
PRESS

Letter from New York

On Not Landing in Grenada

By Sabina Lietzmann



WHEN the American troops (reinforced by some Caribbean elements) landed on the shores of Grenada last year, there were no American reporters present. But on the television screens, through long-range cameras, the US audience could still see how the various boats, ships, and floats which the eager journalist corps had hired to get in to take a closer look were resolutely held back from reaching land. After a few days the restrictions were relaxed, and of course the first items of news were expressions of outrage and indignation. It could be that the sovereignty of the little "Paradise Island" had been violated, but this was nothing compared to the violation in the first instance (so reacted the Fourth Estate) of the hallowed US Constitution and its guarantees for the freedom of the press.

"The American government is doing whatever it wants to", reported John Chancellor, the leading TV commentator, "without any representative of the American public watching what it is doing. . . ." The noisy protests were followed by a loud storm of protest from the public—but in a most contrary way. Newspaper and magazine offices and television studios were flooded with letters and telegrams; and the overwhelming majority of the messages were in favour of the American government and "what it was doing" in its military Caribbean effort. NBC tallied some 500 messages, and they supported by some 5-to-1 the exclusion of the NBC contingent. Its competitor, ABC, was no better off: some 99% reacted similarly. Ditto the 225 letters which arrived at the *Time* offices (proportion: 8-to-1) and the thousands into some dozen other publications across the country.

What was the emotional outburst? "*Schadenfreude*"? Why the glee as that sometime American hero, the foreign correspondent, fearless and forthright, finally slipped on a banana

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skin? How could it be that the people, so traditionally protective about its constitutional rights, could turn its back on that heroic little press corps so devoted to the popular interest and the "free flow of news"?

THE SURPRISING BREAK in "solidarity" was doubtless a long time in coming. The incident of Grenada only provided an opening for pent-up feelings about the contemporary role of the American press; yet nobody was more surprised at the news than the newspaper world. The wave of ill-will that reached them found the editors and journalists completely unprepared for unpopularity.

Perhaps they were not reading the little items that were published from time to time in their own papers—public-opinion-poll results which suggested that the ratings for "respect" were sinking as far as journalists were concerned. The 1970s may have been, in their eyes, the heights of "investigative" glory; but the darker hints were being registered and should have merited attention. Annual reports indicated a falling curve in the polls of "institutions which commanded 'great confidence' " on the part of the US citizenry. In 1976 it was some 30% who found the press worthy of respect and confidence. In five years this had sunk to 13.7%; and television, especially, sank into next-to-last place with 12.7% (only slightly higher than that of Congress, the house of the people's official representatives which enjoys such widespread special contempt).

One could make distinctions within the press world itself, but small matter: for the millions who follow the affairs of the world, if they follow its gyrations at all, the TV screen is the "window"; and it is the TV reporter, his cameraman at his side, who is the incorporation of the gatherer and interpreter of the Big News. These, it would appear, are the increasingly untrustworthy ones. As one TV reporter put it himself (David Browde, in *Time*, 2 January):

"Yes, I am rude, accusatory, cynical. . . . Some say I am arrogant and self-righteous. I am glad. That is what makes good reporters."

But that kind of "good reporter" has been seen to be invading privacy, harassing newsworthy persons of every kind and in all walks of life, putting microphones into the faces of grieving widows, getting a fast quote on the pain of some battered victim, insisting on a full face-to-face interview even when tears muffled every sound. When a harassed Richard V. Allen was "in the news", the cameras and the hand-held microphones were at-the-ready on his front lawn (until he and his family escaped following his resignation from the President's National Security Council). When the Teheran hostages were freed, a helicopter of one local TV station circled continuously over the family house of one who had just been liberated until, finally, the "human interest" story was caught: the wife emerged through the door into the searchlight at two in the morning, wearing her dressing-gown. As for the families of the US Marines in Beirut, waiting anxiously for a line of news after the gigantic terrorist explosion, TV again laid siege to the front doors; they finally got their Picture, the Big News, the Truth, as two representatives of the Marine Corps, in full dress uniform,

brought the terrible confirmation to anguished parents; and the mikes were sensitive enough to catch the emotional cries through the open windows.

THE DEFENCE OF ALL THIS is as well known as it is, for the general public, unconvincing. Television needs dramatic human-interest pictures; action and emotion are its daily bread. And, quite clearly, the rough-and-tumble intrepidity with which it follows its self-appointed tasks has rubbed off on the whole of the Fourth Estate and brought journalists (and journalism) into discredit. Freedom of the press now means the right to obtain by all means, fair and foul, the "hot news" and the "sensational story", as if getting the scoop had become the price of vigilant liberty.

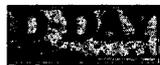
But the discontent with the press goes far beyond the misdemeanours of professional behaviour. The Grenada incident also revealed a widening gap in "values" which divided popular feeling from élite concerns. An article in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* reported this sentiment:

"Journalists are so out of touch with majority values, such as honor, duty and service to country, that they are alienated from the very society that they purport to serve. . . ."

This, obviously, was what those letters and telegrams to the newspapers, magazines and TV stations were all about: an alienation between press and public. The general tenor of the comments—apart that is from the occupational self-interest of writers, editors and publishers (not to mention the "talking

Scoop: "Eisenhower's Folly"

How would the invasion of Europe be received in America if it were being carried out this week instead of 40 years ago and judged the way we judge such things today? I offer as a distinct possibility the following fictitious news story, which might appear under the headline: "General With Roving Eye Loses 10,000 Troops in France."



SOMEWHERE IN Southern England, June 7—Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, rumoured to be romantically involved with his "driver", Kay Summersby, ordered an invasion of Normandy in the early morning hours yesterday.

American casualties, many as a consequence of drownings in landing craft in the storm-tossed Normandy surf—about which the general had been warned—are thought to be among the highest for any single day of military operations since the Civil War. Reliable sources in Eisenhower headquarters have revealed that in the middle of the night he disregarded pessimistic weather predictions and overrode the objections of several subordinates in ordering the June 6 attack, which included an assault by Army Rangers on a German gun position atop a 100-foot sheer cliff, an operation described by a staff aide as "a crazy gamble that was bound to get somebody badly hurt."

Eisenhower has drafted a "contingency" message, not yet officially issued, which takes full personal responsibility for the invasion's failure. A copy of the message was obtained by this reporter; it indicates that Eisenhower may well believe that a débâcle in Normandy is imminent. The possible role of Miss Summersby in the general's late-night invasion decision is not known.

Miss Summersby could not be reached for comment.

IN ANOTHER MAJOR Washington development, first-term Republican Congressman Buford Grundge, prominent critic of American involvement in the arms race,

R. JAMES WOOLSEY, a former US Under-secretary of the Navy, is a Washington attorney. His satire on the press originally appeared in *The Washington Post*.

which led to the current hostilities, and of the unpopular military aid program to a British government involved in such controversial human rights practices as massive wartime relocation of children, has called for a major investigation of Army procurement.

Grundge demanded that the investigation concentrate first on procedures used by the Army in obtaining the toy "crickets" purchased for use by American paratroopers to signal to and identify one another during the nighttime parachute drop on June 6 at Ste.-Mere-Eglise. "Gen. Maxwell Taylor's sole-source procurement of these toys is outrageous", Grundge charged in a crowded press conference yesterday, as he called on the paratroop commander to return from France to testify. The wealthy former toy manufacturer added, "I may not know much, but I know toys, and this is toying with the American taxpayer."

AT THE PRESTIGIOUS Institute for Analytical Analysis in Washington, Berlinologist Carson Whiffle strongly supported Grundge. "I", he said, "am deeply concerned. Any further armored warfare in Normandy will undermine the arguments of the dovish faction in Berlin. This wasn't Operation Overlord, it was Operation Overkill—we would have had fewer than 10,000 casualties if we had just conducted this operation sensibly and moderately with fewer than 10,000 troops instead of the 133,000 that were used."

Whiffle said his institute expected quick and positive action on its grant application, submitted today to the Studebaker Foundation, for funds to film interviews with the families of every American casualty of the invasion, to be shown nationwide in movie theatres this autumn.

IN NEW YORK, in another development, ACLU President Garrison O. Pugh charged

today that there was massive deception involved in the planning for the Normandy operation. "Military duplicity and secrecy led the American people to believe that this invasion would probably occur at Pas de Calais, not Normandy", said Pugh. "There are significant constitutional issues here."

Meanwhile, at Eisenhower's headquarters here, the weight of informal staff opinion leans heavily to the view that dissension among the general's subordinates will prevent a breakout from the tiny Normandy beachhead. "A prima donna like Patton will never work for a pedestrian general like Bradley", said one knowledgeable officer who preferred not to be identified. Further, major disagreements were reported between Allied commanders. Gen. de Gaulle is reportedly furious at not being permitted to lead the invasion. Relations between Gen. Montgomery and all other commanders continue to sour, further endangering joint operations. "I've never seen anything like it", said one observer.

THE CAREFUL WORDING of yesterday's White House press release on the invasion suggests that President Roosevelt and Gen. Marshall (who, it is widely known, wanted to lead the invasion himself) are ready to cut Eisenhower adrift if the invasion fails. And tonight that likelihood looms large among the drowned and machine-gunned bodies on the oddly named "Omaha" Beach.

As he embarked on his way to Normandy, one private first class, Willie Brown, of Biloxi, Miss., gave a surprising answer to this reporter's query about the reason for what is beginning to be called "Eisenhower's Folly."

"We're here to free Europe", Brown claimed.

But it definitely remains to be seen whether this sort of naiveté in the ranks and Eisenhower's wee-hours, foul-weather, and quite possibly bleary-eyed gamble will prevail against the raging elements and the Panzers of the Third Reich.

R. James Woolsey

heads" on the evening TV-news programmes)—has been generally taken to be that the press in Grenada would not have been "objective" and strictly factual; that it would have "criticised", as is their wont, "our efforts" and, in effect, subverted them, as was the case in Viet Nam. This widespread *ressentiment* was put in its sharpest (and since, most quoted) form in a statement to *The New York Times* (2 December 1983) in reply to an article asking why reporters are excluded from war reporting now, when they were everywhere on all fronts in the Second World War:

"... At that time, all our reporters were on *our* side."

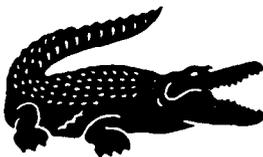
The distinction has become something of a nightmare for American journalists today, who have never before had to cope with a gap between "Us" and "Them", our cause and their cause. It was picked up in Washington at a press conference of Secretary of State George Shultz, who remarked that World War II reporters "went along because, on the whole, they were on our side" whereas these days, it seems, "the reporters are always against us. . . ." And President Reagan himself at a press conference (20 December 1983) took the theme further:

"... I do believe, Sam, that sometimes, beginning with the Korean conflict and certainly in the Viet Nam conflict, there was more criticising of our own forces and what we were trying to do, to the point that it didn't seem that there was much criticism levelled on the enemy."

The attitude was made even more pointed in the remarks of General Maxwell Taylor who indicated that, looking back on the Viet Nam War, it would have been desirable to have rather more restrictions on the movements of the press in the US war zones. . . .

TO BE SURE, THERE HAS always been a species of class struggle going on between government and press in a democratic society: the embattled representatives of the Third and Fourth Estates have had their differences in the past. But the present, dominated as it is by the TV media, has aggravated, exacerbated, even transformed the situation, for the press (as it did, for the historic first time,

Alleged Joke



"You all are alligators," he said, "because you make the allegations."

Alligator stickers now decorate press cards, television cameras and journalists' briefcases. At a recent campaign stop a Secret Service agent was heard giving directions. "Agents this door, alligators that door."

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE (Paris)

Washington, D.C.

THE REV JESSE L. JACKSON has come up with a new name for the 30 reporters, camera crew members and producers who are following his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination: "alligators."

out of South-east Asia) brings wars into "the living-room" of "the people back home." Is this reality or is it entertainment? The TV medium is not quite sure of the distinction; and the viewers have not and could not have been, altogether happy, deep within themselves, watching the serial out of Saigon as if it were *Kojak* or *Dallas*.

In the end there was some kind of "transvaluation of values", a return if you will to simple old-fashioned reactions and "traditional values." What about that notoriously thrilling shot, splashed on everybody's morning paper, of the death of a Vietnamese, executed on the street with a bullet through his temple? What about the drama of that GI putting his cigarette-lighter to a bamboo hut and setting a village aflame? Shameful questions have come to the fore, and even journalists have been embarrassingly self-critical. Did the TV camera-team "set up" the scene of the flaming village by putting the GI up to the newsworthy incendiarism? And did that other brave and upright photographer try to intervene, and possibly hinder the Saigon police chief's brutal execution of a Vietcong prisoner? In both cases serious and disturbing issues have been raised—namely, the extent to which the press, ostensibly playing the role of troubled witnesses to a crime, "participated" in one way or another—sometimes as "accessory", sometimes as negligent bystander—in the outrage.¹

But the literature of self-critical re-evaluation has been growing. "In the beginning", observed Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard, "television covered news; soon news was produced for television. . . ." No longer, complains Michael O'Neill (former editor of the *New York Daily News*) does the press merely cover the news. "Thanks mainly to television, we are often partners now in the creation of news—unwilling and unwitting partners, perhaps, but partners none the less in producing what Daniel Boorstin has deplored as pseudo-events, pseudo-protests, pseudo-crises and controversies. . . ." Ambassador Max M. Kampelman claims that "the relatively unrestrained power of the media may well represent an even greater challenge to democracy than the much publicised abuse of power by the executive and the Congress." And in one of the most scathing attacks on his own profession, the outgoing president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, to quote Michael O'Neill again, warned in May 1982 that "the media now weigh so heavily on the scales of power that some political scientists claim we are upsetting the historic checks-and-balances invented by our forefathers. . . ."

All this goes far beyond all the old discussions of what constitutes straight reporting or biased interpretation. Newspapers no longer merely report and analyse news, they create it. More than that, editors and journalists no longer confine themselves to the role of critic (and, in the constitutional sense, of democratic controllers) but have taken for themselves the assignment of being the National Opposition, more devastating than any "shadow government" in its daily and consistent scepticism and indefatigable muck-raking. All institutions have been unmasked and exposed; and now the

¹ The issue of the "zippo lighter" in the Viet Nam village was first raised in *ENCOUNTER* by Robert Elegant ("Viet Nam: How to Lose a War", August 1981), for which he was publicly denounced by one leading American TV-commentator (Morley Safer), broadcasting live to his millions, as a "Goebbels-propagandist."

underminers have themselves been undermined. If (in Senator Fulbright's famous phrase) arrogant power is the enemy—in the Presidency, in Big Business, in the Military-Industrial complex—then what of the Power of the Press? Fighting power with power *à outrance* can be suicidal.

Each day from the Opposition front benches comes the eloquent "national dissent." If Washington announces some little piece of "good news", the hostile press is quick to correct sternly any impression of progress or amelioration. Has unemployment gone down? Yes, but how will such hard, bare statistics help "Family X"—and the TV cameras are there in one miner's house to give the vivid lie to any suggestion of things somehow getting better. Sufficient unto each day is the coast-to-coast exposé thereof. Still, negativism is wearying and dispiriting and, ultimately, counter-productive. "When will the press realise", one reader wrote to the editors of *Newsweek*, "that we have a dedicated man in the White House who is trying to right the wrongs of past administrations and bring back the United States its long-lost respect in the world community? . . ." Patriots are, by nature, optimistic; and when they are in the majority they will not quite understand why a "minority of nihilists" should rule the day.

This groundswell of opinion is not to everybody's liking, needless to say; but journalists cannot at once claim to "represent the people" and revile all popular institutions and their political-cultural manifestations. The people out there in their millions (the more the better) are, after all, their readers, their viewers, their advertisers' customers. After the shock of the Grenadian outburst of suspicion and mistrust comes the commercial chill. Newspaper publishers and TV moguls must live, mustn't they?

There are few signs, as yet, that the media will "go

patriotic", except, perhaps, for the golden Olympic fortnight. But not in an election year when the endless campaigning of candidates constitutes an inexhaustible source of rakeable muck. (Why did Senator Gary Hart change his name and falsify his birth certificate? When did ex-Vice-President Mondale put his aquiline nose through cosmetic surgery? Is President Reagan's forgetfulness a serious sign of senility? Is Vice-President candidate Geraldine Ferraro involved at all in her husband's controversial business affairs? . . .) These are not auspicious days for American pride and self-confidence.

In any event, the personalities and politics of the key figures in the American media are not likely to change dramatically: no "patriotic" echo to be heard yet. For, in the main, they constitute a generation which has come to power, fame and success through what has been called "the high-brow anti-Americanism" of an "adversary intelligentsia." Many of the major columnists, and most of the TV "anchor-men" are the Viet Nam reporters of yesterday, the student and civil-rights protestors, the "investigators" of Watergate. Turbulence is their *métier*. They have the habits and reflexes of their political passions and even ideologies, and nobody and nothing is going to take them back to the old "bourgeois" ideals of objectivity and factuality, to the moderate self-restraint of straight reporting.

The legacy of their great and triumphant days, the 1960s and early '70s, has manoeuvred them into a spiritual corner of current American life. They dismiss and despise the new "populism" of the American people, but what will happen when they discover that they themselves are no longer popular, that they have become speakers whose words are falling on deaf ears, communicators who have lost contact?

Grenada may have provided a first shock of recognition.

AUTHORS

Robert Burchfield is Chief Editor of the Oxford English Dictionaries and author of *The Spoken Word: A BBC Guide* (1981). His contributions to *ENCOUNTER* include "On That Other Great Dictionary" (May 1977), "The Point of Severance: English in 1776 and Beyond" (October 1978), and "The Great Act of Forgetting" (August 1982). His article in this issue is the text of a public lecture given at the University of Toronto in March.

John Gohorry has contributed many poems to *ENCOUNTER* and other journals over the past few years. His story "The Future Arrives Last Year" appeared in the June 1983 issue.

Blake Morrison's "Topping" is the third part of a nine-part poem, "The Inquisitor", which will be published in his first book of poems, *Dark Glasses*, in October (Chatto & Windus).

Jean-François Revel, since his resignation as editor of *L'Express* in 1981, writes regularly for the Paris journal *Le Point*. His translated works include *The Totalitarian Temptation* (n.e. Penguin, 1978) and *Without Marx or Jesus* (n.e. Paladin, 1972). His new book, *How Democracies Perish*, will be published later this year by Doubleday.

Edward Pearce is a leader writer and Parliamentary sketch writer on the *Daily Telegraph*, and author of *The Senate of Lilliput* (Faber, 1983).

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David Constantine has published a book of poems, *Watching for Dolphins* (Bloodaxe Books, 1983), which has recently won the 1984 Alice Hunt Bartlett Award of the Poetry Society.

Robert Gittings is the author of *Young Thomas Hardy* and *The Older Thomas Hardy* (Heinemann Educational, 1975, 1978; Penguin, 1981), and co-author of *The Second Mrs Hardy* (Heinemann, 1979; paper, Oxford University Press, 1981). With Jo Manton, he is working on a Life of Dorothy Wordsworth. His "Specific Roots: New Light on Hardy" was published in the November 1982 *ENCOUNTER*.

James Lasdun works in London as a publisher's reader. His short stories have appeared in various anthologies and literary magazines, and in 1982 he received an Eric Gregory Award for poetry.