

**Review of Peter Arnett, Live From the Battlefield.  
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During the Gulf war, CNN correspondent Peter Arnett distinguished himself with its courageous reporting in Iraq while under fire by the U.S.-led coalition which dropped more bombs on Iraq than were unleashed in World War II. Reporting live from Baghdad throughout the war, Arnett provided vivid daily accounts of life in Iraq during one of the most sustained air attacks in history. From his live telephone reporting of the early hours of the U.S. attack on Iraq in January 1991 through his live satellite reports of the effects of the daily bombing of Iraq, Arnett distinguished himself through his attempts to cut through the lies and disinformation of both sides and to provide accurate reporting on the effects of the U.S.-led coalition assault against Iraq.

Although he was attacked by rightwing critics, Arnett's Iraq reporting won him international acclaim, even renown, with people throughout the world who watched his daily CNN reporting. As his biography Live From the Battlefield attests, Arnett was no stranger to controversy. Indeed, his Pulitzer prize-winning reporting from Vietnam in the 1960s was even more controversial, eliciting attacks from President Lyndon Johnson and military officials who regularly called him a "communist" and assaulted his integrity.

Arnett's biography is as lively as his life and is thoroughly engaging from start to finish. Arnett emerges as a dedicated reporter, committed to reporting what he personally observes, no matter what the consequences. His "rule" is that he would "write only what I saw myself." He also confesses to being especially enamored of war reporting, of being on the scene in the world's hot spots, and providing first-hand accounts, despite risks to his life. Although he sometimes pictures himself as vaguely progressive, he admits that during much of his life he tended to agree with the broad lines of U.S. policy and eventually became an American citizen.

Born in New Zealand in 1934, Arnett opens with an account of his family, childhood, and native land, a faraway country that ultimately bored him and that he left to seek his fortune elsewhere. Thrown out of boarding school despite excellent grades for illicit pursuit of a young woman, Arnett got a job with the local newspaper as a teenager, and in the next few years succeeded in finding reporting jobs with Wellington, New Zealand, and then Sydney, Australia, newspapers. At the age of 24, he set sail with a woman friend to Asia and landed a job with a Bangkok newspaper some months later. The enterprising and lucky young man then headed up a weekly paper in Laos and after a coup there shut down his enterprise in 1961, he received an Associated Press job in Indonesia, reporting on this large and complex country's mercurial politics, until he was thrown out in 1962 for being overly critical of the Indonesian government.

The early episodes are illuminating for the light they shed on how journalism is comprised by its imbrications in economic and political interests. Arnett straight-forwardly tells how he was manipulated by U.S. embassy and CIA personnel, how his work tended to reflect the views of dominant economic and political elites, and how his journalism was accordingly compromised. He also reveals that when journalists go against the dominant interests they risk losing their job or expulsion -- especially if they are living in a foreign country, as Arnett himself experienced.

On June 26, 1962, the 28 year old AP reporter arrived in Vietnam and his rendez-vous with destiny. Arnett reported on most of the major stories of the accelerating U.S. intervention during the following years and after a brief respite from the story, returned in 1975 to witness the fall of Saigon and to stay on to report on the early days of the communist take-over. His fearless pursuit of truth won him the wrath of the U.S. and South Vietnamese authorities, as well as many prizes and respect for his reporting. Arnett was everywhere it seemed, bravely risking his life to tell the story of what was happening in Nam.

In retrospect, Arnett's glory days were his brilliant and courageous Vietnam reporting and this episode, which takes up over half of the book, is probably the most gripping and engaging part of his biography. Arnett sheds much light on the conflicts between government and press and provides critical insights into the follies of U.S. policy and the foibles of many of the chief players in the Vietnam (mis)adventure who he covered in his daily routine as reporter. Arnett is a great story-teller and his Vietnam stories are continually interesting and illuminating. His account of the war is one of the more compelling overall narratives of U.S. intervention in Vietnam, as he was there from beginning to end, thus this part of his book should interest historians as well as a general audience.

Arnett writes that: "After the Cambodian invasion, I felt my detachment toward Vietnam cracking as I watched the Administration expand the war.... I feared that I would no longer be an unbiased observer, that my reporter's values were swamped in the bloodshed." And so Arnett returned to the US

for a few years, covering the aftermath of the 1960s and various stories as a special correspondent. But he returned to Saigon where he observed first-hand its fall in 1975. Refusing to leave, Arnett was able to observe the communist take-over of Vietnam, learning that one of his part-time photographers had been a Vietcong agent for 10 years! Arnett continued to file stories from communist Saigon, presaging his activities in Baghdad during the Gulf war.

Arnett also reveals how war reporting is a thoroughly macho enterprise, in which the ambitious reporters and photographers risk their lives to get their stories and pictures. Arnett notes the contempt toward women of the elite war reporters in Vietnam and his revealing accounts of the use of prostitutes by war correspondents and soldiers alike makes clear the sexist attitudes that informed both U.S. journalism of the period and of course U.S. military intervention.

The succeeding sections of the book dealing with his war reporting after Vietnam and joining of CNN in 1981, switching from the press to television, are somewhat disappointing by comparison. Although Arnett provides some insight into the early days of CNN, he fails to provide any critical insight into the politics of the Reagan years and provided few scoops or memorable stories during this period. Although he served as CNN correspondent in Moscow during the exciting Gorbachev years, he provides a meager account of this period. Arnett is also soft on Bush's policies, with no real insight or critical reporting on the Panama invasion and he offers a surprisingly pedestrian account of the Gulf war. There is almost no analysis of the causes and effects of the war and little insight beyond what Arnett observed in his reporting in Baghdad, with no sustained critique of the propaganda and disinformation served up regularly by the Bush administration and Pentagon.

Nonetheless, those who regularly watched Arnett's daily reporting will perhaps find his account of life in Baghdad during the war interesting and engaging. There is no doubt of Arnett's

courage and his drive to report what he observed as the facts of the war. Arnett is probably the greatest living war reporter and a very good story-teller and writer. But he lacks insight into the forces that drove Reagan and Bush to their militarist policies of the recent past and limits his critique of the military to the obvious lies, disinformation, and crimes of the Vietnam period. To understand the events and historical trends of the present moment will thus require more insight than CNN's most prestigious correspondent is able to offer.