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Henry S. Bradsher. *The Dalai Lama's Secret and Other Reporting Adventures: Stories from a Cold War Correspondent*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013. 336 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-5051-1.

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Commissioned by Heidi Tworek

In this age of declining investment in traditional overseas news bureaus, Henry Bradsher's swashbuckling account of his days as an AP reporter in India, Russia, and China (among other, wide-ranging places) has a definite ring of nostalgia about it. But Bradsher, who was also the last foreign correspondent for *The Washington Star* before that newspaper folded in 1981, doesn't let himself drown in melancholic reflections, but instead provides a fascinating account of his time reporting on a dynamic ColdWar-era developing world.

Bradsher presents his work memoir—and that is what this is, since the space he spends on himself in the first two chapters is minimal—as a compilation of “pieces written over many years as stand-alone ‘anecdotes,’” with “little overlap.” He insists that he did not set out to write a “comprehensive diary of my career as a reporter” (p. ix). So it is: his tales, told straight and without embellishment, appear to have been written with minimal purposeful continuity.

An exception to this is his first two chapters, which recount his time at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and his first few domestic reporting assignments. Among his first jobs was working for the Associated Press in Atlanta, Georgia, and covering the Montgomery bus boycott in the winter of 1957. It is Bradsher's style, like the AP man he was, to provide lots of background detail, interspersed with a brief note or two about how he got the news. What emerges quickly is a modest, perhaps even too modest, reflection of his reporting adventures.

When he gets to India, his first big overseas assignment, for example (in a chapter teasingly called “Killing the long-haired lama:” Bradsher is good at naming his stories and drawing you in), there are only hints of his

daily, working life, and much more geopolitical detail on how various events unfolded. The third chapter covers the 1959 escape of the Dalai Lama from Tibet into north-eastern India. Its best parts are when Bradsher faces logistical or other obstacles in his reporting, or explains some of the technology and terminology of his time. Two instances of this: a “rocket,” he relates, is an angry missive from the AP overseas headquarters in London, and the fragile network scattered across the subcontinent that could transmit radiophotos back to base was fragile indeed, being based mostly just in New Deli and Calcutta.

Also interesting is his mentioning of rivalry and occasional collaboration among Western correspondents. If they were in the same market, they would not be above asking local officials to deny rival news agencies permission to fly their chartered planes in order to buy a few hours of lead time. But if they served a different audience, or were writing for later deadlines, Bradsher and his friends would share details in a “brotherhood of journalists” (p. 62).

The next several short chapters—more than half of his memoirs, in fact—focus on a series of entertaining “journalistic escapades” (p. 55) from India, as Bradsher is soon promoted to bureau chief. He writes about the political intrigues surrounding outspoken prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, visits by President Eisenhower and the young Queen Elisabeth II, dashes in and out of remote corners of India, such as Bhutan and Ceylon, and the lingering military conflict between India and China over their then-vague and disputed border along the Himalayas. His ability to do his own typing, to dictate well, and later, to send his own reports via Telex (essentially text over a phone line) gave him a competitive edge in these situations.

Of particular note in these chapters are his interactions with other reporters, not just the aforementioned Western journalists. Most of these were friendly, collegial, and helpful, but clashing journalistic values could be apparent in some cases. In “Mail from the Nagas,” his tenth chapter, he writes about an incident in 1960 in which he receives evidence of Indian Army abuses from the local population of a small, isolated province in extreme northeast India. The Indian journalists, motivated by a strong sense of nationalism, sought to repress or at least downplay these reports. If only for these sorts of asides and quick glimpses into the journalistic cultures of the developing world (along the edges of the Soviet sphere), Bradsher is worth reading.

Again, however, with the exception of a charming middle chapter about how he met and married his wife Monica, a Fulbright scholar to India in 1963, Bradsher is mostly all business, shifting his attention in the second half of his memoir to an extended series of stories about his time in Moscow as AP bureau chief. Only in his early 30s, Bradsher soon attracted the ire of the Soviet authorities for his no-nonsense coverage of the strident Russian government: “calling things as I saw them,” in his words (p. 184). Among his more annoying accomplishments, from the perspective of the communist powers-that-were, was his debunking of Soviet propaganda, and refusal to be cowed by both official and unofficial pressure. In typical Bradsher style, however, he does not trumpet these achievements. His best chapter on these and other challenges of working in the Soviet Union in the teeth of the Cold War is “Bombed in Moscow,” which

describes the very visceral reaction of the KGB to his reporting.

His last few chapters quickly cover stints in Hong Kong, where he closed *The Washington Star*’s Hong Kong office, the unrest in East Pakistan (Bangladesh), forays into Vietnam in the latter stages of the war, the brutal guerrilla conflict in Cambodia, and coverage of the peace accords facilitated by President Carter between Israel and Egypt in 1979. Prefiguring the way reporters today write while on the go, Bradsher used a travel typewriter to write his story on the way home from the latter event, “squeezed into a middle seat” (p. 276). The penultimate chapter reviews the fates of some of his colleagues over the years, who often fell victim to the uncertain freedoms of journalists in the developing world. He does have some encouraging anecdotes, but “too many have paid with their lives—from Mexico to Pakistan to many other countries—for giving the public information essential for good government and economic honesty” (p. 286).

Bradsher ends his memoir with a tantalizing note about how he was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency to work as an analyst not long after the *Star* faded. That part of his story is probably worthy of another book, but does not appear here. What does appear is an enjoyable but sometimes slightly repetitive (due to unintentional summaries which rehash information already related) account of a wire-service reporter’s globe-spanning career. Despite the occasional review of facts from previous chapters, it would be a good supplement to an undergraduate journalism course on comparative media systems, or just a fun read in its own right.

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