

»» Detached, det

During this interview with Peter Arnett about war reporting he was sitting in his room at the Continental Hotel in downtown Saigon making a television documentary about his journalism career. »I could think of no better location than Vietnam to reflect on war reporting as a profession«, he said, »because this is where a generation of French and then American reporters covered wars launched by their countries after World War Two. The Vietnam experience has colored world journalism ever since.«

? *How does it feel not to have covered the war in Kosovo?*

Arnett: War reporting is my livelihood. To miss covering a war for me is like a soccer player missing his team's championship match. In short, I was disappointed not to be with my colleagues risking their lives to get the story in Belgrade and at the Kosovo border. But there was a good reason as to why I was not covering that story. I was having a disagreement with my employer, CNN, over the course of my career. That disagreement resulted in my leaving CNN after 18 years and beginning a new career as chief international correspondent for *foreigntv.com*, the first international broadcaster on the internet.

? *Are you bitter about not going to Kosovo?*

Arnett: No, I am not bitter with CNN for not sending me. War coverage is not a right but a privilege. CNN, like every other news organization, makes its assignment decisions based on its own special needs. I am also not greedy. I have covered 18 wars in my journalism career, including a decade in Vietnam and in conflicts in Africa, central America, the Middle East and central Asia. I have had opportunities given few journalists to cover dramatic events, like the fall of Saigon to the communists in 1975, and the bombing of Baghdad in 1991. So I missed covering Kosovo. But because

I remain in excellent health and retain my enthusiasm for reporting, I have no doubt whatsoever that I will be covering the next war.

? *What feelings do war reporters have in conflicts?*

Arnett: The best war reporters are disciplined observers, maintaining their detachment and refusing to become emotionally involved in the stories they are covering. We are all too human, however, and at times we get angry at some things we see, and other times saddened. The best reporters, however, keep the anger and emotion out of their copy. The more dispassionate a reporter can be in his stories, the better for the reader and viewer. Only a detached, detailed, accurate presentation of information in a war is acceptable.

? *Why did you become a war reporter?*

Arnett: I became a war reporter by chance in Vietnam in 1962. I was sent to Saigon on temporary assignment for the Associated Press wire service and stayed on because the story kept getting bigger and bigger. I found that the inherent drama of conflict made for dramatic news stories. As the Vietnam war grew larger so did the stories become more important. To get the best stories required going out in the battlefield with the soldiers. I learned to be a war reporter on the job.

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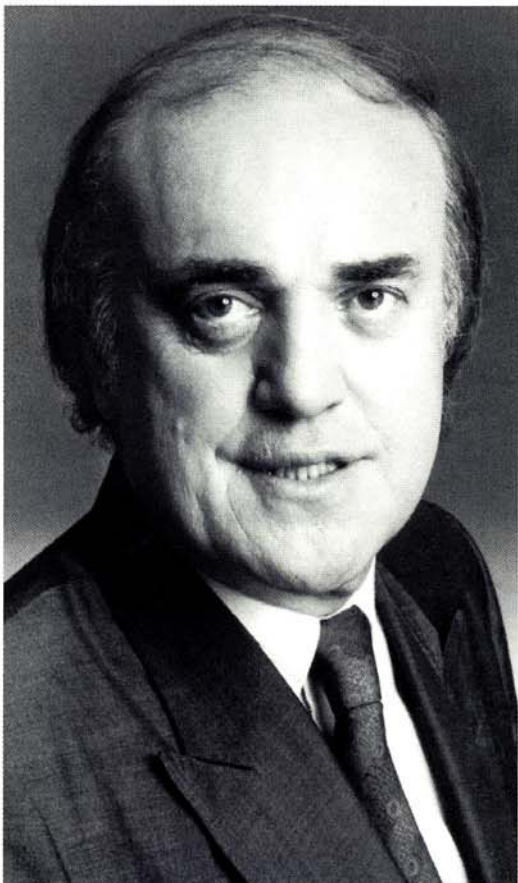


Foto: CNN

PETER ARNETT,

1934 in Neuseeland geboren, war AP-Korrespondent in Bangkok und ging 1962 nach Vietnam, wo er bis 1975, über das Ende des Krieges hinaus, blieb. Für seine Live-Berichterstattung aus Vietnam erhielt er den Pulitzer-Preis. 1981 stieg er bei CNN ein. Während des Golfkriegs (1991) berichtete er für CNN live aus Bagdad und machte den Nachrichtenanal (siehe auch S. 52) weltweit bekannt. Am 19. April 1999 schied Arnett bei CNN aus. Im Kosovo-Krieg war er, zu seinem Leidwesen, nicht dabei. Stattdessen arbeitet er seit kurzem für den Internetdienst foreigntv.com.

? *Is it so fascinating to be a war reporter?*

Arnett: No other reporting job is as dramatic as that of a war reporter. War dramatically punctuates the history of mankind. War reporters write the first rough draft of history with their accounts from the battlefield. Wars also make the most extreme demands on reporters, sometimes it demands their lives. In Vietnam, 63 reporters were killed in that war. Scores of reporters have died since on the battlefield. So why do reporters go to wars if they are so dangerous? At one level it is a test of courage ... the closer to the action, the more dramatic the story. The human drama in the midst of a war is unique to conflict.

? *What does a reporter look for in a war. Is he looking for truth, or is he exploiting war's cruelties?*

Arnett: War by its very nature is cruel because the innocent are always made victims. Certainly, reporters cover war's cruelty, and its casual brutality, because that is the purpose of war fought by democracies – to achieve where political negotiation failed, and that means applying the ultimate of pressures, the use of destructive weapons. Covering cruelty is also a reminder to those launching wars that the cost is high and should be justified politically. Reporters also cover the human interest stories, accounts of the innocent victims. From such coverage comes a sense of the truth in war. Cruelty in war is truth, so are the stories of innocent victims.

? *What are the special qualities required by a war reporter?*

Arnett: A war reporter has to believe that his role is essential in a democracy, that the public has a

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right to know what is happening in a war theater. By having this belief, a reporter can meet the other requirements of bravery and detachment that are also essential to cover wars. Reporters have been willing to cover wars since newspapers became popular in the mid-19th century. Their example should be an inspiration to those aspiring to be war reporters today.

? *Can you learn to be a war reporter?*

Arnett: Of course you can learn to be a war reporter. Every generation has reporters who cover conflicts. One way to learn is from the example of reporters of earlier wars, studying their example in college classes. But many young reporters just fall into the job as I did in my early twenties when I was sent to Vietnam. Special training is also valuable because the whole point of war reporting is staying alive and getting the story back to your news organization.

In Vietnam we had instruction manuals written by our bureau chief and these proved valuable in field coverage. Today, special survival training is available in Britain for battlefield activities such as first aid and weapons recognition.

? *How do you find the truth in the battlefield?*

Arnett: You find the truth by getting as close to the action as possible, whether it is under the bombs in Belgrade, or traveling with the rebels in Kosovo. Your eyewitness accounts are invaluable because it is difficult to conceal the truth in the chaos of military action. A war reporter's eyewitness accounts from the enemy side, such as in Kosovo, can help

Peter – allein in Bagdad: Im Golfkrieg harnte Arnett als einziger westlicher Journalist in Iraks Hauptstadt aus.

to understand the whole picture. The ultimate truth comes from a combination of information from all sources. It is my experience that deliberately fabricated information is obvious in war and can be easily discounted.

? *How different is Kosovo to the Gulf War and Vietnam?*

Arnett: Vietnam was a major conflict fought in the context of the Cold War to stop the spread of communism. It lasted a decade. Press coverage on the American side was unrestricted. The communist side allowed no uncensored reporting. The Gulf War was fought to drive Saddam Hussein from Kuwait and was supported by the international community because of the threat to the world's oil supplies. It was intended to be a brief, decisive struggle using overwhelming force. Press coverage on the coalition side was restricted. The Iraqi side censored reporters but allowed live coverage from Baghdad. The Kosovo War was based on humanitarian considerations. It was a limited war restricted to Nato air strikes. News coverage was limited by both sides, with the exception of the refugee story which was fully covered.

? *Did the Kosovo news coverage stir up the conflict?*

Arnett: The early coverage of the Kosovo War – particularly the graphic reports of uprooting and atrocities from the thousands of refugees forced into Macedonia and Albania – helped buttress

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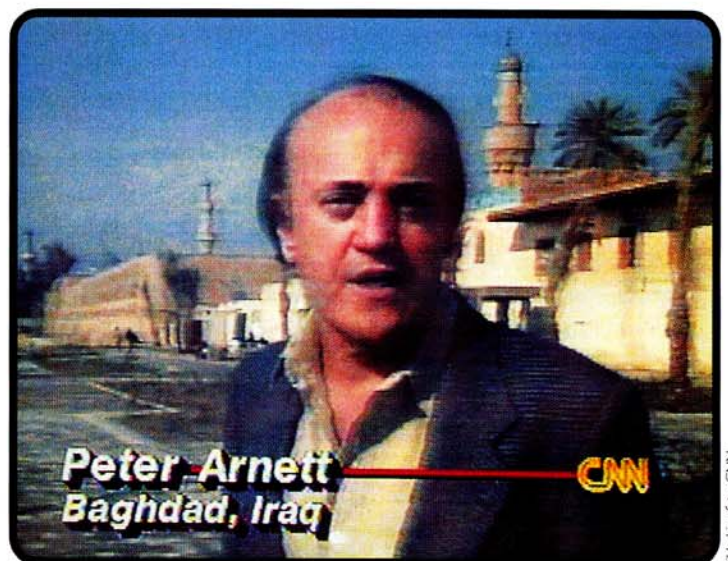




Foto aus: »Unter Einsatz des Lebens: Knurr, München

Augenzeuge: Im März 1964 sah Arnett als AP-Korrespondent, wie südvietnamesische Milizen einen mutmaßlichen Vietcong-Kämpfer auf brutale Weise verhörten.

allowing reporters at the scene of action. The media has no choice but to protest their treatment, and to go along with it, to at least get a sense of what is happening. The last war that was fully covered on the American side was Vietnam. Severe restrictions were imposed by the Americans in the Grenada invasion, in the Panama invasion and in the Gulf War. Any Nato ground action in Kosovo would have seen similar press restrictions. It is important that news organisations keep reminding their readers and viewers that access to information is limited.

? *What was in your opinion the information strategy of both sides?*

Arnett: Nato had a two-fold strategy. One part was to prove that military action was absolutely necessary against the Serbs. The other, to show that the bombing campaign was being successful. The Serb's strategy first was to discredit Nato's strategy by blaming the bombing for the refugee exodus from Kosovo. Another part of the strategy was to highlight civilian casualties to win world sympathy.

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? *If there had been a free flow of information would the war have ended sooner?*

Arnett: Yes. Accurate coverage from Kosovo would have forced the Belgrade government to acknowledge its ethnic cleansing campaign.

? *Can you imagine not being a war reporter?*

Arnett: No. I believe that my skills and experience are still of value in a world where the persistence of small, bloody conflicts is an alarming phenomenon. That is why I intend to continue covering wars, becoming, I hope, the first internet war correspondent through my job on foreigntv.com.

Die Fragen stellte
Torsten Engelbrecht.

Nato's decision to begin the bombing campaign. Americans in particular were shocked by the refugee plight, and supported President Clinton's war aims. The whole basis of Nato's campaign was a humanitarian one. Later coverage from Belgrade's side gave graphic accounts of civilian casualties, the result of mistaken bombing by Nato. Such accounts during the Gulf War persuaded American military planners to limit the bombing of Baghdad. But because of the continuing plight of the refugees in Kosovo, Nato was able to argue that the bombing of Belgrade and elsewhere should continue despite civilian casualties. World opinion continued to support such a policy.

? *Did the media fail in Kosovo because of information restrictions?*

Arnett: The media did not fail in Kosovo by today's standard of coverage. It is an unfortunate fact of life that all governments now control information in times of conflict, and generally refuse to allow reporters access to what is going on. In the major wars of this century, governments at least allowed reporters to witness events under censorship rules. But today censorship is exercised by not