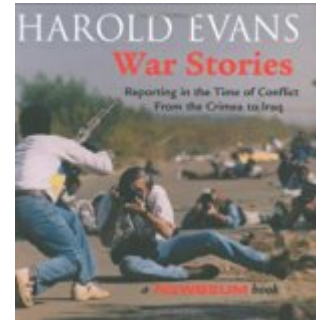


Harold Evans. *War Stories: Reporting in the Time of Conflict from the Crimea to Iraq.* Boston and London: Bunker Hill Publishing, 2003. 96 pp. \$12.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-59373-005-5.



Reviewed by John Harris

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Shortly after the January 2005 election in Iraq, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman was discussing media coverage of the war on CNN's "Reliable Sources." Host Howard Kurtz asked Friedman if journalists were so focused on what was going wrong that they missed the progress that was being made. Friedman responded that he wouldn't be too hard on the media; under the circumstances, mistakes are bound to occur. Journalists run the risk of being shot, deliberately or accidentally, and they could be kidnapped or beheaded. "The conditions are not difficult," he said. "They are impossible." Every journalist who has worked in Iraq, he added, deserves the Medal of Freedom.

Statistics compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists support Friedman's points. Twenty-two journalists died in Iraq in 2005, bringing the total to 60 deaths between March 2003 and the end of last year. That makes Iraq the deadliest conflict in the twenty-four years the committee has kept track of media deaths.

All of this brings to mind two questions: How do journalists manage to do their jobs in such a

bloody and dangerous conflict? And, why are they willing to put themselves in harm's way in the first place?

Harold Evans's *War Stories* doesn't answer those questions definitively, but it does provide insight into the hows and whys of covering the war in Iraq, as well as past wars. The book is based on an exhibit of the same name at the Newseum, an interactive museum of news formerly in Arlington, Virginia, and now moving to Washington, D.C. Evans, a renowned English journalist, served as curator of the exhibit, and the book is at its best when he offers his opinions and relates his experiences. He worked as editor of the *Sunday Times* of London from 1967 to 1982; wrote *Pictures on a Page* (1978), an important text on picture editing; and authored the acclaimed *The American Century* (1998).

So why *do* journalists put themselves in harm's way? Why endure deprivation and depravity for the sake of a story? While Evans was working at the *Times*, the newspaper had reporters and photographers risking their lives from Vietnam to Northern Ireland, from Lebanon

to Uganda, and from El Salvador to Ethiopia. It wasn't a problem finding journalists willing to go to those hot spots, Evans says; instead, the difficulty was choosing among those who wanted to go and then trying to restrain those who were chosen from taking too many chances.

Evans says the reasons for such enthusiasm are many and complex, but the allure can be explained simply: "[W]ar is the biggest story of all" (p. 7). Or, as Nora Ephron argued, covering war is a classic male endeavor (think Hemingway), offering the exhilaration of physical danger without taint of disapproval from an unsympathetic public. "The awful truth is that for correspondents war is not hell," she said. "It is fun" (p. 38). The Vietnam War photographer Tim Page was asked to write a book that would take the glamour out of war reporting. "How the hell can you do that?" he asked. "You can't take the glamour out of a tank burning or a helicopter blowing up. It's like trying to take the glamour out of sex. War is good for you" (pp. 38-39).

Evans doesn't paint an overly romantic picture of covering war. He details the suffering and deaths of numerous journalists, including Leonardo Henricksen, a television cameraman covering a coup attempt in Chile. Henricksen aimed his camera at a soldier who simultaneously pointed his gun at Henricksen and shot him dead. As Evans notes, press credentials offer little protection in today's wars (if they ever really did). "[Correspondents] calibrate the risks," Evans writes, "trying to recognize the moment when the story becomes secondary to survival" (p. 42).

War Stories is a small book, both in terms of pages (less than one hundred) and physical size (it's about six inches by six inches). It isn't as comprehensive as Phillip Knightley's *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, first published in 1975. It provides some examples of battlefield reporting, but not to the extent of the Library of America's *Reporting Vietnam* (1998) and *Report-*

ing World War II (1995). And it's not a picture book, in the manner of *The Eye of War: Words and Photographs from the Front Line* (2003) with text by Knightley.

Instead, it combines history, accounts by correspondents such as Ernie Pyle, reflections by the likes of reporter Peter Arnett and photojournalist James Nachtwey, and photographs, many of which show journalists at work. In sum, it's more entertaining than scholarly.

Evans tells of a war correspondent who waded ashore during a battle and later described the scene thus: "Hands full and weighed down by the heavy burden of their arms, the soldiers had to simultaneously jump from the ships, get a footing in chest-deep waves, and fight the enemy, who, standing unencumbered on dry and familiar ground, could so easily kill and maim the invaders" (p. 17). The correspondent tells how the soldiers, unaccustomed to fighting under such conditions, failed to show the same "alacrity and enthusiasm" they did on dry land. Omaha Beach, right? No, it's an account of the invasion of Britain in 55 B.C., and written by the commanding general of the invasion, Julius Caesar.

Initially, Evans explains, war correspondents were soldiers involved in the campaign. That changed in the Crimea with the advent of the first professional independent war correspondent, William Howard Russell, who wrote his observations in letters to the *Times* of London. Russell asked the editor whether he should report scandal as well as battles, and the editor told him to write everything. Thus were born timely accounts of war and the perpetual tension that exists between war correspondents and government and military authorities.

In the subsequent 150 years, the scale of war has grown, requiring better-trained observers. Technology has shrunk the world and speeded up communication, fostering competition. And an increasingly literate population has learned about war from an omnipresent media, forcing govern-

ments to justify their reasons for engaging in hostilities. The evolution of all this resulted in live, up-to-the-second coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. "It was surreal to be a viewer-- opining in comfort and flinching from the bullets," Evans writes (p. 12).

Such coverage can create ethical dilemmas. Brent Sadler of CNN rolled into Tikrit ahead of U.S. troops during the first days of the invasion, protected by armed security. As television viewers watched live, a car pulled alongside Sadler's and opened fire. Sadler's security guards fired back. Did this compromise the journalist's status? The *Wall Street Journal* thought so. "[O]ur concern is that it also sent a message that all journalists are potential combatants and that they all travel with security who are armed.... Just as fire from ambulances would endanger all medics, a repeat of Mr. Sadler's armed rush to Tikrit would put all journalists in harm's way" (p. 15). Evans acknowledges the force of this argument but points out that many combatants know little or nothing of the Geneva conventions, and wouldn't care anyway. (Keep in mind he wrote this in 2002 at a time when the shocking murder by terrorists of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl was still fresh in the public's mind.)

Evans addresses other ethical issues, elaborating in the manner of a tour guide:

On editorializing: "Wrapping everything in a flag is too easy. It is cheap marketing and it is bound to raise the suspicion that unpalatable truths will be glossed over. The value of being able to believe what we hear, what we read, is incalculable" (p. 14).

On publishing images of dead bodies: During the first Gulf War the Associated Press pulled Kenneth Jarecke's photograph of the charred head and shoulders of an Iraqi soldier emerging from a vehicle (the photo isn't included in this book). The *London Observer* ran the photo and was swamped with calls of protest. "Admittedly it was shocking," Evans writes, "but it was still a photo-

graph that respected the human identity of the dead man. It was not dismembered flesh. As a newspaper editor I have rejected photographs of carnage that are obscene because they do not improve our understanding of the event. They amount to a macabre voyeurism" (p. 34).

On how much information to report: The British Ministry of Defense declared during the 1982 Falklands engagement, "The essence of successful warfare is secrecy; the essence of successful journalism is publicity" (p. 59). Such thinking can lead to the public perception that correspondents will go to any length to reveal details of war, that they will report troop movements and military strategies even if it costs their countrymen or their allies a setback. Evans argues against such notions: "The history of war reporting suggests that correspondents and editors do not willfully betray operational secrets" (p. 63). It does happen, of course, as Geraldo Rivera proved when he knelt down for his Fox News audience and drew a map in the sand to show the location of the troops with whom he was embedded. But Rivera is the journalistic exception (in more ways than one, one might argue, but that's a subject for another essay).

A more serious problem is censorship on the part of the military, and not always with the purpose of keeping battle plans from the enemy. Military leaders and politicians conceal information, Evans argues, to protect their careers. "The public has no 'need to know' the date and route of a troopship sailing, but it does need to know when scandals are being covered up," he argues (p. 66). He recounts how in World War I censorship was used to conceal that American soldiers suffered from shortages of equipment and that those returning from the front in the winter of 1917-1918 were dying from pneumonia for lack of dry clothing and adequate shelter. During the Vietnam War, South Vietnamese police destroyed television cameras and beat reporters for revealing corruption. In the current war, a contract worker lost

her job after photos she took of flag-draped coffins showed up on the front page of the *Seattle Times*.

Evans expects relations between journalists and authorities to worsen. In the past, correspondents often had served in the military and understood how it worked. That no longer is the case. Another factor that will exacerbate the tension is the limited nature of warfare. "[These] wars are so short there is not time for mutual trust to develop," Evans writes (p. 64). Ernie Pyle followed the fighting from Europe to Asia because, he wrote to his wife, "I've been part of the misery and tragedy of it for so long ... I feel if I left it, it would be like a soldier deserting" (p. 64).

Correspondents are up against more than bullets and official dissembling and obfuscation in seeing that their work is printed or aired. They also must deal with the agendas of publishers, the preconceptions of editors, and professional jealousy on the part of their colleagues. Evans recounts how Sigrid Schultz of the *Chicago Tribune* uncovered in 1940 that Hitler was murdering Jews and building concentration camps. *Tribune* publisher Robert McCormick, a staunch isolationist, believed the story could propel the United States into the war and killed it. During the Vietnam War, *Time* magazine rewrote the copy of correspondent Charles Mohr to paint a rosier picture of the war and Mohr quit. The magazine's managing editor, Otto Fuerbringer, attacked the Saigon press corps, accusing it of downplaying victories and glorifying defeats. "Fuerbringer was writing propaganda, not journalism," Evans states (p. 81).

It remains to be seen what lessons will be learned from the current war in Iraq and the courageous journalists covering it. Will the dangers and difficulties imposed on correspondents by this war be anomalies or the beginning of new phase in the history of war correspondence? History shows that the methods and the challenges of covering war continually change. But, as Evans

points out, those who do the work remain consistent in their dedication to truth and to humanity.

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