chief angling correspondent Bertil Lintner as "the devil we know") attributes his misfortune not to Pattaya's wayward hospitality trade but to his association with the FCCT. Probably purely by coincidence, the last issue of this



esteemed organ contained a stunning exposé of Pattaya's expatriate criminal underworld by newshound Andrew Ace Drummond.

Second Vice President Margo Towie is not a lady to tangle with lightly. She was recently at Bangkok International Airport waiting patiently for a taxi when a businessman from Taiwan suddenly jumped the queue. Having made it clear that such behaviour was rather boorish, our Margo proceeded to climb into her taxi — only to find her entry had been forcibly assisted by a mighty shove from her irate new friend. Realizing this was not an occasion to waste time mincing words, SuperMargo let loose a well aimed kick that really focussed the queue-jumper's attention. Enraged and in acute pain, he lunged into the taxi only to find our Margo coiled up on the other side, her foot poised beneath his nose and ready to really make his day. He retreated, cursing but perhaps somewhat wiser in matters of etiquette. Anyway, if you find yourself standing next to Margo at the buffet, for goodness sake don't go after the same bread roll.



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