

APPRECIATIONS

The Far Eastern Economic Review



By Helene Cooper

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For someone who grew up dreaming about swashbuckling journalists reporting from far-flung places, there was no greater model than The Far Eastern Economic Review, a weekly founded in Shanghai in 1946 and put out by a raffish staff of adventurers.

To me, the review's reporters embodied what journalism was about. There was Bertil Lintner, the Swedish buccaneer who spent a year walking along the Chinese-Burma border during the 1980's with his wife. Their baby was born along the way, and Mr. Lintner continued to file mammoth articles that gave voice to a culture nobody would pay anyone to cover. There was John MacBeth, the New Zealander who kept reporting from East Timor to Jakarta even after his leg was amputated, battling the Indonesian strongman Suharto. There was Nayan Chanda, the Bengali from Calcutta, among the last reporters left in Saigon when North Vietnamese tanks invaded the city. Mr. Chanda was filing his article as Communist tanks were crashing through the city gates. He kept working until two Communists walked up to him and literally pulled the plug of the telex machine.

And then there was Nate Thayer. My hero. During the 1980's and 90's, the mercurial Mr. Thayer hung out with the Cambodian resistance, dodging Khmer bullets in the jungles around Angkor Wat, fleeing Vietnamese troops across the Thai border and even at one point inadvertently running over a land mine, which exploded and destroyed his pickup truck. In 1997, he finally got the reward he had been seeking: Khmer commanders took him deep into the jungle, where he found Pol Pot.

Last week, Dow Jones, publisher of The Far Eastern Economic Review, announced it was shutting it down and laying off 80 people. The current Nov. 4 issue will be the last of its kind; while Dow Jones is keeping the brand name alive, FEER will be a monthly with essays from academics and government officials: not a Nate Thayer in the bunch.

Four years ago, on my way home from Beijing, I met the FEER reporter Murray Hiebert on the plane. He was fresh out of a Kuala Lumpur prison, where he had just spent a month for reporting about a Malaysian judge's wife who had sued an international school for kicking her son off the debate team. I was star-struck; here was one of my heroes in the flesh, still battle-scarred. Murray was bashful. "I think most journalists should go to jail for a month," he said later. "You have no idea how much you respect press freedom after that." HELENE COOPER

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