THE JOHN PETER ZENGER AWARD FOR
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND
THE PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

1990 Terry A. Anderson

TO REPORT IT
YOU MUST BE THERE

by Mort Rosenblum
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The Associated Press

Tucson, Arizona
April 24, 1991

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
TUCSON ARIZONA
THE JOHN PETER ZENGER AWARD — 1990

THE ZENGER AWARD WINNERS

1990  Terry A. Anderson, *The Associated Press*
1989  Robert C. Maynard, *The Oakland Tribune*
1987  Eugene L. Roberts, Jr., Executive Editor, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*
1986  John R. Finnegan, Editor, *St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press and Dispatch*
1985  Thomas Winship, *The Boston Globe*
1984  Tom Wicker, Associate Editor, *The New York Times*
1982  Fred W. Friendly, Edward R. Murrow Professor Emeritus, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism
1981  Paul S. Cousley, Publisher, *Alton (Ill.) Telegraph*
1980  Walter Cronkite, CBS
1979  Jack C. Landau, Executive Director, *Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*
1977  Robert W. Greene, *Newsday*
1976  Donald F. Bolles, *The Arizona Republic*
1975  Seymour M. Hersh, *The New York Times*
1974  Thomas E. Gish, Editor and Publisher, *The Mountain Eagle*
1973  Katharine Graham, Publisher, *The Washington Post*
1972  Dan Hicks Jr., Editor, *Monroe County Democrat*
1971  *The New York Times*
1970  Erwin D. Canham, Editor in Chief, *The Christian Science Monitor*
1969  J. Edward Murray, Managing Editor, *The Arizona Republic*
1968  Wes Gallagher, General Manager, The Associated Press
1967  John S. Knight, Knight Newspapers, Inc.
1965  Eugene C. Pulliam, Publisher, *The Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette*
1964  John Netherland Heiskell, Publisher, *Arkansas Gazette*
1962  John H. Colburn, Managing Editor, Richmond (Va.) *Times-Dispatch*
1960  Virgil M. Newton Jr., Managing Editor, Tampa (Fla.) *Tribune*
1959  Herbert Brucker, Editor, *Hartford Courant*
1958  John E. Moss, Chairman of House Governmental Information subcommittee
1957  James R. Wiggins, Vice President, Executive Editor of the Washington (D.C.) *Post* and *Times Herald*
1956  James S. Pope, Executive Editor, *Louisville Courier-Journal*
1955  Basil L. Walters, Executive Editor, *Chicago Daily News* and Knight Newspapers
1954  E. Palmer Hoyt, Editor and Publisher, *The Denver Post*
TO REPORT IT, YOU MUST BE THERE

FOREWORD

Mort Rosenblum, who will present the John Peter Zenger Award tonight, had embarked on a career as a foreign correspondent even before graduation from the University of Arizona.

His current title is special correspondent for The Associated Press, based in Paris. He comes to us tonight directly from a senior correspondent's role with Desert Storm in the Middle East.

His foreign reporting career has led him to AP bureau chief positions in West Africa, Singapore, Buenos Aires and Paris. He was editor-in-chief of the International Herald Tribune before returning to the AP in 1981, with the world as his beat.


His coverage of the overthrow of Communist rule in Romania earned him the Overseas Press Club Hal Boyle Award in 1990.

George W. Ridge, Jr.
The University of Arizona
April 24, 1991
TO REPORT IT, YOU MUST BE THERE

by Mort Rosenblum

Some years back I began a little book about reporting with a quote borrowed from the great old American foreign correspondent, H. R. Knickerbocker: "Whenever you find hundreds of thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of madmen struggling to get in, you know the latter are newspapermen." What followed was a sound roasting of my colleagues and myself for our many failings, our confusing shorthand, our imperfect reporting systems and, to the exclusion of slow-moving but vital undercurrent events, our obsession with coups and earthquakes.

Today, while I've left my pals back in the Middle East watching the war go on while we claim victory back home, let me talk a little about the other side.

We still have our failings, and a few of us ought to be stir-fried in hot oil. But never before have foreign correspondents been more crucial to this nation's well-being, never have they faced so many daunting and dangerous obstacles, and — in the midst of some mediocrity — never have the best of them performed so well.

We are too few, spread too thinly, and limited by circumstances beyond our control. More and more, people back home think we are closet traitors, obsessed with personal advancement. If they can't check on us nightly on CNN, we are goofing off, or out comforting the enemy.

We battle uphill against insidious influence, or bald censorship, by our own government and military. Once, the word "pool" suggested that refreshing little patch of water behind the hotel into which we could never find time to plunge. Now, we are being drowned in pools, imposed by the U.S. military as though we were yet another branch of the armed services. Much of our public, many of our proprietors, seem prepared to live with this.

Garry Trudeau had it right the other day. This time the military came home to cheers and yellow ribbons. It was the correspondents who got spit on. I thought it was pretty funny until the other day in Berkeley when I listened to a string of warm-up speakers to Ramsey Clark. If the right wing hates us, you should hear the left.

There I was, not long ago, feeling pretty noble in some desert without beer, under detention by the U.S. military for insisting on the people's right to know. Then I came back to hear how I was somehow responsible for farmworkers' kids going hungry because of an orange freeze in California. I was something called "the media."

Fair enough. No one said we were supposed to be loved. But it might help everyone's futures if some more people figured out what the media is — and what it isn't. More specifically, what correspondents are doing — and how well some of them are doing it.
At the risk of flattery myself in the process, let me say it clearly: I am in deep admiration of my colleagues, America's foreign correspondents. It warms me and thrills me to be among their number.

Let me talk about a few of these colleagues. People tend to have a detailed and uniform image of a “foreign correspondent,” as they might of a Rockette. In fact, correspondents come in such varied sorts and sizes that sometimes only their own kind can recognize them. That makes up the strength of the corps.

December before last, I caught a charter flight to the Romanian revolution with two men no one would confuse with Humphrey Bogart. Phil Revzin of the Wall Street Journal, a large, gentle man whose eyes twinkle behind gold wire-rim glasses, was a specialist in trade wars. Bill Landry, long retired as UPI foreign editor, was at a point in life when lesser men sit by a palm tree to write their memoirs instead of scrambling to add a few more chapters.

When the shooting started, both men rose magnificently to the occasion. Their reporting over the next week captured not only the events but also the surge of human feelings beneath the events. Revzin was something to see. On a Tandy 100 balanced precariously atop his knees, he battered out the sort of literature that writing teachers can use as text for decades to come.

Just recently, in the Middle East, I ran into Dick Blystone.

I first met Bly in 1971 near Hue when I was wondering how to avoid hopping on a helicopter to join a South Vietnamese unit on some particularly insane venture behind enemy lines. Bly appeared, a member of AP's Saigon bureau to which I was only briefly attached. The story was his responsibility, he insisted; he would cover it. That he was half dead from dysentery did not alter his thinking.

These days, Bly is talent for CNN, silvered at the temples and looking a little more prosperous about the midriff. His professionalism and wit have grown with the years. The penetration of cable news coverage is not because the camera is always on. It is because of people like Blystone who know how to determine what to tell the camera.

An old pal of ours also made the leap from AP to CNN, a New Zealander named Peter Arnett. These days, he is more of a household term than Alan Simpson, or even the more intelligent Simpson, Bart. But us graybeards know what Peter stands for and how he goes after what we rely upon him to find.

Day after day, I watched him tell us more with his eyebrows and innuendos than most U.S. senators can convey in a day-long filibuster. For us, who were also muzzled by American and Saudi censors, it was impossible to believe that some Americans could prefer blindness and ignorance to Peter's open line from Baghdad.

Another old war pony comes to mind. Bob Simon. We sat in Dhahran wondering if we would ever again see Bob and his crew. Those were the other three guys everyone seemed to have forgotten about. All four of them went north on the Tapline Road to a spot Simon thought would give him a vantage point on the war which the U.S. military would not allow him. They got closer than they wanted.
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Bob Simon did what we all have to do, cover the news whatever the obstacle. If the obstacles include people appointed to represent our nation, who do not bother to read our Constitution, that cannot stop us. It can only spur us harder.

That was John Peter Zenger's attitude, and it is why we remember him tonight. Being loved was not one of his priorities. Let us all make sure ol' JPZ's principles do not follow copy pencils and typewriters into the junkyards of journalism.

Back home, I sometimes hear people say, how could Bob Simon have been so stupid? Or how could he have endangered our boys' lives? Such talk makes my skin crawl. Simon was not stupid. He was doing his job, for people who counted on him. He knew soldiers' lives are not endangered by reporters who know what not to say. They are endangered by generals with carte blanche to carry a nation's flag up the hill, unwatched by the people whose blood and treasure are at risk.

The list of good correspondents is endless. Tony Horwitz is a kid on the Wall Street Journal married to Geraldine Brooks, who is also a kid on the Wall Street Journal. Without them, our understanding of what Saddam Hussein is up to would be far poorer. Tony was the first reporter into Kuwait. He simply camped in the desert and hid from U.S. officers, one of whom once yelled at him: "Get the hell off my battlefield." Then, choosing the right moment as he always does, he attached himself to the Kuwaiti army.

After the war, Geraldine sketched a word picture of Kurds, on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, that finally connected with Americans when people were paying attention. She, like many of us, had been trying to talk about Kurds for years.

There's Blaine Harden of the Washington Post who, like Tony Horwitz, never loses his friendly, happy grin. Blaine can take readers into deepest Uganda, or Poland, and connect them to the pathos and humor of lives they might have never imagined. He came home from Africa and wrote a wonderful book about the continent. On C-SPAN, an interviewer asked him to make a single brief comment about Africans. Blaine answered: "They love you."

There is Ed Cody, also of the Post, who clobbers us all in competitive situations. Cody speaks Arabic, French and Spanish so elegantly it makes you sick. One morning he pitched up in Amman from Baghdad and sat down for breakfast with the crowd at the Intercontinental. When the waiter approached, Cody made a gesture of respect, asked after his family and picked up some inside political news. To all of us, he was just the guy with coffee. Cody knew better.

Cody and others like him are the antidote to the usual wave of second-guessing and thumbsucking from back home whenever a big story breaks. You can try to "explain" a story from a distance, based on your prior knowledge, your subtle prejudices and your cultural assumptions. But to report it, you must be there.

Real reporting counters what Cody calls washing-machine journalism on television foreign affairs programs. "They just tumble around ideas, over and over," he observed once. "People think it is news to have two experts argue over
some event. In the end, it's only two professors shouting at each other. That's not news."

True. News from abroad has to come from people on the list.

These days, there is also a new breed on this list. We old hands tend to grumble at an encroaching attitude that our branch of journalism is a sort of an advanced boot camp for serious young comers on their way to a real career. Tony Clifton of Newsweek caught this perfectly in an article some time back for the Overseas Press Club magazine, Dateline.

Tony, by the way, was in Dhahran when the U.S. military briefings started. The briefings were in Riyadh, piped by television to Dhahran where most of the reporters were. He looked at the monitor and grumbled. "At least in Vietnam they lied to you in person."

In his dateline article, Tony was telling a young journalist his favorite war story, about a photographer in Cambodia who was hit by shrapnel and fell clinically dead by the side of the road. A passing paramedic restarted his heart. The photographer dusted himself off and headed back up the road. Tony wound himself up for the punchline. "Hey," someone yelled, "you could get yourself killed." The photographer replied, "It wouldn't be the first time."

"Oh, right," said the kid across the table from Tony. And they went on talking about whether it would be a good career move for him to put in a couple of years abroad before he got to serious journalism in America. But, at the same time, some of the best people abroad have just gotten there.

At the top of my list is a man I met in 1983, shortly after the Israelis moved into Lebanon. He had been based in Johannesburg, but he agitated to come to the Middle East. I was on a temporary assignment to Beirut and when he arrived, technically my numerical replacement, I went home.

He has been there ever since, now for six years, one month and eight days, locked in a tiny room, mostly chained to a radiator.

Terry Anderson should be here tonight, not me. This is his award and we all wish more than we can say that he was here to receive it. But he'll get here.

What makes Terry so good, what makes all the best correspondents so good, is a blind sense of mission that seems to be going out of fashion in a lot of other fields.

It bothers no one that this is a little corny. Obviously, it is hardly all self-sacrifice. Everyone has his and her personal rewards. Correspondents get to see the world in ways others cannot. Most of us even get a salary for doing what we love to do. But there are certain absolutes that, corny or not, we find to be noble.

Terry, like the best of them, feels this instinctively. That is why, heat or no heat, he stayed in the kitchen.

You cannot compromise with copy. A fact is a fact, and it must be nailed down. A principle is a principle, and it cannot be bent. An obstacle must be surmounted, no matter what it is. If it beats you, you have failed, and no one wants to hear — no one ought to hear — the extenuating circumstances.
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Our lives are different now with all the technology. If Henry Morton Stanley found Dr. Livingstone this week, he could direct-dial his paper from Kigali, and Nightline would steal his thunder before the Sunday edition. CNN might be there with a portable satellite. Now, at night, former hell-raisers talk about modems not madams. But nothing essential has changed.

When the phone rings at midnight, you may be in the air at dawn headed for someone else's baffling mayhem. Minor concerns drop away. Is the washer repairman coming? Are eight people invited to dinner? Does your toe ache? Is tomorrow Christmas? Tough. A fireman only has to put on his pants and extinguish flames. You've got to tell a million people who struck the match and why.

I don't mean to harp on the logistics, or the dangers. Some of the best foreign correspondents seldom stray from large comfortable cities where they must make sense of events that take shape deep below the surface. Others are specialists, helping us understand new challenges in economics, science or the environment. Their sources are often long, boring documents which, nonetheless, affect our lives.

Nor do I want to single out those whose names are well-known. Tireless, dedicated people, like Jamal Halaby, the AP's man in Amman, are the underpinning of America's correspondent corps.

But it is important to insist on the new obstacles facing us. The world has changed drastically for people trying to report on it. For one thing, as Terry knows more than anyone, we are now part of the story. Journalists are fair game. Of course, we are inadvertently and reluctantly involved in diplomacy and politicking.

It may be a scoop if a Ted Rather-Brokaw or a Tom Jennings-Gumbel is the first to interview the monster of the month. But it is not without careful analysis by the monster's team of handlers. We are under scrutiny, and every government, including our own, schemes to use us for its own purposes.

A calamity befell us with the invasion of Grenada. The Constitution notwithstanding, we let our own generals keep us from the story. Worse, we accepted a pool system that leaves us in the dark, at the mercy of censors whose concern is as much the avoidance of embarrassment as military secrecy.

In Vietnam, we covered a war while also covering peoples at war. By seeing things for ourselves, we could understand — and therefore explain — the underlying forces beneath it all. When local authorities made our job harder, our own government reminded them of the American people's right to know.

In the Gulf, we covered the war the way Chinese doctors used to diagnose female patients: from the next room, with porcelain ceramic models. When local authorities make our job harder, too many U.S. officials quietly cheered them on.

Some U.S. officials take risks to share information they know should be shared. But many others reflect a growing attitude that counters the spirit of our country. The head of the Joint Information Bureau in Dhahran gave to the Saudis the names of us scolaws who committed "unilateral" by trying to report on our own. That we were not expelled speaks more of Saudi respect for our constitutional role than the U.S. military's.
Official political censorship is a far greater threat to our society than an armed occupation in the Gulf. The latter had to be dealt with — but not at the expense of the former.

To my horror, I sometimes see U.S. embassy press officials sitting in on the old give-and-take sessions with “Western diplomats,” carefully taking notes and taping in a way that even the KGB has abandoned. In Jordan, when we asked a young press attaché for guidance on covering an evacuation flight of Americans from Baghdad, he said he was not authorized to say anything. When I asked if a senior officer would give us some clue, he replied: “If anyone in this embassy speaks to you, I want his name.”

Our government is gentler than most. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists counted 53 reporters killed in 1989, twice as many as in 1988; hundreds were physically assaulted and many hundreds more arrested.

Foreign correspondents are hardly the worst off. We can generally hop a plane and go home. Our local colleagues, brave men and women in Central America and Lebanon, and a lot of other places take the hard knocks. They must stay and face the pressure, day after day. So far, in Colombia alone, the drug war has killed 50 journalists.

These days, letters to the editor are delivered with convincing clarity. Presses are bombed. Reporters are machine-gunned. There is what Peruvian journalist Sonia Goldenberg calls “censorship by death.”

In this climate, foreign correspondents also take their knocks. And often in the simplest, stupidest cases. A few months back, reporters covering Liberia went to visit the West African peace-keeping force at its base in Sierra Leone. They asked to see the head peace-keeper. An officer emerged, put a gun to their heads and frogmarched them at double time the length of two football fields. Then, after some vile threats, he got nasty.

My colleague, Mike Goldsmith, who was beaten up and imprisoned for a month by Emperor-to-be Bokassa, was still at it in Africa at age 68. In October, he was beaten up again by soldiers in Liberia. But let me say more about Goldsmith.

I wrote a first version of this speech last fall. As usual, I went to Mike for wisdom and inspiration. I could not do that this time. Mike died in November, specifically from internal injuries. But, really, Mike eventually succumbed to the rigors of his mission; he felt his health failing. But it never occurred to him to slow down.

The problem for correspondents is less danger than it is control. Almost anywhere you turn, there are hamsters with guns demanding papers they can’t read and following orders they can’t understand. I emerged safe and sound from Bucharest. But some thug revolutionary at a roadblock in Timisoara shot and wounded AP’s John Daniszewski. You can’t stay out of dicey situations because you don’t know what’s dicey. Instead, you just take your chances in a grim lottery.

Miraculously, reporters covering the Gulf War all came home safely. But there were moments. Iraqi press officers enjoyed reminding correspondents of...
Farzad Bazoft, the Iranian-born British journalist who Saddan Hussein hanged as a spy earlier this year. One kept observing to Joe Treaster of The New York Times and Terry Leonard of AP: "Oh, you're investigative reporters? Bazoft was an investigative reporter."

Some of all this control is because of the sheer numbers now involved. It is nothing for 500 newspeople to pitch up at a medium-sized story. Four American TV networks send producers, camera and soundmen, correspondents, bookkeepers, T-shirt makers. During real wars and ratings wars, individual stations send their own people, like one crew that showed up in Jordan hoping for some reflection from the 82nd Airborne a whole country away. And that's just the Americans.

There are four British nets and three French, not to speak of the Japanese, Finns, Brazilians. We pencil people are lucky enough to see a popular news source, let alone get close enough for a question. But big numbers in the obvious places do not ensure adequate cover. And that brings up yet another set of obstacles.

These days, foreign correspondents face new controls from their own companies. Some news organizations have risen to the challenge, opening new bureaus and spending generously to keep atop of events that are reshaping the world. But others seem less concerned with the people's right to know than with the investors' right to a second BMW. The news business was always a business. But, increasingly, it is populated by linear thinkers who find no column for "mission" on their spreadsheets. And you can't explain it to them.

Now some real economic problems worsen this situation. As the product suffers, so does readership.

Two-thirds of good reporting depends upon instinct and flexibility. No scientist can prove it, but every decent correspondent knows a story has a scent. To find it, you follow your nose, and that can take time and travel money. Not every foreign editor, when querying advance costs, can handle: "I don't know, chief, but I can smell it."

As much as with budgets, the problem lies with mentalities. These days, all businesses, including ours, attract a certain number of corporate clones whose guidance system depends upon an even keel. There is a healthy side to this; no company can operate out of control, or without a firm grip on its treasure. But something is missing.

A certain complaisance among executives leads to settlements on principle when no quarter should be given. After the Gulf War, 11 small magazines and papers and four writers sued the Pentagon for restricting access. A Manhattan federal judge dismissed the suit, calling the issues abstract and conjectural. No major organization joined it, and few even covered it.

One of the plaintiffs was Sydney Schanberg, who won his correspondent stripes in Cambodia for The New York Times. In his Newsday column, Sydney let fly at the majors. He quoted from the government's legal response: "It is probable that, given the number of journalists who will desire to cover any future hos-
tilities, DoD will be forced to regulate access to U.S. troops and combat operations."

Then Schanberg added: "Should any of the media biggies need a translation of these pronouncements, here it is: We the government have successfully established a precedent for information control, so if you in the press thought you were shackled during the Iraq war and blocked from access to the troops and followed everywhere by Pentagon 'minders' and reduced to being rewriters of government communiques, you ain't seen nothing yet."

This new mentality tends to add a distracting static to the correspondent's familiar call. Too often executives forget that a foreign correspondent is a cutting tool, with sharp, irregular edges. If you stamp out the juvenile delinquent element, you douse the fires that drive us all. When the accountants get down to billing you for the safe water you drink from your hotel minibar, you begin to wonder why you didn't go into orthodontics like your brother, Sid.

Then again. Sid was not with us on the Jordan-Iraq border as hundreds of thousands of desperate Asian refugees from Kuwait camped in the desert like biblical throwbacks. Interviewing them, hearing their grief and desperation, I, for one, knew why I was a foreign correspondent.

One morning I found myself surrounded by Bangladeshis clamoring for anyone's attention. They felt abandoned by their government, and some were certain they would die in the desert. When I finished asking questions, one man grabbed me by the arm and said:

"Please, Mr. Terry Anderson, put this in your newspaper, and tell the world about us."

He had seen my bracelet, with Terry's name on it, and assumed that's who I was.

Well, that Bangladeshi refugee was right. We are all Terry Anderson. We stand with Terry and he stands for all of us.

Tonight, I am presenting the John Peter Zenger Award on behalf of a generic class, the American foreign correspondent. Don't forget about Terry Anderson. And, Terry would say, don't forget about any of us. Today, the world starts right here, outside the front door. To thrive, even to survive, everyone must know what is happening in this world.

When I hear people back home complaining about the pushiness of reporters, or their insistence on also giving the other side. I have one thing to say, on behalf of Terry and everyone else: Make damned sure the American foreign correspondent is out there. If we're not there, you're not there.

The award was accepted by Mrs. Judith Walker, Terry Anderson's sister.