The Freedom Forum European Centre Pays Tribute to

Martha Gellhorn

at a roundtable discussion entitled

Women on the Frontlines:
Do Women Have a Different News Agenda?

Also with

Stephen Claypole, APTV, Managing Director
Kate Adie OBE, BBC Chief News Correspondent
Giselle Portenier, BBC Assignment, Deputy Editor/Correspondent
Emily Buchanan, BBC Developing World Correspondent
Fiona Murch, BBC Assignment, Senior Producer
Anna-Maria Tremonti, CBC Middle East Correspondent
Wivina Belmonte, CBC Bureau Chief
Hilary Bowker, CNN Presenter
Marci McGinnis, CBS Bureau Chief
Linda Christmas, City University, journalism lecturer
Emma Daly, Independent
Karen Curry, NBC Bureau Chief
Tessa Mayes, London International Research Exchange, Director
Joan Hoey, London International Research Exhange, Director
Geoffrey Sterne, LSE, Prof Int'l Rel
Janine D'Giovanni, freelance journalist
Mary Anne Fitzgerald, freelance journalist

MODERATOR: John Owen,
Director of Freedom Forum European Centre

Extracts from Discussion

Martha Gellhorn, now in her 80s, is still an active journalist. In August this year Gellhorn wrote an investigative story about the killing of small children in Brazil. Below she talks about her method of operation, and what still drives her to cover stories.

Martha Gellhorn

Well, how did I attack that story? I found out that there was a tiny little charitable organisation that dealt with the parents of children who had disappeared or been killed, and so I trundled round and saw them, and then I went to the Juvenile Court and I just wandered around picking up anybody who seemed to know anything about this subject.

I have great confidence in fellow journalists, and so I found the crime reporter on the leading newspaper in Salvador where I was -- charming man. And he, like everybody else, knows the children are killed in Brazil. But he didn't know any more about it than that, because it's not a story. Just one more child killed. But he tore something out of a newspaper and said this will interest you, and it was somebody who had was on remand. But you can be on remand for 5 or 6 years in Brazil. It's probably the worst organised country that exists, and he had been convicted as the murderer of four children, not convicted, was in remand prison.

So I went off to the prison to see him. Then I went to see his family and so on. I mean you know, you just amble around and pick up stuff. I haven't really got any system.

Geoffrey Sterne

How far are you haunted by the past? You're always doing something new and yet I have the feeling that the past is always with you. Is that right?

Martha Gellhorn

Well, I don't forget. I don't forget major things I've seen although I often don't know what countries I've been in. Somebody says something about a country and I think ah, I've been there and to my great surprise couldn't remember it. But I think the larger, the more important things, yes, I do remember them. I don't know whether they affect anything one's doing at the time.

"I was just driven by this obscene idea that you could just go and kill small children for no known reason."

I mean I couldn't relate killing children in Brazil to anything else that I knew. It was a brand new subject to me, and I went there idiotically because I couldn't digest this idea. I just couldn't understand how it was possible. Who did it? How could it be done? How could it go on? Not only go on, but grow year after year. I couldn't sort of handle this notion, so off I went to try and find out.

"Of course I didn't forget for one single minute that children were herded into the gas chambers at Auschwitz, I never forget that but I don't think it related to why I went to Brazil."

I don't think I did find out. I found out a bit, some of it. I've got some ideas about it, but I was just driven by this obscene idea that you could just go and kill small children for no known reason one could discover. And that didn't have anything to do with anything I know of in my past. Of course I didn't forget for one single minute that children were herded into the gas chambers at Auschwitz, I never forget that but I don't think it related to why I went to Brazil or anything that I saw or learned in Brazil except I suppose a kind of common degree of inhumanity, of regarding anybody as a non person so it doesn't matter what you do to them, but I wasn't consciously relating that to anything in the past.

Martha Gellhorn on Do Women Have a Different News Agenda?

"In Vietnam the American army was kept at bay by the fact that I said "Oh, I'm just here to do the woman's angle."

- "I never knew any men reporters who ever went near a hospital and I was a great frequenter of hospitals because that's where you really see the price of war. But I didn't have deadlines, most of the men did. Also they were much more interested in temporary military gains and losses, which I wasn't. But that's also because in my job I didn't have to do that sort of thing."

- "A thing I've used wonderfully in my time -- when I had no papers and I was stopped by the guard, I said, "Oh, I'm just doing a woman's angle, I just want to interview the nurses." The minute you say a woman's angle it just seems so innocuous. that you can get there.

- In Vietnam, for instance, the American army was kept at bay by the fact that I said "Oh, I'm just here to do the woman's angle," and nobody ever bothered me again."

"It is a kind of rare and amazing passport to be a journalist. It gives you a chance to see the history of your time."

- "I think we've been very helped by having this passport, which is journalism. It's always astonished me that as a private person, you couldn't go and knock on a door and say, "Please tell me the story of your life." They'd say: "Buzz off!" Knock on the door and say, "I'm from the Daily something-or-other," and to your amazement they say, "Come in." It is a kind of rare and amazing passport to be a journalist. It gives you a chance to see the history of your time."

Women see extraordinariness in what otherwise seems ordinary, argues BBC Developing World Correspondent, Emily Buchanan. This point provoked more argument amongst women correspondents and editors around the table: Do Women -- should women -- report "soft" news over "hard" news? Is a woman's news agenda more "subjective" than men's? Or, as in Kate Adie's experience, does this merely reflect men's perceptions of women's writing?

Emily Buchanan, BBC

Many of the stories that I think maybe women are interested in are things that are very much everyday things, they're not even news in that country. Things like the way women are treated, or babies are killed, or other classes killed, it's not even news in those countries, it's not remarkable. I think there's maybe a tendency in newsrooms to go for what is obviously remarkable that comes up on the wires.

I think a lot of what women can see, or anybody who has a bit of time to do a bit more human interest stuff, is what is unremarkable -- but what is remarkable to us. That's what you found in Brazil. You pulled it out of its context where it was an unremarkable event.

Fiona Murch, BBC Editor

I notice that when a story is more human interest, the view of male colleagues tends to be: it was powerful but was it important? And there is a suspicion of anything that arouses an emotion in a viewer, that maybe it is suspect, you shouldn't be provoking emotional responses because that is not hard news.

And often women journalists don't have the same resistance to something that is emotional.

Kate Adie, Correspondent

What makes Martha Gellhorn special is that there isn't a story that she hasn't covered which hasn't been the front page, hard news, biggest news out in anybody's agenda, yet it is reported in the manner in which we are talking about.

"What makes Martha Gellhorn special is that there isn't a story that she hasn't covered which hasn't been the front page, hard news, the biggest news out in anybody's agenda"

We have divided off in this argument between talking about human interest and what is interesting to women and that sort of thing on a traditional agenda, and then sort of saying there are hard news agendas about other matters. I just think perhaps if we drove it the other way and said, rather than banging on about the misery of having the human interest stories relegated by conventional agenda, gate keepers or whatever, one should say that perhaps more effort should be made towards the kind of standard journalism which does drive human interest as the spine of a major news story. Because it's often missing in a lot of reporting. It is just statistics and politics and economics and background and conventional movements without the humanity in it.

"If women are working on a story, the automatic suspicion is that you are going for the soft underbelly of the story."

The view is, and there must be many women in this room who have just listened to it round their news desks, that if women are working on a story, the automatic suspicion is that you are going for the soft underbelly of the story and that you have somehow come back in a ragged emotional state, unable to cope with the rigours of professional journalistic standards. Most women around here would know that argument I believe.

So, you've got to analyse it, and find out what is going on in terms of how you are dealing with stories. I think we have got somewhere to the core of it here over the business of it is difficult to define how women's

"We suspect – feel – in a sort of female intuitive sort of way – that there may be a difference (between men and women's reporting), but it is very hard to codify it. And once you have codified it, it then becomes subject to criticism and probably a good deal of prejudice."

attitudes are in any way different to men's in the professional business of journalism. It is hard. We suspect, feel, in a sort of female intuition sort of way that there may be a difference but it is very hard to codify it and once you have codified it, it then becomes subject to criticism and probably a good deal of prejudice.

Martha Gellhorn

The thing about objectivity absolutely fascinates me. The assumption being that the reporter is made of plastic or something of the sort, and has no reaction to anything.

You know, you're supposed to see death and destruction and just regard that as if you have no opinion about it. I find that absolutely mad. I don't see how any human being, male or female, cannot react to what it sees, and we react emotionally, not only intellectually, both.

"Of course emotional reactions are valid. They're valid in the reporter, they're valid in the writing, and they're valid in the reader or the viewer, and it would seem to be very useful in fact to use them, to work on them in order to evoke in people sympathy."

I mean obviously sentimentality has to be avoided, but the idea that there is such a thing as total objectivity assumes that the human being has no feelings, has no reaction to anything and is totally cold to anything it sees, which I find impossible, I mean subhuman, not normal, so all they're trying I suppose to have you do is not be totally on one side or the other, maybe that's what they mean by objectivity.

But of course emotional reactions are valid. They're valid in the reporter, they're valid in the writing and they're valid in the reader or the viewer, and it would seem to be very useful in fact to use them, to work on them in order to evoke in people sympathy, and sympathy is I suppose a subjective feeling.

Since Gellhorn began writing, women journalists have come a long way. In some senses, Gellhorn carved out this way for women. But the consensus is that the journalist's world is still predominantly male.

Linda Christmas
City University

What we're actually seeing with the arrival of women on the scene is that we are not deeply comfortable in the ambience of institutions because we have never been part of the institutional elite, men have. For the most part the men I'm talking about have probably been to public school and Oxbridge as well so they're deeply comfortable with institutionalised elites. Women are not, so when they're thinking subliminally their way through a story they veer away from those channels of communication and go to the hospitals.

Giselle Portenier,
BBC Assignment

"We have a remit to appeal to a male audience, and this is not a piece that will interest male viewers: therefore we don't want it."

Emily and I did a film in Paraguay on illegal adoptions of babies last year, and we were hoping that this would be a co-production with Arts and Entertainment in the States, and they were very keen. We thought it was a perfect story because there was dozens of American parents, and it was a purely American story, and we often do co-productions with investigative reports on Arts and Entertainment.

"Whether we get it into the news or not depends a lot on the gate keepers, most of whom are still men."

But at the end of the day they didn't go in on it with us, because they came back and said, "We have a remit to appeal to a male audience, and this is not a piece that will interest male viewers: therefore we don't want it."

Their decision seemed to be based solely on that, nothing to do with the merit of the story, the interest of the story, how well it was done or anything like that. So whether we have a different agenda because we are women I am not 100% sure, but whether we get it into the news or not I think does depend a lot on the gate keepers, most of whom are still men.

Karen Curry,
NBC Bureau Chief

I have an anecdote. There was a helicopter crash with a lot of high-rated intelligence members involved, and no pictures. The next day ITN got some pictures, which I saw, and were truly very strong. They were from a female reporter, and we talked about it and pitched the story, and it was bought and we sent the story to New York, and I got an earbashing because I told them it was really strong stuff.

"It was the outline of the side of the mountain, which to me was a very strong image."

What it was the side of the mountain with a kind of vaporised area where the helicopter had completely vaporised, and it was the outline in the side of the mountain, which to me was an amazingly strong image. These people had just disappeared . It wasn't hardware, it wasn't twisted metal. It wasn't a strong picture in the view of the people in New York, who are male. But I thought that maybe an example of the way in which things are viewed differently by men and women.

The Humanisation of War Reporting

It is not just the gender of the reporter, but the nature of war that is changing, according to research by the London International Research Exchange. As war becomes more enmeshed in ethnic hatreds and national uprisings, reporters tend to look more at the people than the power politics. Martin Bell writes of the "humanisation" of war reporting.

Tessa Mayes,
London International Exchange

The Vietnam War was really the start of human interest reporting. Now there is a trend toward it, and many women say yes, they do have a different agenda, although many others don't. It really doesn't seem to be a question of gender, but more of which paper you're writing for, or the politics of the individual.

Joan Hoey
London International Exchange

Actually I would be more critical about the trend towards what has been called the humanisation of war reporting, or the feminisation of war reporting, and I think there is discussion about this now in the media.

It's something that Martin Bell has addressed in his speeches, up and down the country. There's generally more of an emphasis on the human dimension of war and conflict, an elevation of eye witness reporting and an emphasis more on the subjective approach, on the human victims of war and conflict

On the surface that would seem like quite a refreshing thing, a good thing, an emphasis not on the conduct of war and the commanders of war, but on the human casualties of war.

"I'm also suspicious of it in the sense that we have a move away from explanation and causality."

But I'm also suspicious of it in the sense that along with that emphasis we have a move away from explanation and causality, which I think especially if you want to do something about stopping war and if you want to mobilise people to do something about it, you've got to give them some broader context, you've got to give them a context within which they can understand what is happening, else what do you do except hold up your hands in horror and say you know, another disaster, another war, what can be done about it.

Marci McInnis
CBS Bureau Chief

We sent a team to Eritrea and they did a story on landmines. It was an entire male team. The story came back, they found the Americans that were blowing up the landmines, they found the soldiers that were saying this is the greatest thing in the World. There were lots of explosions in the piece. There was one shot of a guy with no legs.

There was no woman who said I'm afraid to let my children go play outside. There was no teacher who said I have a classroom full of kids that have no legs. There was nothing that was anything except bang bang. And when those guys called up and said, "Oh you're gonna love this story, this is great," I looked at it and said "Where are all the people with no limbs that were affected by these landmines?"

They thought it was a great story because they had explosions and soldiers , and I thought it was a bad story.

John Owen,
Freedom Forum

We had a terrible incident at the CBC where there were two files in an evening, one from Chechnya and one from Bosnia, and the Bosnia story got dropped because in the words of the producer of the night to the field correspondent "it seemed too much like the other story". In other words the people looked alike, sounded the same and grieved the same.

Why Write at all?

According to journalist Mary Anne Fitzgerald, women instinctively report the humanity of the event, and personalise it, in way that can often lead to practical action. Sometimes to changes in foreign policy. Gellhorn claims to have a more modest agenda.

Mary Anne Fitzgerald

I'm from Kenya and I felt very strongly about what was happening in Ethiopia, and I lobbied here in Whitehall, and in the State Department to change foreign policy sufficiently to allow food to go to the rebels, the TPLF, who are now in government, and I sent my articles to everybody. I sent them to Princess Ann, I sent them to every MP and whoever, and I know for a fact because it came back to me that those articles did change policy and food was sent in to an area that would have suffered from great famine. So I think that feminine compassion or the compassion that women have and men can have too, but is more within us genetically or whatever it is, does sway opinion.

Martha Gellhorn

I've never had the experience myself of feeling that anything I did had the slightest use, but it seemed to me necessary to do it anyhow. I remember Mrs Mendelsham was the wife of the great poet whom Stalin had killed ,and she herself, a very brave and extraordinary woman, wrote an amazing book called "Hope Against Hope." And she said if you can do nothing else you must scream. And I felt that that was one's role. If you could you do nothing else you must scream.

"If you can't change it you must at least record it, so that it cannot just be ignored or forgotten."

If you can't change it you must at least record it, so that it cannot just be ignored or forgotten. It is some place on record and it seemed to me personally that it was my job to get things on the record in the hopes that at some point or other, somebody couldn't absolutely lie about it.

That was a very modest aim and I never felt that I was successful because my greatest passion of all was the war in Spain, and no matter what one wrote it didn't change anything, but it was there, it was some place or other, it was on the record.

"I hope I made it clear that the invasion at Panama was a disgrace and totally wrong and evil and pointless also. The causality remains a mystery."

Somebody read something of my Panama thing. I hope I made it clear in that thing that the invasion at Panama was a disgrace and totally wrong and evil and pointless also. The causality remains a mystery, I mean as far as one can make out it's just because a horrid old man decided that he was now big enough not to take orders from the CIA but of course you have to get in what it's about, not only the result but something of the cause. There used to be something called the think piece in which somebody wrote very learnedly about the whole diplomatic and political thing and I'm very much in favour of that as well.

"Yes, you must have reporting on causes. I mean why doesn't the UN work? The UN is only the sum of its parts, and the governments don't pile in, don't give the troops, don't give the money, don't agree. You can't just say it doesn't work."

I think there's room for both but yes, you must have reporting on causes. I mean why doesn't the UN work? The UN is only the sum of its parts, and the governments don't pile in, don't give the troops, don't give the money, don't agree. You can't just say it doesn't work. You have to make explanations of this kind - it's almost back room stuff which is what moves us.

It has to be there but I don't think they rule each other out. I think they can both get in somehow or other.

Changing News Agenda

They say the news agenda is changing, but there was debate about how. Does the global village give us more or less foreign coverage? And what are the effects of the new information highway?

For Martha Gellhorn, now almost blind and heavily reliant on broadcast media, foreign news is scant.

Martha Gellhorn

"If you want even to notice that there are other countries in the world, you've got to tune in to the World Service to find out that Peru exists or that Mongolia's still there."

If you want even to notice that there are other countries in the World, you've got to tune in to the World Service to find out that Peru exists or that I don't know, that Mongolia's still there. I tune in at 1.00 on my cheesy little radio just to find out that there are some other countries.

And there is something terrible about the constant horrors of the world being transmitted by the soundbite.

For a long time (it was) Bosnia, then you have Taliban in Afganistan, and now we have Rwanda, and I think people are just taking it as part of the evening news, the horror of the world, one minute and 42 seconds of the world's horror. There isn't enough space in print to write at length. I don't think anything now gives you a chance to get really deeply involved in the horrors which are in fact ceaseless.

The assumption is that the public has an attention span of one minute and 42 seconds, and I'm not sure that that isn't an insult to the public. John Pilger, for instance, had time, and he did get something across that startled and horrified the world.

The debate about news agendas challenged the very meaning of news, a term that shifts both over time and cultures.

What is the news, I mean who decides what's important? Mostly it seems to me, as I listen to all of them, they tell you about something local. They don't really inform you. I have yet to see or hear anything of any depth about the problem, for instance, of homelessness, which I would like to know about.

"I suppose it isn't news that people are homeless, it isn't news that there is malnutrition in God knows how many children in this country."

There are lots of things we don't hear about, about the state of life in this country and I suppose it isn't news that people are homeless, it isn't news that there is malnutrition in God knows how many children in this country and then I'd like to know what they're malnourished on and how far anybody's money can go on the dole. There's so much I'd like to know that I never find on the news. Then perhaps that's not news, that's information, general information.

John Owen
Freedom Forum

I think there's a great debate about whether story telling is much more applicable in North America for example, than it is in continental Europe and you can go to conferences and debate for ever with French and German journalists who think story telling beginning with example is completely anti-intellectual and demeaning.

Kate Adie

Adie draws a striking parallel between food consumption in the USA and 24-hour information.

I have a feeling that once there is an abundance of something because of supply, judgement is lost, it is difficult to select the important. It's also difficult to know what is relevant and what you should know more about in depth and the little, sort of metaphor I think of is food in America.

America is a place full of food. The last few times that I have been there I have discovered that fewer and fewer people appear to eat large dinners. People snack and graze the entire day through. Food is available 24 hours, food is cheap, food is there. Few people worry about getting the food together for a large meal, cooking it carefully and worrying about scraps and leftovers. It is though a fact that when something comes in abundance you then take from it what you like when you like, nibble nibble here, the tasty things, the nice things.

"We begin to nibble and snack on information., the one minute 42 appears to be enough. We've had our news for the day. We would be sated if we had to sit down for 30 minutes and watch something."

Maybe that is why people are growing ever fatter in parts of the States. They eat what they like rather than what is available or what is just good for them.

Now I don't have a criticism of the eating habits in the States but it is a parallel I'm trying to draw very oddly with news information. We now in this country are rarely further from three and a half minutes from a bulletin of news on radio and television around the clock. You can tune in right through night and day seven days a week to news information and the more there is, the less it's easy to sit down and watch a large banquet of it, in the evening when you have snacked all day. I mean I ask you all just to sort of do that simple calculation, do you on a busy evening sometimes say oh, I've heard that, I picked it up on the radio, no I know about that, no I heard a piece about that at lunch time. We begin to nibble and snack on information., the one minute 42 appears to be enough. We've had our news for the day. We would be sated if we had to sit down for 30 minutes and watch something.

Anne Marie Tremonti, CBC

Middle East Correspondent

Tremonti disagrees. She sees the fault as lying with the desk editors -- who assume most people consume news in the same volume that they do.

People out in the real world have jobs and mortgages and children and things to run around and do, and they are not sitting in front of their TVs and tuning in their radios every minute of the day. Our desks make the mistake that just because a group of people in whatever news organisation have flipped around and watched all the all-news channels and heard everything all day that all of the viewers out there have. And so we offer them a little bit on the belief that they have a little bit everywhere else. I think that's the big mistake of our desks.

Linda Christmas

City University

A more positive view of foreign coverage.

Most people are more interested in what's going on abroad than they ever were for the very simple reason that they travel so that

"The statistics show that in the up-market newspapers there are more foreign correspondents now than there have ever been."

when they see something coming up on the news it's not just a foreign spot. It's something that they can identify with. This is reflected in both television programming, that there are now programmes that concentrate on decent full length programmes like BBC 2's 'Assignment'. And when you look at the print side, the statistics show that in the up-market newspapers -- the broadsheets, as they are sometimes called -- there are more foreign correspondents now than there have ever been.

Kate Adie

"The last travelling foreign correspondent was fired three weeks ago from the Daily Express."

They have stringers, if I may propose that, and The Telegraph, which used to have the largest foreign staff has not got the size of staff it used to, and as far as I know of the tabloid newspapers in this country, the last travelling foreign correspondent was fired three weeks ago from the Daily Express. The Sun and The Star, The Mirror, The Express and The Mail -- sneer as we might if we do not consider those to be part of major mainstream press, they are read by the majority of people and the written press in this country have not got the foreign staff.

The Profit Margin

Blood and guts don't sell news, says videojournalist Jane Kokan. But even if it did, CBC Bureau Chief Wivina Belmonte argues that the "horror factor" should be used less.

Jane Kokan, videojournalist

I just wanted to say that the news gathering industry is a billion dollar, million dollar whatever industry, as is the arms trade What makes papers sell, what makes anything sell in the news gathering business is for example sticking on a picture of Lady Diana on the Daily Telegraph -- sales for that day will go up 35%. They've even done surveys on that.

Put a picture of a limbless orphan from Khabul on the front page of the Daily Telegraph or whatever, sales will probably drop 30%. We have a new station coming on the air in 1997, Channel 5, will that deliver more conscientious news to our living room, maybe yes, maybe not.

"You put blood and guts on the front page, people won't buy the paper. You put on a smiling Lady Di, that's what people want to see."

But at the end of the day there's profit margins, every major broadcaster or broadsheet paper out there has to appease the advertisers. At the end of the day we are fighting battles with what keeps the news gathering industry afloat. You've got to appease the guys that pay for the advertising. At the end of the day, you put blood and guts on the front page, people won't buy the paper. You put on a smiling Lady Di, that's what people want to see. Anyway, that's all I have to say.

Martha Gellhorn

"That's the idea of a free press, of course it's not free. It's driven by profit."

That's the idea of a free press, of course it's not free. It's driven by profit, it's driven mainly I suppose by profit, and also by the politics of the person who owns it or the Corporation that owns it so that there isn't much room for the oddballs, the non profit making thing. Yes if they'd rather see Princess Diana and that sells the paper, that's what will be on the front page, that's very discouraging when you wish that you had something better.

But it is, the profit motive basically that drives our free press, plus of course the opinion of the proprietor. If the proprietor's right wing, so is the paper. If the proprietor is a trust like The Guardian then it isn't, so - free?- I suppose you can sort of shop around and try to find some place that'll carry your stuff but it's not a free press in that sense.

Wivina Belmonte, CBC

Just in terms of what you were saying Jane, the blood and guts, just to show blood and

Sixty Years of Journalism

Extracts from Martha Gellhorn's Work

Martha Gellhorn's journalism spans over sixty years, from the covering of the Spanish Civil War through to an investigative piece on the organized murder of children in Brazil, written earlier this year. We asked some of today's leading women correspondent's to read extracts from various of her works, giving us a quick tour through twentieth century history, and insight into a woman who helped set the news agenda.

On the Spanish Civil War
(read by Janine di Giovanni)

"In the Plaza Major, the shoeblacks stand around the edges of the square, with their little boxes of creams and brushes, and passers-by stop and have their shoes polished as they read a paper or gossip together. When the shells fall too heavily, the shoeblacks pick up their boxes and retreat a little way into a side street.

So now the square is empty, though people are leaning close against the houses around it, and the shells are falling so fast that there is almost no time between them to hear them coming, only the steady roaring as they land on the granite cobblestones.

Then for a moment it stops. An old woman, with a shawl over her shoulders, holding a terrified thin little boy by the hand, runs out into the square. You know what she is thinking: she is thinking she must get the child home, you are always safer in your own place, with the things you know. Somehow you do not believe you can get killed when you are sitting in your own parlour, you never think that. She is in the middle of the square when the next one comes.

A small piece of twisted steel, hot and very sharp, sprays off from the shell; it takes the little boy in the throat. The old woman stands there, holding the hand of the dead child, looking at him stupidly, not saying anything, and men run out toward her to carry the child. At their left, on the side of the square, is a huge brilliant sign which says: GET OUT OF MADRID."

On the Normandy Invasion
(read by Kate Adie)

"... We saw the coast of France and suddenly we were in the midst of the armada of the invasion. People will be writing about this sight for a hundred years and whoever saw it will never forget it. First it seemed incredible; there could not be so many ships in the world. Then it seemed incredible as a feat of planning; if there were so many ships, what genius it required to get them here, what amazing and unimaginable genius. After the first shock of wonder and admiration, one began to look around and see separate details. There were destroyers and battleships and transports, a floating city of huge vessels anchored before the green cliffs of Normandy. Occasionally you would see a gun flash or perhaps only hear a distant roar, as naval guns fired far over those hills. Small craft beetled around in a curiously jolly way. It looked like a lot of fun to race from shore to ships in snub-nosed boats beating up the spray. It was no fun at all, considering the mines and obstacles that remained in the water, the sunken tanks with only their radio antennae showing above water, the drowned bodies that still floated past. On an LCT near us washing was hung up on a line, and between the loud explosions of mines being detonated on the beach dance music could be heard coming from its radio. Barrage balloons, always looking like comic toy elephants, bounced in the high wind above the massed ships, and invisible planes droned behind the grey ceiling of cloud. Troops were unloading from big ships to heavy cement barges or to light craft, and on the shore, moving up four brown roads that scarred the hillside, our tanks clanked slowly and steadily forward.

Then we stopped noticing the invasion, the ships, the ominous beach, because the first wounded had arrived. An LCT drew alongside our ship, pitching in the waves; a soldier in a steel helmet shouted up to the crew at the aft rail, and a wooden box looking like a lidless coffin was lowered on a pulley, and with the greatest difficulty, bracing themselves against the movement of their boat, the men on the LCT laid a stretcher inside the box. The box was raised to our deck and out of it was lifted a man who was closer to being a boy than a man, dead white and seemingly dying. The first wounded man to be brought to that ship for safety and care was a German prisoner."

On Dachau
(read by Emily Buchanan)

"The American soldier in the plane said, 'We got to talk about it.' You cannot talk about it very well because there is a kind of shock that sets in and makes it almost unbearable to remember what you have seen. I have not talked about the women who were moved to Dachau three weeks ago from their own concentration camps. Their crime was that they were Jewish. There was a lovely girl from Budapest, who somehow was still lovely, and the woman with mad eyes who had watched her sister walk into the gas chamber at Auschwitz and been held back and refused the right to die with her sister, and the Austrian woman who pointed out calmly that they all had only the sleazy dresses they wore on their backs, they had never had anything more, and that they worked outdoors sixteen hours a day too in the long winters, and that they too were 'corrected,' as the Germans say, for any offence, real or imaginary.

I have not talked about how it was the day the American Army arrived, though the prisoners told me. In their joy to be free, and longing to see their friends who had come at last, many prisoners rushed to the fence and died electrocuted. There were those who died cheering, because that effort of happiness was more than their bodies could endure. There were those who died because now they had food, and they ate before they could be stopped, and it killed them. I do not know words to describe the men who have survived this horror for years, three years, five years, ten years, and whose minds are as clear and unafraid as the day they entered."

London, 1967
(read by Karen Curry)

"As for me, I had seen enough dead bodies, and enough refugees, and enough destroyed villages and could not bear to see any more. It was useless to go on telling people what war was like since they went on obediently accepting war. To feel useless or helpless is the way most people feel, when faced with great public acts, and it is a bad way to feel but also an excuse. If you can do nothing to change events or rescue your fellow men, you are free to live your own life, and living one's own life is always more pleasant than the exhausted scrabbling role of a responsible citizen.

I based my life successively in Mexico, Italy, London and East Africa, beautiful places to live. I wrote fiction because I love to, and journalism from curiosity which has, I think, no limits and ends only with death. Though I have long lost the innocent faith that journalism is a guiding light, I still believe it is a lot better than total darkness. Somebody has to bring the news as we cannot all see for ourselves."

On the Invasion of Panama
(read by Anna Maria Tremonti)

"The Spanish word for totally destitute is *damnificado*. The people who ran from their burning collapsing houses in Chorrillo, with the clothes on their backs, saving their lives and nothing else were *los damnificados de Chorrillo*. I wanted to hear their stories, exactly what happened on the night of the Invasion and what was happening to them now. The Panamanian journalists said they were not allowed to see them; maybe I could get in.

Three thousand *damnificados* are housed on an unused US airfield. The US army built windowless plywood cubicles for most of them in an empty hangar. The cubicles are three meters by three meters. The high, shadowed building is at least cool; the overflow suffocates in army tents. Another five hundred *damnificados* camp in two city schools.

I got to the hangar entrance and was stopped. As I had no press credentials of any kind, I made a bullying scene, saying that if I could not speak to these refugees the authorities must have something to hide. The camp director, from the Panamanian Red Cross, conceded that he would let me in if the '*Señora*', the government representative, gave me a letter. I returned to Panama. After infuriating telephone calls, trying to find this lady, she appeared at my hotel, a nice oligarchy aristocrat. She wrote a note and telephoned the Red Cross director to expect me.

I went back. This time I got no farther than the guard post. The camp director came to meet me, all welcoming smiles, and took the note. But the American lieutenant on duty, eight feet tall, white, swathed in bandoliers, hefting his M-16 (a seriously threatening weapon), said: No. I did not have a 'seal' (a press card from Southern Command?); my name was not on his roster.

I observed that the Panamanian authority and the camp director gave me permission to talk to Panamanian citizens and I did not see what the US army had to do with it.

'Anybody can write a letter,' said the lieutenant, holding the note. 'I have my orders.' The camp director, who of course knew the handwriting and knew his superior had agreed to my visit, stood beside the lieutenant, looking at the ground. It was a public humiliation, delivered with indifference. US Southern Command rules, OK.

I said to the camp director, in Spanish, 'You live under an army of occupation.'

He closed his eyes for a second and said softly, 'What can we do?'

I said, 'You have my full sympathy.'

He said, 'Thank you, *Señora*,' and we shook hands.

Wales, 1992
(Read by Hilary Bowker)

"At this moment (June 1992) there is good and full reporting of the senseless civil war in Bosnia because ex-Yugoslavia does not affect the status of our governments. This reporting has wakened strong public feeling; the press is indeed dangerous; it influences hearts and minds. Though briefly. The Kurds and Shias are out of the news but not out of misery. What has become of the starving war-mangled people of Liberia? By the time this book appears, there will surely be another war or the Bosnian conflict will have spread, and if our governments are not directly involved, we will briefly get good reporting.

But when the pride and power of our governments is invested, post-war reporting is now the only way we can learn what really happened. Like an autopsy. Our chance for true post-mortem information depends on the working press, and the permission of its proprietors. We do not have a free press, another illusion.

The means of communication are owned by individuals or corporations who decide what they want to publish in words or photography. They have their own political attitudes towards government. Some are independent, some are enthusiastically servile; none are crazy about standing up alone against current opinion. Dissident views are not readily welcomed.

I am no longer sure that the general public wants to know what actually happened if 'our boys' are mixed up in the ugly mess that is war. Perhaps the public prefers patriotic ignorance. I don't know."

Brazil, 1996
(read by Giselle Portenier)

"We piled into a taxi, Alec taking up most of the rear space with stocky Mr da Silva and skinny Mrs Hereira, and the little girl and the baby distributed on laps. As the oldest and money-bags I sat in front. We drove for miles. We passed the fateful Lobato railway station, a dingy black building on a slight rise, with waste ground around it. I could not see why this should have been a favoured meeting place for kids. Slanting steps, hidden by a high black wall, led up to a roofed area also hidden by a high parapet wall. The taxi stopped in a sort of bay. After this there were no streets, only narrow dirt paths between the shacks. I told the taxi driver he could go: there was a bus stop within walking distance. 'No,' Alec shouted in a high frantic voice, 'I am not walking through here. I am not going to. I want a car.' 'In broad daylight,' I said. 'You're afraid to walk here in broad daylight?' The taxi driver said he'd like to come along, he was interested. Alec calmed down.

Cross-roads, the worst black township outside Cape Town was luxurious compared to this. There the shacks had plenty of space between them, room to plant and build little patios. A wide main street ran between the shacks. In Lobato only footpaths led between the rows of hovels that leaned against each other. An open sewer lined part of the path and there was a large stagnant puddle, covered by half-submerged planks. The sun must have absorbed the stench of all this dark watery sludge. We passed a faded blue-painted shack, made of irregular bits of board with rusty screening instead of windows. Thin rag curtains were drawn behind the screens. It seemed unsteady, about to collapse. This was the home of Jose Jorge da Silva, aged 19, the oldest of the murdered boys, whose father had not come to the meeting at Cedeca."