Tim Page: a personal memoir

Tim Page died on the 24th of August in the house that he and his partner, Marianne Harris, built in a clearing on the edge of Bellingen Forest. The house is homely, hung with prints of Tim's photographs and lined with his Buddhas and books. From the verandah where he sat each morning, the view down the clearing is of stands of towering grey gum and ironbark. It is a place of peace, but it took Tim a long journey to be there.

The obituaries that appeared in the days after his death, online and in newspapers from London to Los Angeles mostly focused on when he was a combat photographer during the Vietnam War, on the fact that he was wounded four times, on the drugs and sex and rock-and-roll of those years. They referred to Page's cameo appearance in Michael Herr's *Dispatches* to claim that he thought war was 'glamourous'. And they mentioned that he was probably the model for the manic, doped-up photojournalist played by Dennis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now*.

More perceptive was the tribute of fellow photojournalist Ben Bohane writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who noted that, first and foremost, Page was a humanist, "always alive to the power of photography and art to change perceptions and highlight the folly of war." No-one mentioned that Tim was also someone haunted by death, not least his own, and driven to discover some meaning in his life that could transcend it.

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Tim Page and I first met in Vientiane, Laos, in 1963 in the compound of the US Agency for International Development. Like me, Tim had heard in Bangkok that USAID was hiring third country nationals (not American, not Lao). He was broke and his Thai visa was about to expire, so he decided to try his luck.

And his luck held. After convincing the personnel department that the extensive knowledge of temperate forests he claimed to have would be of inestimable value in tropical Laos, Tim was hired on probation and directed to agriculture. The job he landed was to manage a gang of Lao labourers assigned to plant gardens in the high-security American housing compound, to which a *falang* (non-Lao) foreman was required to gain entry. This entailed making garden beds in the compound and driving out to look for plants in the forest. I was in agricultural extension.

As Tim had nowhere to stay, I took him back to my room in the ramshackle Somboun Hotel, originally three storeys of two-room apartments for visiting French colonial officials. There he took up residence on my couch, and as we were both in Laos to save money and move on, we agreed to share the rent. And so began a friendship of sixty years, close enough for us to call each other 'brother'.

Over the days that followed, we talked endlessly, filling in biographies, comparing travel experiences. Tim was adopted. His birth father had drowned when his ship was torpedoed during the war, and his young mother had given him up for adoption. He'd lived a happy middle-class life with his adoptive parents, but dropped out of school after O-levels. His forestry qualifications consisted of planting a lot of trees. Hard work, but it got him his first motorbike. A serious smash through no fault of his led to his first stay in hospital and an early love affair. Once discharged, Page fled with his pregnant girlfriend to Holland, leaving a short note for his parents that he was off to see the world. When the girl's parents tracked her down and hauled her back to England, Tim exchanged his motor bike and the compensation cheque for his accident for a second-hand VW Kombi, and carried on.

For the next year and a half, Tim headed east. His goal was to reach Australia. Money was in short supply, but fellow travellers picked up along the way shared costs. Even so, he was forced to sell off most of what he owned – camera, clothes and eventually the Kombi. The last got him enough to travel on to Rangoon, and then Bangkok. The road trip taught him three things. One was to seize every opportunity that came his way; the second was the sociability inherent in doing drugs – turn someone on and you have an instant friend; and the third was that friends will do things for you. And they did. All his life.

Tim liked Laos. Opium was legal and in the Morning Market old ladies sat between giant cones of tobacco on one side and marijuana on the other. His Lao workers smoked huge spliffs of half and half, which Tim happily shared. They even fashioned a bamboo bong for him, and filled it with the best herb. As a result, progress on the gardens was slow. Page reckoned he'd have a job for months.

In *Page After Page*, Tim's frank and detailed memoir published in 1988, he refers to me as the elder brother he never had. I introduced him to existentialism, beginning with Camus and Kafka, and as Tim had driven through India not knowing one Hindu god from another, to a more serious study of Buddhism. And then there was my interest in history and the First Indochina War. Tim became an avid reader. Over the course of his life, he built a considerable library on the 'orient' as he called it, and on the history of war.

Laos gave Tim time to pause, to put his kaleidoscope of hectic travel into perspective, aided by induced altered states of consciousness. We got high, went to temples, and attended festivals. What changed our

lives, mine and his, was the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. United Press International's correspondent in Vientiane was despatched to Saigon. Before he left gave me a two-hour lesson on how to cover for him, and never came back. So I became UPI stringer in Laos. A year later, when USAID eventually discovered I was moonlighting as a journalist and I lost my job, I was promoted to staff correspondent.

By then Tim and I had moved to a share house with another young would-be journo named Simon Dring, later to make his name with Reuters and the BBC. Tim meanwhile had bought himself a 250cc Cotton. Mechanical things fascinated him: 'toys' he called them. Another priority was a camera to replace the one he had sold, subsequently upgraded to the superior Pentax I brought him back from a spell on the UPI news desk in Tokyo.

Tim sold his first photographs to UPI when a technician accidentally tripped the 50 calibre machinegun he was reloading on a T28 fighter-bomber. The burst detonated a second plane, and the resulting chain reaction blew up half the Lao Air Force. One shot showed an aircraft framed by twisted shapes of Marston matting, composed to create maximum visual impact, to tell the story. Page had a natural eye. He saw in frames and images. I think that's what UPI's photo editors picked on as I submitted more of his work. When later he began writing, he wrote that way too: words sketching images remarkable for remembered detail. Even when part of his brain went missing, Tim retained his extraordinary memory.

The break for both of us came with the abortive Lao coup d'état of January 1965. An attempt the previous April engineered by the ambitious commanders of the Vientiane army garrison and the paramilitary police to overthrow the Neutralist government of Prince Souvanna Phouma had fizzled out, providing few photo ops. In the months since, distrust had grown between the erstwhile plotters, so when former Lao strongman General Phoumi Nosavan attempted a comeback, military leaders seized the opportunity to get rid of potential rivals.

The fighting that followed closed not only the airport and the border, but the telegraph office as well. As the army lobbed mortar shells across the city at police HQ, I bashed out copy in the Constellation Hotel while Tim rode around on his motorbike and snapped the damage. Together we ran rings around the competition, but had no way to get the story out. In desperation I packaged everything up and told Tim to get himself, one way or the other, down to the American air base at Udorn.

How Tim managed to talk himself and his motorbike across the Mekong with the Thai border closed and no visa, drive 60 kms to the base, get through security, find a courier, and notify the Bangkok bureau to pick up the package I can only guess. His account was laconic, but he was elated. UPI was impressed.

Days later, with the American presence in Vietnam on the increase, Tim was offered a position as a photo stringer in the Saigon bureau. We poured him onto a plane dressed in a dark suit and bowler hat. How else would you go to war?

Sending Page off with a final drink (with left, Tammy Arbuckle, Reuters, and Garrick Utley, NBC)

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Tim called Vietnam his ‘formative country’. And he was right. Vietnam made his name as a crazy-brave combat photographer. It was also where he gained his reputation for excessive drug use and manic exploits. Both had an element of truth, but neither was without reason. It didn’t take Tim long to realise that he could make a lot more money free-lancing on contract for *Time/Life* or *Paris Match* than on salary for UPI – providing he took the kind of photographs they wanted. And what they wanted were close-up shots of American GIs in combat, winning the war.

Vietnam was just the war for that kind of photography, because the press – correspondents, photographers and TV crews – were free to accompany any combat unit they liked. Nobody was ‘embedded’ with the Marines or the First Air Cav or the Big Red One. You could hitchhike helicopters out of Tan Son Nhut air base to anywhere in the country, as I soon discovered when UPI sent me too to Saigon.

Accompanying troops on operation was especially dangerous for photographers because they had to be where the action was. There was a limit to how many photographs a freelancer, as Page had become,

could sell of hovering helicopters and soldiers trekking through rice paddies. There had to be action, preferably with casualties.

The press was briefed before each operation, and the inevitable question was: which unit was most likely to see action, the first wave flying in, the platoon on the flank, the blocking force? There wasn't much point photographers hanging out at Company HQ. The alternative was to wait with the medivac choppers, fly in with them on call, and get shots of casualties loading aboard. If these were heavy, however, and the return flight was full, you could get caught in the field while competitors got pix on the wire.

Photographers in Vietnam faced the same dangers as the troops they accompanied. From 1946 to 1975, 135 photographers died in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos covering the First and Second Indochina wars, 72 of them on the communist side. Among those killed were some of the most outstanding combat photographers of the twentieth century, including Robert Capa, the exemplar for every photojournalist in Vietnam, who died covering the First Indochina War, and three whom Tim knew well and held in high regard: Kyoichi Sawada of UPI, Henri Huet of the Associated Press (AP) and English freelance photographer Larry Burrows.

For Page, war was not just an adventure, it was an opportunity to take on a new identity. Photography was no longer just an interest: it was what he did as a profession. Being a war photographer gave him a status he made the most of. Besides, war was exhilarating: riding helicopters into landing zones, accompanying troops on operation, or flying a ground-support mission in a Phantom jet, all stoked adrenalin.

It was also dangerous.

The first time Tim was wounded was in August 1965 during Operation Starlight, the first significant operation conducted by US ground forces in Vietnam. It was also Tim's first operation as a freelancer after leaving UPI. With no contact for two days, the press bailed out. But Tim stayed on. The combat he witnessed scored him six pages in *Paris Match*; while being wounded gained him a reputation for getting in close. So more assignments followed.

Tim's wounds consisted of three small fragments of shrapnel in his right buttock. Back in Saigon that evening, we made light of it: "Shit, Page. Call those wounds? You can't even see them. You'll have to do better than that if you want a Purple Heart!" We were all in Page's room in the narrow, concrete, four-storey house six of us had rented on a quiet back street about 15 minutes' drive from the UPI office. Only the family room on the first floor was air conditioned. We tossed for it, and Page won. In quarters above

the garage at the back lived Frankie and his wife, the couple who shopped and cooked and cleaned for us. So we called it Frankie's House.

Frankie's House gained a reputation among older members of the Saigon press corps for wild parties, with sex and drugs laid on. In truth we did hold a few good parties; but Frankie's House was our retreat from the madness of the war, in preference to drinking in the Caravelle, or hanging out in the girlie bars on Tu Do catering to GIs. In Page's room, we could roll our joints, sip our PX cognac or vodka, and lose ourselves in sound – Dvořák and Verdi (Steve Northup was an opera buff) and cool Coltrane as often as the Beach Boys or the Animals or the Rolling Stones. 'Honoraries' dropped by and spaced out – John Laurence of CBS (Jack to his friends), Sam Castan of *Look* (before he died guiding the platoon he was with out of a VC ambush), Sean Flynn (son of Errol), and more. If we needed anything in short supply, Frankie could come up with it, day or night.

Frankie's House was a UPI establishment, except for Simon Dring who was with Reuters. No photographer or reporter for the Associated Press hung out there or moved in. Honoraries came from all over: from TV correspondents like Jack Laurence to freelancers like Sean Flynn. The lease was for two years, and by the time it expired in 1967, most of us had moved on to new assignments. And yet we kept in touch over the years, to meet up again 30 years later at Tom Corpora's vineyard in Virginia, which was where this photograph was taken.

L to R: David Stuart-Fox, Tim Page, Steve Northup, Simon Dring, Joe Galloway, Martin Stuart-Fox, Robin Mannock, Tom Corpora (missing Jack Laurence) Photo: Devi Stuart-Fox

All of us in Frankie's House were young, single, and stoked to be covering what was then the biggest news story in the world. When in Saigon we attended press briefings by MACV, but mostly these were the responsibility of senior correspondents. Our assignments were operations with the Marines or the 101st Airborne or the First Air Cav, which could mean weeks away upcountry, in Danang and Qui Nhon and An Khe. Accreditation, available to anyone with a letter from their hometown paper, got you rights to the officers' mess, and C rations in the field. It was an attractive proposition for any freelancer: helicopters, action, excitement and the prospect of money and renown.

Sean Flynn was an exception. He didn't need money or recognition: as 'Son of Captain Blood', he enjoyed those already. Sean came to Vietnam with something to prove – that he was more than his father's son. He was bored with film sets. Photographing a real war gave him an opportunity to test his courage. Naturally he gravitated to Frankie's House, where he and Tim struck up a close friendship, drawn together by the camaraderie of music and drugs and what Tim referred to, in a comment to Michael Herr that he would later regret, but never retract, as the 'glamour' of war. And Sean would have agreed. But it was never a war that either believed should be fought.

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Sean was with Tim when he was wounded a second time, covering the violent suppression of anti-government Buddhist demonstrations in Danang. Shrapnel again, more serious this time because he was hit in the head and hand, though not enough to require hospitalisation.

The third time certainly did. What was supposed to be a routine assignment – a photo story on the crew of one of the Coast Guard vessels patrolling up near the Demilitarised Zone to intercept small boats smuggling arms from North Vietnam – turned into an inferno of friendly fire. Just before dawn on the second day, the vessel came under attack from three American aircraft, killing two of the crew and setting fire to the boat. Page and the remaining crew abandoned ship and spent hours in leaking dinghies before being rescued.

This time Tim was peppered with more than a hundred shrapnel fragments, and was in a bad way. I was in Danang when I heard what had happened and jumped on the first flight to Phu Bai. Tim was swathed in bandages and marginally coherent. I called a medic to staunch the puncture wound in his back that was leaking blood, assured him that he would survive, took the photograph below, and phoned the story through to Saigon.

Within a couple of days, Tim was transferred to a military hospital in Saigon, where his recovery was assisted by a steady supply of smuggled joints and thermoses of vodka. In a couple of weeks he was back in Frankie's House, but fitter in body than in mind. Each time he had been wounded had been worse than the last. In our minds, and in his too I think, was the suspicion that a fourth time would be fatal. "They didn't get you that time, Page," we told him. "But they will the next."

So Tim took time out, flying to London, then fleeing to Paris. The Six-day War was over too soon for Tim to see any fighting, but at least he was on daily freelance rates for *Time/Life* that paid him enough to live well and live high. He and Flynn returned to France, hanging out on the Riviera "in a haze of kif and incense" and tripping on LSD. On an assignment in the U.S. to photograph The Doors at the end of year, Tim was arrested along with Jim Morrison when police stopped a performance mid-concert. In *Page After Page*, Tim says little about his time in the U.S., except that it "helped let go the tension the war had bolted down". The phantoms of Vietnam were with him still.

Reporting the war as we did, operation after operation to feed the news cycle, forced us repeatedly to confront its madness and destruction, the impact its senseless and implacable violence had on the lives of terrified Vietnamese, the ceaseless threat and numbing reality of death, the horror and heroism, the courage and compassion. And from these encounters we stored images we could never erase – the dead mother, screaming children, the fearful old man pleading for his life, convinced he would be killed; and the bodies of the dead, lined up to be counted, young men and women in their prime of life, with gaping wounds or eye sockets that were no longer human in which the mud through which they had been dragged had already congealed. Or medics fighting desperately to save the life of a dying GI. Or flying out on a helicopter with legs disrespectfully draped across body bags, their contents collected a day or two after a firefight, already heavy with the stench of putrefaction.

None of us could forget what we saw. The emotions that transfixed them in memory went too deep, working their way into our psyches. Only the reassurance that we were intensively alive could banish them for a while, expressed in the compulsion to talk away the fear after cheating death again. And that was what Frankie's House allowed us to do, through the camaraderie of those whose similar experiences created a bond beyond words. The music we played, the dope we smoked brought the hours of oblivion that made it possible to go out again the next day.

Despite the distance photographers of war try to put between what they see and what they feel, the camera lens never provides an adequate shield. PTSD was not recognised by psychologists as an operational diagnosis until 1980, but looking back, the companionship and banter of Frankie's House was how we held it at bay. Temporarily. Exorcism required time and therapy, which all too often wives and partners were later called upon to provide. Throughout his life, Tim was lucky to attract some remarkably understanding women – only to lose them through his own inconsiderate behaviour (as he was the first to admit).

The brotherhood in Frankie's House went some way in allaying the immediate trauma of war. In the longer term, both writing about the war and returning to Vietnam were therapeutic. Time did both. So did other members of Frankie's House. Joe Galloway returned deeply shaken after the Battle of Ia Drang in which 237 Americans died and he was the only reporter on the ground. After the war, he and Hal Moore, commanding officer of the 7th Air Cavalry, went back to Vietnam and met with officers on the communist side – and incidentally Tim went with them. Moore and Galloway went on to write the definitive account of the battle in *We Were Soldiers Once, and Young*.

Jack Laurence defeated his own demons through writing *The Cat From Hue*, one of the finest memoirs written about the Vietnam War. In it he recounts being caught in crossfire in the cemetery at An Thai, where his Thai soundman was hit in the stomach and he and I were lucky to escape unscathed. My brother David wrote books on Bali, while Steve Northup collaborated with me on two books about Laos. Tim also eventually turned to writing, in his autobiography, his account of returning to Vietnam, and texts accompanying another half dozen books of photographs, all but one focusing on Vietnam.

Even after being shot up, Tim could never get Vietnam out of his head. The 1968 Tet offensive found him broke and miserable, envious of the photo spreads of friends and competitors. Within weeks he was back in Saigon, sharing an apartment on Tu Do Street with Sean and John Steinbeck IV. Michael Herr dropped by on his last visit to Vietnam. Tim turned him on and took him out on operations. Whatever fears and anxieties they both had were soothed by a few pipes of opium – but only to surface again.

Post-Tet the war became even crazier. The brotherhood of Frankie's House had never bought search-and-destroy as a winning strategy. The operations we covered, some on a huge scale, swept through villages, killed a few Vietnamese, and moved on. There was no follow-up; pacification was a joke; the Viet Cong simply moved back in. Body count was the most absurd metric ever devised to decide who was winning. From personal experience, we all knew how inaccurate it was. Anyone dead in black pyjamas – old men, women – counted as VC. At the outbreak of the First Indochina War, Ho Chi Minh warned the French: "You will kill ten of our soldiers for every one of yours; and we will win." The American military claimed better than ten to one, but they were no more on track to victory than the French. And they never understood why. I once asked a Marine officer if before deploying to Vietnam they had studied the French experience in the First Indochina War. "No," he said. "Why not?" "They lost" was his reply.

The body count had more malign consequences, however. Making the number of dead Vietnamese the measure of success perversely valued the dead over the living. The body count did not just dehumanise the Viet Cong – something all armies do to their enemies – it demeaned 'our' Vietnamese as well.

For Page, on operation after operation, the human cost of death and grief could never be reduced to numbers. Nor could his cameras protect him from the fear of being wounded again. He needed time out, but couldn't afford it. Two things kept him going after he went back. One was the escape provided by an island of peace in the Mekong presided over by a religious leader known, because of his diet, as the 'Coconut Monk'. Being inducted into his eclectic mix of Buddhism and Christianity, with its message of peace through neutrality, visitors from Tu Do could briefly insulate themselves from the continuing madness of war.

The second support was an unexpected love affair. Linda was visiting friends in Saigon when Tim ran into her. Previous affairs had been short-lived and carnal. This was different. Linda meant more to Tim than anyone he had ever met. She moved into the Tu Do apartment and went on retreats to Coconut Island. And she was there for him when Tim was wounded for a fourth time.

He was on his way back to Saigon when the chopper he was riding was diverted to pick up a couple of wounded grunts. Rushing to load them aboard, the NCO ahead of Tim tripped a booby trapped mine, sending a shard of metal slicing into Tim's brain. Page was pronounced DOA, 'dead on arrival', but was somehow revived. To extract the shard meant removing some 200 cc of Tim's brain. The delicate procedure saved his life. Over the next month, from operation to operation and in and out of consciousness, Tim was moved through field hospitals in Vietnam and Japan and on to the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington DC. And Linda went with him.

Sean Flynn was in Laos when he got news of Tim's injuries. He took the next flight to Saigon, in time to press a small wooden Lao Buddha into Tim's hand. Though only semi-conscious, this was the last time Tim saw Sean alive. He treasured that Buddha all his life: it was beside his bed when he died. The sight of Page, head swathed in bandages and very likely paralysed for life, shook Sean. With nothing left to prove, he was in any case ready to move on. Tim's injuries sealed the decision.

Sean spent the next year in Indonesia. In March 1970, he returned to Saigon to wind up the Tu Do apartment and retrieve his belongings. Before he left Jakarta he planted a flame tree in Joe Galloway's garden, promising to be back before it bloomed. As the war spilled over into Cambodia, however, Sean couldn't resist one last assignment. On 6 April, he and fellow photographer Dana Stone were stopped at a Khmer Rouge road block and never seen again. For years the flame tree stubbornly refused to bloom. When eventually it did, we knew that Sean was dead.

Sean's disappearance weighed on Tim. Even though determined rehabilitation improved his physical state, mentally he was a mess. *Time/Life* met all expenses, while Linda provided support. Once he was out of rehab, *Time* found Tim a sinecure assignment in Rome. But his behaviour was erratic, he was doing too many drugs, and Linda had split for India, her destination before Page waylaid her in Saigon.

Tim rented an apartment a stone's throw from the Trevi Fountain, and it was there we finally caught up again. I was recently married. Tim, on a rebound from Linda, thought that was a good move. Marriage to his current partner, Jan, might banish Vietnam. We talked about the four of us meeting up in India, doing stories together, discovering some kind of existential meaning in our peripatetic lives. Tim proposed; Jan accepted; but it was never going to work. *Time* decided they wanted someone more reliable in Rome. Back in the US, the marriage collapsed in acrimony and anger.

For Tim, the 1970s were a lost decade. As the war wound down, he was struggling mentally, haunted by his near death and Sean Flynn's disappearance. He'd been to the other side, he told me, and there was nothing there. Doing drugs was his way to forget. He bummed what he needed off friends and slept on their couches, until some crazy episode proved too much and he was asked to move on. Only *being a photographer* kept him going. Not just the occasional assignment for *Crawdaddy* or *Rolling Stone*, which never paid enough to live on for long, but the identity it conferred, signified by the cameras he always carried, by the frames he kept shooting, even while high.

All through those years in America, the spectre of Vietnam never let go – not even when the final humiliating debacle reduced it to a war no-one wanted to remember. Because for Tim and the anti-war vets he hung out with on and off, forgetting was never a possibility.

Deliverance came in a totally unexpected way, with publication of Michael Herr's *Dispatches*. The book had taken Herr ten years to write, five incapacitated by a mental breakdown caused by the war he had witnessed. By the time he wrote the chapter 'Colleagues', Flynn was long dead and he had met up again with Page. Not only did both feature in the book and the "Rock-War Musical" based upon it, but Herr let it be known that between them they had inspired his screenplay for *Apocalypse Now* in the character of the gonzo photojournalist played by Dennis Hopper. The BBC followed up, filming 'Mentioned in Dispatches' for its Arena doco series. All of a sudden Page was a celebrity. Though still "riddled" with PTSD, as he conceded in later interviews, and "battling addictions and long moments of inexplicable torture", Tim had found a way back.

It was 1980. The agonies of the seventies were over. Revulsion against the war had passed. *Dispatches* had transmuted reportage into literature and performance. With the passage of time, combat photographs came to be viewed not in anger or pain, but in remembrance, as collectors' items. A new Vietnam had emerged, unifying north and south. In 1978 its armies had overthrown the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. Two years later, eager for international recognition, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam celebrated its fifth anniversary and Page was contracted to cover celebrations for the *Observer*.

As many veterans have discovered, returning to Vietnam can assuage the traumas of war. For Tim, that first trip back was cathartic. There were no 'toys' to ride, no adrenalin rush accompanying troops in combat, no Americans (apart from a few journalists). What he discovered was an entirely different Vietnam, a country and people determined to forge a new identity in which war served not as incapacitating memory, but as inspirational motivation. The images he had made before were of Vietnamese as victims, faces contorted in grief or blank with terror. Encounters in 1980 were with a people at peace, proud to have won their war, magnanimous in welcoming old foes.

Vietnam at peace provided the counterpoint to Vietnam at war. It altered the perspective in which Tim viewed the war, and gave new meaning to his images of it. What previously had evoked the adrenalin-driven exhilaration experienced accompanying troops into combat came to carry an entirely different message: that war was futile folly. As Tim liked to say: 'A good war photograph is a good anti-war photograph.' It was this changed perspective that both gave him new purpose and helped him contain his own agonies.

Contain, but never eradicate. How could it? Brain damage had left Tim partially paralysed despite rehabilitation and he limped for the rest of his life – a disability that led to several falls. And long after, suppressed fears surfaced in his hatred of general anaesthetics: the disorientation, the decent into

darkness. Reconnecting with Buddhism – in Vietnam, in Laos, in Sri Lanka – also helped his healing. The scent of incense, meditation, the reverence of ritual, all served to ground him, to instil acceptance.

In December 1980, the communist regime in Laos celebrated its own anniversary. As in Vietnam, for the first time in five years a select few Westerners were allowed to attend. As there was no category for academics, I applied for a press visa. All the same really: academic equals journalist equals spy. When I arrived in Vientiane, I was surprised to find Page there before me. A last-minute decision apparently. I was staying at the old Constellation Hotel, renamed the Viang Vilay. Page turned up towards midnight, stoned, cameras swinging, delighted by my surprise.

It had been a decade since Rome, punctuated only by news through mutual friends and occasional post cards. Tim's always began “High?!” (and you had to be to make much sense of the Page-speak that followed) and were signed “Vulmit” (‘Tim luv’ backwards). Over Bier Lao we filled in the intervening years: my return to India and covering the birth of Bangladesh; Tim's lows and highs (in lurid detail). I told him I was going to do a book on Laos. Tim liked the idea. Back in the UK, he convinced Thames and Hudson to come up with a contract for his first book, *Tim Page’s Nam*.

It was a joyous reunion. Page was back to form, photographing everything. We revisited old haunts; checked out markets; dropped into temples to burn incense; and took the measure of Lao Marxism. Despite a total ban on drugs, Tim had discovered not one but three backrooms offering a pipe of opium, his cosy choice presided over by a skeletal Chinese he promptly nicknamed ‘Belsen’.

Page had a way with minders: he simply disregarded them and wandered off. Around the city we could do what we liked, but on organised functions we were accompanied by officials from what Tim dubbed the Ministry of Pointless Affairs. At one excruciating briefing on the triumphs of Laos’ failing cooperativization program, Page caused consternation among the cadres by demanding to know if the total number of ducks included fertile eggs. The question was translated: bewildered discussion gave way to angry looks. Page was delighted and spent the rest of the day photographing every duck he could see.

Tim was grateful for the quick thinking of one minder, however. While on a trip to what was then the country’s only hydroelectric dam, Page pointed his camera at a Vietnamese guard and found himself staring down the barrel of an AK47. Quickly his minder intervened: the weapon was lowered, and the guard saluted. When Tim asked why the change of heart, his minder grinned; “I told him you were Russian.”

Over the next several years, Tim returned time and again to Vietnam and Cambodia, trying to discover what had happened to Sean Flynn and fellow photographer Dana Stone. One lead led to another. The CIA handed over a file, but it was inconclusive. Tim pressed the Vietnamese to search whatever Khmer Rouge archives they had carried off to Hanoi, but again nothing. In Cambodia Tim tracked down villagers who remembered seeing (or hearing of) two foreigners, one short and one tall, kept prisoner in this hamlet or that. Some skeletal remains were discovered, but they didn't belong to Sean or Dana. The conclusion Tim eventually came to, as he told me later, was that Dana probably died of malaria, and that Sean was executed by a blow to the back of the skull. But we shall never know.

The frames Tim made in Vietnam in the 1980s and 1990s, portraits of children, people going about their daily lives, the war-damaged and the elderly, reflect a compassion for the human condition grounded, I believe, in his own suffering. At first Tim was driven by the need to find out what had happened to Sean Flynn. But in time, deeper motives were in play. It was as if he recognised, despite his injuries, that he owed the celebrity he enjoyed to this country and its people, and felt obligated to give something back in return.

What he gave were three projects that meant so much to the Vietnamese that they awarded Tim a Friendship Medal. And when Tim died, the Vietnamese ambassador to Australia sent a wreath and personal condolences. The first project was setting up the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF); the second putting together a collection of photographs by the photographers *on both sides* killed during the First and Second Indochina wars; and the third was publicizing the plight of war orphans and children deformed by Agent Orange.

Tim launched the IMMF with the support of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Bangkok in 1991 to provide training for young journalists, photographers, radio broadcasters and TV correspondents. Initial funding came from auctioning signed photographs by war photographers, to which Tim contributed generously. In all, the Foundation organised 23 regional training courses and 25 workshops over the years, bringing together media students from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia with their counterparts from Thailand and Myanmar. Sessions were mostly given by former war correspondents and photographers who imparted their skills and expertise gratis. The program ran until 2009.

Tim's second project began an act of remembrance for Sean Flynn and Dana Stone, but soon expanded to include all the photojournalists killed between 1945 and 1975 on both sides during both the First and Second Indochina wars. The decision to include photographers on the communist side opened doors for Tim, and he spent weeks tracking down families in Hanoi who might have kept fading prints or

mouldering negatives. The exhibition that Tim eventually compiled with the help of former Associated Press photo editor Horst Faas toured the world and remains on permanent display in the War Remnants Museum in Saigon. *Requiem*, the book of the exhibition, stands as a moving tribute to the professionalism and courage of all the photographers who died in Indochina. [Later Tim compiled another volume of photographs just from the communist side, culled from the negatives he hunted down in Hanoi,]

Tim had one final act to perform to enshrine the memory of Sean Flynn. In 2013, we were together at the dedication of a monument in Phnom Penh to the 37 foreign and local correspondents and journalists who died or went missing in Cambodia between 1970 and 1975. Engraved in the black granite along with the names of Sean Flynn and Dana Stone was Kyoichi Sawada, the outstanding UPI photographer I had worked closely with in Vietnam.

Agent Orange haunted Tim. He knew that he had been exposed in areas in Vietnam defoliated by the herbicide. The unflinching photographs he took in the orphanage for abandoned victims of Agent Orange outside Saigon and of worse cases in the Peace Village ward of Tu Du Hospital were confronting and heartrending, but he included a selection on his website. They are still there at timpage.com.au. When his diagnosis of incurable pancreatic cancer came through, Tim was in no doubt Agent Orange was to blame.

The books Tim wrote and compiled during the 1990s, *Requiem* among them, cemented both his celebrity status and his place in the photographic history of the Vietnam War. But they signalled more: a deeper engagement with what is usually referred to as the ‘human condition’, expressed in images reflecting sympathy and compassion for the pain and joy of everyday existence. Throughout this decade, memories of the adrenalin-driven exhilaration of war had been progressively eclipsed by gradual discovery of a far more profound reality – the historical and spiritual roots of people and place. Not for nothing is the book Tim published in 2001 that best portrays this ‘other’ Vietnam entitled *The Mindful Moment*.

Every time I got to England during the 1990s I caught up with Tim, whether in London or down in Kent where his archives (including not only negatives and prints, but everything from toy helicopters to old postcards) were housed in a converted barn loaned to him by one of his admirers. His third marriage to actress Clare Clifford ended, as had the previous two, in acrimony and divorce, and for years Tim took little interest in his only son, Kit. But Tim was immensely proud when Kit won a place in Westminster Choir School, and regularly informed me about how well he was doing. After Kit graduated, he came out to Australia at long last to meet his father, and the relationship continued. To Tim’s great joy, Kit was able to spend a week with him in the month before he died.

It was a surprise to me when Tim told me he was migrating to Australia. He had met Marianne Harris in England. Her background was in television, on the production side. When she returned home, Tim came too. They settled in Brisbane, a couple of suburbs away. So from that point on, we saw a lot more of each other. By then I was teaching at The University of Queensland, and Tim was wondering what to do. Griffith University included photography in its creative arts program, and was only too happy to include workshops with a famous war photographer. For a while Tim contemplated doing a PhD, a project we discussed at length; but in the end he settled for a position as adjunct professor.

Tim immediately felt at home in Australia: he called it "a grown-up country". The living was good; the natives were friendly; and Marianne had contacts across the media. In effect, she became his manager, arranging interviews and exhibitions and speaking engagements. Photographs Tim took of Australian gunners in Vietnam featured in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Even before he became an Australian citizen, Page improbably served as an Australia Day ambassador at celebrations in towns in western Queensland. And everywhere he went he dressed the part: T-shirt, open bush shirt, cotton daks – and always a Cambodian *krama* around his neck. Plus, of course, his cameras.

It wasn't long before publicity attracted acolytes. Younger professional photographers already knew Tim's work. Reading *Page After Page* had inspired some to follow his example: take off around the world seeking conflicts and crises – Afghanistan, Iraq – or just the humanity evident in Tim's later work. The best of them came together to create the Degrees South photographic collective. Would-be photographers hung on Tim's words at workshops and exhibitions. Helpers and hangers-on dropped in. Page was generous with his time, offering vicarious insights and advice in equal measure.

Celebrity brought Page's work to the attention of wealthy collectors, of the box-sets he produced of his best war photographs. It also brought him contract assignments – in the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, for the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in Cambodia and the United Nations Development Programme in Afghanistan, along with exhibitions of his work. And everywhere he went he added to his own archive of poignant portraits and desolate landscapes.

In his last decade, Tim's stature rested in equal measure on legend (the identity I had watched him craft) and longevity (survival as almost the last Vietnam War photographer in the public eye). Of those who had survived the war, Eddie Adams and Horst Faas, Catherine Leroy and Philip Jones Griffith were all dead; Rick Merron had disappeared from view; Nick Ut kept to himself in California. Only Tim and Don McCullin remained active. Elder icon was a role he not only relished, but accepted as his due.

When Tim and Marianne moved to Bellingen, we continued to keep in regular contact. On my last visit, Tim was at his avuncular best, full of plans for future projects. A couple of months later I phoned him for his birthday. The diagnosis of pancreatic cancer he had just received had come as a shock. We had talked about death before: given his history of injuries and falls, it was not surprising the subject was never far from his mind. Tim always believed he would die of a heart attack: cancer never entered his calculations. But already it had spread to his liver and lungs. He talked about having a year left, perhaps even two – long enough to put his archives in order and perhaps complete a book of contact sheets from his time in America in the 1970s. But it was not to be.

Over the weeks that followed we talked quite often. True to form, Tim nicknamed his cancer "the triffid", that alien organism eating him inside. Chemotherapy held out some slight hope, but Tim was reluctant to go down that path. In the course of an hour's conversation his mood would flip from hope to resignation, from defiance to fear in the face of what he knew to be inevitable. I talked of the legacy he had left, his photographs, his books, He was grateful for the messages he received from friends around the world as his condition became known.

The end approached quicker than anyone anticipated. The triffid had got him, he told me. He was skin and bones, his pain dulled by heavy doses of morphine in addition to the cannabis he continued to smoke. I booked the next flight to Bellingen. Tim was drifting in and out of consciousness, but he knew I was there. He knew too that he was dying, though his body fought on. The last afternoon Marianne was exhausted. Friends were helping. I took his hand. "Let go, Tim," I said. "I want to let go, but I don't want to let go," he whispered back. They were the last words he said to me. I walked out into the sun. Minutes later when I returned, Tim had gone.

It was somehow fitting, I felt, that as we had been together at the beginning, I should be there at the end. The next morning we formed a small honour guard, just five of us, as Tim's body was wheeled out of the house to the undertaker's van. Salut, old friend. You lived one helluva life!