

Consorting with the Enemy: American Reporters and "Red Sources" at the Korean Truce Talks, 1951-1953

John Jenks

Volume 22, numéro 1, spring 2002

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs22_1art07

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Jenks, J. (2002). Consorting with the Enemy: American Reporters and "Red Sources" at the Korean Truce Talks, 1951-1953. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 22(1), 89-105.

Consorting with the Enemy: American Reporters and "Red Sources" at the Korean Truce Talks, 1951-1953

by *John Jenks*

John Jenks is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois.

Through the Cold War's ebb and flow, there were always contacts across the line, even at the tensest of times. One of the most remarkable was the information arrangement made between American and Communist-affiliated journalists at the Korean truce talks first at Kaesong and then at Panmunjom from July 1951 to July 1953. The American correspondents acted upon a journalistic ideology that allowed them to defy the United Nations Command (UNC) and "fraternize" with the enemy during wartime. While still staying wholly committed to the Cold War consensus - a belief in the goodness of American and the evil of monolithic Communism.¹ This experience not only demonstrated the flexibility of journalism in the Cold War, but also probably made it easier for other journalists to use Communist sources and information - and even travel behind the lines - in the Vietnam War. Reporters in Vietnam, however, were able to push the boundaries further because the divisions in American society over the war had expanded the range of what was considered legitimate news in Vietnam.

Many historical accounts of American journalism in the Korean War have criticized the reporters' embrace of the Cold War consensus and their blindness to many important stories of brutality, racism, and military incompetence. British journalist and historian Phillip Knightley's *The First Casualty* is the most comprehensive example of this approach.² A more charitable account by Peter Braestrup describes a clash between military and journalistic cultures, with journalists frequently challenging the military and writing many critical stories.³ But a close look at the Panmunjom truce talks suggests that neither approach is completely adequate. Instead, an approach taking in both anti-communism and the professional ideology of American journalism best explains the often-surreal situation.⁴ The emphasis within this ideology of journalistic autonomy, competitiveness, and skepticism allowed journalists to resist official pressures and to turn to enemy sources when no other information was available. Despite criticism from the military, the journalists still saw themselves as tough anti-Communists who just happened to be using Communist sources.

During the 30 years before the war, American journalists had created an unwritten system of professional beliefs, standards and practices - an ideology - to which most Korea correspondents adhered.⁵ Although these tenets were sometimes contradictory and not always observed, all were in play at some point during the Korean negotiations. The relevant parts of this professional ideology include:

- Dependence on authority: Journalists had come to rely on official sources of information, generally middle to upper-level officials. But there was ambivalence about

the relationship, especially if these officials were suspected of lying or hiding information.⁶

- **Adversarial Coverage:** Journalists frequently argued that they had a special obligation to take a strong adversarial position toward the government and, as the public's "watchdog," expose official incompetence, wrongdoing, and waste. This was an important part of their self-image and their relationship with their readers.⁷
- **Autonomy:** Individual journalists had a certain degree of control over what they reported and how they wrote it. They prided themselves on their relative independence from direct state pressures, even as they relied extensively on official statements.⁸
- **Distrust of public relations (PR):** Government and military public relations grew exponentially in the 1940s, pre-packaging facts and isolating journalists from newsmakers. Most journalists disliked these PR professionals, whose jobs offended their sense of purpose and professionalism.⁹
- **Objectivity:** Reporters also relied on objectivity as a strategic ritual in which accurately quoting officials and presenting properly cited facts indemnified a reporter against charges of bias.¹⁰ This occurred even when reporters knew their sources were lying.¹¹
- **Balance:** Reporters generally tried to get the viewpoints of both sides in a story, but seldom gave the Communist side equal credence, if it was included at all.¹²
- **Competitiveness:** An exclusive story - a scoop - was a treasured prize for any journalist and guaranteed praise from superiors and envy of colleagues. Although competition had become less ferocious by the early 1950s, reporters still eagerly sought scoops on even comparatively minor issues.¹³

This ideology had its limits. Journalists generally stayed within the bounds of the Cold War consensus, in what media scholar Daniel Hallin has called the "sphere of legitimate controversy." This would include disputes over strategy, tactics, and personalities, but would not include stories that questioned the basic principles of US Cold War policy or ones that granted legitimacy to the Communist point of view. Those fell into the "sphere of deviancy."¹⁴

For instance, among Western correspondents in Korea it was known that the anti-Communist South Korean army and police were brutalizing and killing thousands of political prisoners and suspected leftists, including women with children. Mainstream British newspapers reported these atrocities; the American press largely ignored them, until 50 years after the fact.¹⁵

The first year of the war was volatile. After the 25 June North Korean invasion across the 38th parallel, Americans reinforced the South Korean forces, but soon were retreating alongside their allies to the southern tip of the country. General Douglas MacArthur's 15 September landing at Inchon reversed the fortunes and brought US forces to the Chinese

border, which triggered massive Chinese intervention and led to another headlong retreat before the lines stabilized near the 38th parallel.

Given the Cold War consensus and the journalistic ideology, the coverage in the first year was predictable. Correspondents identified with the troops in the field and the anti-Communist cause. While reporting military disasters and official bungling as well as triumphs. For example, Associated Press' Tom Lambert's account of the US retreat in July 1950 praised one unit's gallant performance against "tremendous odds," then quoted a front-line soldier saying: "'You don't fight two tank-equipped divisions with .30 caliber carbines. I never saw such a useless damned war in all my life.'"¹⁶

Initially, MacArthur's UN Command did not censor journalists, but urged them not to report information on military equipment, movement, and strength, or news that damaged morale.¹⁷ MacArthur apparently did not think the war would last long or that the North Koreans were in a position to take advantage of any lapses. But after several reporters were banned from the war zone for stories that offended the military, other correspondents, and many US officers, began to press for World War II-style censorship. The correspondents thought that it would remove both uncertainty and the temptation to publish sensitive information to avoid being scooped. With Chinese intervention in November 1950, however, censorship became mandatory.¹⁸

Although reporters had asked for censorship, many of them resented the way the UNC applied it. United Press correspondent Robert C. Miller complained in the conservative, mass-circulation *Reader's Digest* that stories about riots in North Korea, guerrilla activity in the south, and an incompetent American commander were all suppressed by censors. The truth was the West's greatest weapon in the Cold War, Miller argued, and censorship was blunting that weapon:

From time to time American newspapers have been accused of not 'printing the truth' about the Korean War. The critics are right: we newsmen are not giving the true facts about Korea; we haven't been for more than a year and a half; and there will be little improvement in the war coverage unless the military censorship policy is radically changed. Much of the truth about the war and the peace talks has been red-penciled.¹⁹

After fighting had ground to a stalemate near the 38th parallel, the Communists and the UN started negotiating an armistice in July 1951 at Kaesong. From the beginning, the American political elite was divided over the talks. The Democratic administration was pushing for a negotiated settlement and most Congressional Republicans were warning that the talks were a misguided prelude to appeasement.²⁰

Coordination between Washington and the negotiators was sometimes lax, with top officers in Tokyo and Korea making many on-the-spot decisions and adopting an often undiplomatic approach to the negotiations. Further complicating matters was the need to consider the sometimes contradictory aims of UN allies and the South Korean government.²¹

The generals and admirals comprising the UNC delegation did not have the press along for the first session, which turned into a Communist propaganda circus - cameramen were on hand to record various minor humiliations meted out to the American delegates.²² After that experience, the delegates insisted 20 UN reporters - enough to have "pictures and news coverage at least equal to that assumed by the Communists" - be allowed to accompany them to the truce talks area. The Communists initially balked, but eventually acceded.²³

But the UNC's commitment to free press access did not extend as far as actually sharing news with the UN-affiliated journalists. Once the reporters arrived at Kaesong, they found little information. Residents of Kaesong avoided them, and negotiators kept them out of the actual sessions and gave them only "fragments of information." Stories based on these fragments emphasized the success of the Americans' hard-nosed negotiating strategy.²⁴ Reporters received nothing from the North Koreans or Chinese, and either could not or would not approach them.²⁵

A writer for the British *Economist* magazine later recalled the nature of the problem:

There was one thing missing from the official apparatus of the place as far as the United Nations' correspondents were concerned - a Communist spokesman who would comment on the proceedings much as (the American spokesman) did. Clearly this could not be done by an officer in North Korean or Chinese uniform, because anybody seen speaking to him would have been looked on as a most suspicious character. So matters were arranged informally.²⁶

The informal arrangement came after the arrival of "two white commies" - Wilfred Burchett and Alan Winnington - on the North Korean side at the end of July.²⁷

Winnington was a career Communist from the London suburbs with little journalism experience and few professional contacts outside the London *Daily Worker*, where he had worked since the early 1940s.²⁸ He had been covering the Korean War from the beginning, and had sent to the *Daily Worker* reports of South Korean massacre and atrocity, some of which were confirmed later. These stories had led the British cabinet to consider prosecuting him for treason.²⁹

Burchett grew up poor in Australia and had earned a top-notch reputation as a correspondent reporting World War II in the Pacific. He worked alongside many American reporters, and found some of them reporting from the UN side at Panmunjom. Although he worked for the conservative British *Daily Express* for much of the 1940s, his own political views had moved left and were indistinguishable from Communist line by 1951, by which time he was working for the French Communist newspaper *Ce Soir*.³⁰

Most American journalists disliked Winnington and characterized him as "effeminate" and "prissy."³¹ Almost all of them liked Burchett, though they characterized him as the more "dangerous" of the two because of his affability.³² Another journalist characterized

the two this way: "Winnington was a Communist who tried to become a newspaperman. Burchett is a newspaperman who became a Communist." ³³

When Burchett and Winnington arrived at Kaesong, the UN-affiliated correspondents were stunned by the sight of two casually dressed Caucasians arriving in Russian jeeps, and "crowded round like South Sea Islanders meeting Captain Cook, almost feeling our clothes." ³⁴ For the duration of the talks the two reporters' most significant work was not their own dispatches, which were printed in Communist and left-wing publications around the world, but their unique role as conduits, men who linked the world of American journalism with Asian communism. ³⁵ Their relationship with the American reporters was clear from the beginning, when they staged an impromptu press conference on conditions in North Korea and China. ³⁶

Although the key to Burchett's and Winnington's importance as sources was their close relationship to the North Korean and Chinese negotiators, who provided them with documents and in-depth information, other factors helped them build a working relationship with the UN correspondents. ³⁷ Many American reporters disliked and distrusted the UN's spokesman, Brigadier General William Nuckolls, who seemed to antagonize them more than most PR officers. ³⁸ United Press correspondent Robert C. Miller attributed the negotiator's evasive press relations to traditional military fear of the press, exacerbated by "stupidity." ³⁹

In a racially charged war where Americans often derided both enemy and allied Koreans as "gooks," Winnington and Burchett were English-speaking, whiskey-drinking Anglo-Saxons. ⁴⁰ While this led to accusations that they were traitors, it also enabled them to establish a shaky rapport with Americans that Chinese or North Korean correspondents probably never could achieve. In fact, the numerous Communist-affiliated Asian correspondents at the talks never spoke to the UN correspondents. ⁴¹

This added up to a unique situation. The Western news media would get many of the details of negotiations from the North Koreans, through Winnington and Burchett, instead of the UN negotiators. Professional ideology meant that journalists could fraternize with "Reds" on the front lines and still maintain their anti-Communist vigor and virtue. Veteran war correspondent Allen Raymond clearly spelled out in a 1952 article how the journalistic ideology applied at Panmunjom:

Every trained newspaper reporter would certainly consider this questioning of enemy correspondents the obvious and proper procedure for a representative of the free commercial press who wanted to learn anything whatever of a news event besides what was told him in a government handout. ⁴²

Although one newspaper initially described Winnington's and Burchett's tips as "almost comic" propaganda, correspondents soon had serious material to consider. ⁴³ American public statements had mentioned before the talks began that the 38th parallel could be the armistice line. Press briefings during negotiations indicated that the United Nations was asking for an armistice on the battlefield and that Communist intransigence was blocking

a settlement.⁴⁴ But in the truce tent, the United Nations proposed a line far north of the 38th parallel or the battlefield. The UN delegates argued that their demand for 12,000 square kilometers of Communist-held land was compensation for halting US Air Force and Navy activity. They never told the press about this proposal. Winnington's and Burchett's tips about the UNC's extensive demands fit with Beijing and Pyongyang radio reports and led to an equivocal tone in some US newspaper stories on the negotiations. It also helped feed the impression that it was the American negotiators prolonging the unpopular war. Some press reports quoted Winnington, some quoted Communist radio stories, but all were denied by the UN command - even when the truth slipped out in an official report from Tokyo headquarters.⁴⁵

In August 1951, the talks broke down, but in October both sides were ready to resume them a few miles away at Panmunjom. The United Nations had a media blackout on the preparatory liaison officers' meetings, so the UN correspondents depended more and more on Winnington and Burchett, who were able to provide quick and accurate reports. Now they were cited openly as sources. Quoting them was palatable because of their quasi-official positions. As Miller recounted, nearly 50 years later, much of his job with United Press was quoting officials. Winnington and Burchett were simply "unofficial officials" and thus perfectly acceptable as news sources, as long as the "few tidbits that were true" were winnowed from the propaganda.⁴⁶ The *Economist* found them quite professional:

They were as approachable as a good public relations officer. Every day, even before the delegates arrived, they would be surrounded by a dozen or more United Nations men anxious to know what General Nam Il's line would be and what the Communist view of future prospects was.⁴⁷

For example, when the American liaison officer gave his "no comment" to the *New York Times*, the *Times*' reporter cited Burchett and Winnington for the news that the talks were stalled over the extent of the neutral zone surrounding Panmunjom.⁴⁸ In the early months, much of Winnington's and Burchett's information came out like this, in nuggets sprinkled unobtrusively through news stories. The American reticence soured many correspondents, including this one who spoke out anonymously in 1952:

Panmunjom is an excellent example of how news is withheld at the source from the American press for the purpose of government propaganda. Time and again correspondents caught United Nations spokesmen in half-truths or important omissions of fact in statements about what was going on inside the closed truce-conference sessions.⁴⁹

Winnington and Burchett took a more prominent position in the *New York Herald Tribune* later in October. Pulitzer Prize winning reporter Marguerite Higgins came up to Panmunjom on a quick trip and met with Burchett. (She had been "intimate" with Burchett when they both covered the Berlin Airlift in 1948.)⁵⁰ In her story, after a mild condemnation of Burchett's politics, Higgins described the man at work:

Shortly before noon the liaison meeting broke up and Mr. Burchett excused himself to go and talk to the Communist liaison officers. 'I'll go find out what's happening so I can give you chaps (referring to the news agencies) a fill-in,' Mr. Burchett said. He produced the fill-in as promised and it was through him that we learned the essence of the morning discussions.

Higgins went on to describe the stonewalling from the UN negotiators, then pointed out that Burchett's and Winnington's briefings had been "quite accurate, and, until the last couple of days, more informative than the Allied evening briefings."⁵¹

When regular talks resumed at the end of October reporters were limited to one sketchy official briefing at the end of the day.⁵² At these briefings Nuckolls, the UNC spokesman, withheld, obfuscated, and dealt in half-truths, according to *New York Times* reporter George Barrett. Other military officers simply would not talk to reporters.⁵³ In retrospect, the delegation's psychological warfare advisor judged that the failure to cooperate with the press had been a major *faux pas*:

For example, they would say, 'At 1103 Gen. Nam Il lit a cigarette, at 1105 he smiled, etc.' But they failed to give any substantive information. As a result the Allied correspondents were forced to go to the Red correspondents for information about what went on inside the Tent. And this was unfortunate as the Reds have a habit of distorting facts.⁵⁴

Winnington's and Burchett's links to Western correspondents not only helped present a more complete account of the negotiations in the Western media, but also helped them serve as back channels for officials on both sides.⁵⁵ Sometimes the links made it to the top. In March 1952, UN Commander General Matthew B. Ridgway reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) that the two were dropping "frequent veiled hints" to Western newsmen that secret talks could lead to a speedy armistice. The UN correspondents followed up those hints and reported back to the UN officers.⁵⁶ The Communists also used the two to amplify and reinforce certain points, such as their deep objection to UN inspections of North Korean facilities.⁵⁷

Access to truce table information had made Winnington and Burchett important to American correspondents, but in the winter of 1951-1952 their access to American POWs made them indispensable. The North Koreans and Chinese had refused to admit International Red Cross inspectors into their camps, or provide the names of captured Americans. Apprehension about the fate of these POWs turned into consternation and horror in November when a high-ranking US Army officer claimed that the Communists had murdered more than 5,000 American POWs.⁵⁸ That claim was widely publicized, but could not be substantiated.⁵⁹ On 18 December, the American and Communist negotiators exchanged lists of POWs, and Burchett and Winnington provided inside information to the UN correspondents. Burchett explained what transpired in a private letter:

Today when prisoner of war lists were released, most of the American press were virtually crawling on their hands and knees on the road to us, begging us for crumbs of information. We were in the lovely position of ignoring all those who had tried to injure

us and handing priceless information to the few who had written honestly about the talks.⁶⁰

One name on the POW list was Major General William F. Dean, who had been missing since July 1950 and was presumed dead. Nuckolls hinted that the Communist claim to be holding Dean was a lie. To prove Dean was alive and well, and to embarrass the UN command, Burchett interviewed him in his prison quarters and provided the story - along with photos of the two men together, smiling - to American correspondents just before Christmas. On 24 December, the *New York Times* printed it on the front page, and clearly indicated that the story had been reported by Burchett and then "spun in a Korean hut for the benefit of United Nations correspondents."⁶¹

The POWs became even more important when the UN delegation stunned the Communists on 2 January by proposing "voluntary repatriation" for all prisoners. This would mainly affect the more than 100,000 Chinese and North Korean POWs, who would be given the option of settling in South Korea or Taiwan.⁶² That same day Winnington and Burchett launched their next salvo.

Associated Press photographer Frank Noel had been in a POW camp for nearly a year, and was in a position to take credible photos of his fellow prisoners. His AP colleagues wanted him to take photos in the camps. Winnington and Burchett both lay claim to having set up the deal in which AP handed over a camera and film at Panmunjom to be forwarded to Noel at the POW camp. The two "Red" correspondents then quickly delivered to waiting AP journalists censored prints showing smiling, well-fed American POWs identified by name, rank, and hometown. Winnington later recalled AP photographer Bob Schutz's excitement, quoting him saying "I would do murder for this. It's the scoop of the century."⁶³

The results were explosive. Photos of the POWs - cleared by both Communist and UN censors - were gradually doled out and ran for weeks in newspapers throughout the United States.⁶⁴ Noel remained a POW, but was given a special award, *in absentia*, by the National Press Photographers Association and commended publicly by AP managers.⁶⁵

To keep up the momentum and to placate United Press, which had not been privy to the Noel deal, Winnington provided that news agency with more photographs of General Dean.⁶⁶ These photographs showed the general dressed in a double-breasted pinstriped suit - exercising, walking, and playing chess with his guards. These photos were also heavily publicized, and were even given a double-page spread in the Army newspaper *Pacific Stars and Stripes*.⁶⁷ In addition, plans were apparently in the works for radio reporters to obtain audio recordings from the POWs.⁶⁸

Weeks worth of stories and photos showing healthy and happy American POWs were too much for the US Army, which was preparing a media counterattack. Ridgway's PR adviser, Colonel George Welch, told the UN Commander that "some quid pro quo had already been paid for these favors at the hand of the enemy and that further payment will be exacted unless this type of fraternization and traffic is eliminated." He did not specify

what the UN correspondents had given in exchange for these scoops, but the implications were sinister.⁶⁹

Welch urged Ridgway to "take all necessary steps" to bar any contact between UN-affiliated correspondents and Winnington and Burchett. His own recommendation was that any newsman who contacted the two be barred permanently from the truce talks.⁷⁰ Ridgway's final decision was not as harsh. He issued a memorandum warning reporters to avoid "fraternization and trafficking with the enemy," and specifically mentioned the exchange of cameras, film and photographs. He also accused the UN correspondents of drinking with Winnington and Burchett. The widely publicized memorandum clearly implied that there was a risk of tipsy UN correspondents spilling military secrets to Winnington and Burchett, thus endangering American soldiers.⁷¹

Pacific Stars and Stripes continued the criticism of truce talks reporters who "whoop it up with each others' booze" and implied that American reporters were letting professional values and competitive pressures override loyalty, patriotism, and good sense. "With a UN correspondents patch on your shoulder instead of an M-1," the newspaper asked, "how neutral can you get?"⁷²

The journalists did not take the criticism well. AP's Tokyo bureau chief claimed that UN correspondents were military or media veterans of World War II who gave top priority to troop security.⁷³ AP correspondent Bill Barnard wrote a rebuttal in *Stars and Stripes* and argued that Ridgway's memorandum only meant the US Army did not like the pictures of POWs Winnington and Burchett were providing. He argued that the UN correspondents in their dealings with the two "Reds" were careful and clearheaded:

Now all Allied newsmen know what kind of guys the Communist correspondents are. They are tough babies from the word go and communism is the only creed they know. But many's the time they have given hot news stories on what is happening in the armistice tents to Allied correspondents and the stories have turned out to be correct.⁷⁴

In the *New York Times*, George Barrett made some of the same points and explicitly compared the behavior of the UN Command to the Communists:

Many Allied correspondents who have covered the cease-fire talks since they began seven months ago at Kaesong and have been dueling with the information officers almost continuously are convinced that, in their effort to get the truth and give it to their readers, they often have been caught between two propaganda machines - that of the Communists and that of the information officials of the United Nations Command.⁷⁵

In defiance of Ridgway, the correspondents at Panmunjom ostentatiously fraternized with Winnington and Burchett - and some reportedly made a point of passing around a bottle of liquor. The Tokyo offices of the big news agencies apparently lobbied the US Army to back off, and it did.⁷⁶

Even correspondents such as UP's Arnold Dibble, who had tried to avoid Winnington in the past, believed that Ridgway's attack was a mistake. Dibble found himself relying on the two "Reds" even more.⁷⁷ Then, for a while, it became even more difficult to get information from the United Nations. The following week, UN negotiators not only refused to provide transcripts of the day's negotiation, but also declared that even the questions reporters asked the UN spokesmen were off-the-record. The *New York Times* pointedly quoted Chinese radio crowing "Who's got the iron curtain now?"⁷⁸

By mid-1952, Winnington and Burchett were still in Korea, but largely occupied with other tasks. They wrote about the Communist prison uprising at UN-held Koje-do, and allegations that the United States was waging "germ warfare."⁷⁹ At Panmunjom, the UN public relations finally improved. Nuckolls and his successors provided more complete and honest briefings. The reliance on Winnington and Burchett declined, but they were still able to supply inside information to the American press, up to the day the armistice was signed.⁸⁰

After the armistice, Winnington and Burchett were still very much on the minds of the UN Command, which started circulating "wanted" posters of Winnington in southern Korea in case "he should try to pass through the lines as a legitimate correspondent."⁸¹ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reportedly sponsored a plan to offer Burchett \$100,000 to defect to the West, but he refused to take the bait.⁸²

Winnington later drifted into obscurity, first in China, where he occasionally helped Western reporters, then in East Berlin.⁸³ Burchett continued in the limelight for another three decades, pumping out pro-Communist dispatches, working as a special correspondent for AP in North Vietnam, quietly helping American journalists navigate the treacherous waters of Asian communism, and serving as an unofficial diplomat.⁸⁴ He helped guide *New York Times* correspondent Harrison Salisbury to Hanoi in 1966, and had a chummy breakfast with Henry Kissinger, to discuss the possibilities of peace in Vietnam, at the White House in 1971.⁸⁵ Throughout it he had a reputation as a reliable source - he "has played it straight in most instances."⁸⁶ Even the conservative *U.S. News and World Report*, describing his work at Panmunjom, wrote that Burchett "never lied, so far as anyone could discover."⁸⁷

American journalists access to Communist information and their flexible interpretation of Cold War teamwork at Panmunjom alarmed the US officers running the truce talks. They were oblivious to the journalists' professional ideology and tried to enforce a rigid version of discretion and loyalty. It did not work. The trained journalists themselves did not see any problem in dealing with their "Red" counterparts - perhaps it was a bit distasteful, but necessary for the job.⁸⁸

The skepticism of the journalists always was contained within a broader Cold War framework in which dissent over strategy, tactics, and personalities was acceptable. In fact, the existence of such dissent probably served to give greater flexibility and reinforce the legitimacy of the Cold War framework.

There were other limits as well. Interviewing sources such as Winnington and Burchett was barely acceptable because of the unusual situation at Panmunjom. More in-depth contacts with rogue Communist states could spell trouble, as American journalist William Worthy found out when he flouted the State Department ban on travel to China in 1956. His passport was revoked as a result.⁸⁹

By the 1960s, a few journalists covering the Vietnam War were more willing to stretch the limits of the Cold War consensus as US-Soviet tensions eased and the national establishment itself divided over the war. AP began distributing some of Burchett's stories from North Vietnam.⁹⁰ In 1966, Salisbury traveled to Hanoi at the invitation of the North Vietnamese and filed explosive stories. On his return, he suffered criticism from the White House, sniping from fellow reporters, and a snub by the Pulitzer Prize Committee.⁹¹ However, much like at Panmunjom, most of the coverage critical of the war effort focused on tactics and strategy, while not questioning core anti-Communist aims.⁹² When the Panmunjom correspondents covered Vietnam, they also stayed within the Cold War consensus. Their experience with truth-telling Communists in Korea had not fundamentally changed their views on the Cold War. Marguerite Higgins harshly attacked critical correspondents such as David Halberstam, Barrett continued as a "huge anti-Communist," and Miller remained a cynical Cold Warrior through a half dozen trips to Vietnam as a wire service reporter.⁹³

The case of the Panmunjom contacts shows both the flexibility of the journalistic ideology and the durability of the Cold War consensus. Much like US reporters in Vietnam, the Panmunjom journalists followed hot stories and often antagonized the political and military elite, but hardly ever questioned the essential justice of the US involvement or gave legitimacy to the Communist point of view. Competitiveness and skepticism ensured that self-respecting reporters would not content themselves with General Nuckolls' releases in Panmunjom or the daily 5 p.m. briefings in Saigon, known to many as the "Five O'Clock Follies."⁹⁴ Their sense of autonomy and distrust of the government and military meant that they would resist US authorities' most blatant attempts at manipulation. This independence meant that they would be open to taking information from Communist sources. But the ideology also worked in other ways. The reliance on easy-to-find official sources and the steady flow of official statements meant that most of their content would be dominated by the US point of view. The idea of balance, in the Cold War context, might mean coverage of American war critics but would not mean equal time for Communists.

At Panmunjom the circumstances highlighted this ideology and its relationship to the Cold War consensus. The details of armistice negotiations made for hot stories worth pursuing. Official US sources on the scene were unhelpful and evasive, at best. "Red" sources were articulate, available, and able to provide verifiable facts and sensational photographs that could be found nowhere else. Even at the height of Cold War tensions from 1951 to 1953, with anti-communism at near-paranoid levels in the United States, it was clear to most American journalists that questioning Burchett and Winnington was the "obvious and proper procedure" for any trained journalist who wanted anything more than an official press release.⁹⁵ Other journalists at other times have used similar

reasoning to travel to Hanoi during the Vietnam War, or to remain in Baghdad during the Gulf War, as Cable News Network's Peter Arnett did.⁹⁶ In these cases, the reporters resisted pressures to conform to a narrowly tailored view of national loyalty, followed the journalistic ideology, and delivered exclusive, important news.

Endnotes

1. Americans dominated the press corps covering the UN side of the negotiations.
2. Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), pp. 336-56. Ted Galen Carpenter drew on Knightley for his book, *The Captive Press: Foreign Policy Crises and the First Amendment* (Washington, DC: The Cato Institute, 1995), pp. 48-52. Much of the early criticism came through James Aronson's *The Press and the Cold War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 103-16. For a comprehensive bibliography on the topic, see Marilyn Martin White, "The Korean War and Journalism: An Annotated Bibliography," MA thesis, University of Kansas, 1987.
3. Peter Braestrup, *Battle Lines: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media* (New York: Priority, 1985).
4. Daniel Hallin fruitfully used that approach in his account of Vietnam War coverage. Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
5. For the best account of the professionalization of journalism, see Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic, 1978).
6. Leon Sigal, "Sources Make the News," in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., *Reading the News* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, pp. 18-39.
7. Braestrup, *Battle Lines*, pp. 136-39; Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 32.
8. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, pp. 63-70. Some see this independence as validating a system of ideological hegemony. See, for example, Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) pp. 249-82.
9. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, pp. 134-76.

10. Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), pp. 160-61.
11. Robert C. Miller, telephone interview by author, 5 June 2000.
12. Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, pp. 260-61; Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 147.
13. Fred Fedler, *Lessons from the Past: Journalists' Lives and Work, 1830-1950* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2000), pp. 101-20.
14. For further explanation of this concept, see Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 117.
15. Don Iddon, "Don Iddon from New York," *World's Press News*, 1 December 1950; Knightley, *The First Casualty*, pp. 343-44; "The United Nations Must Put a Stop to this BRUTALITY," (London) *Daily Mirror*, 7 November 1950; Tokyo Mission to (British) Foreign Office, 15 August 1950, FK1661/8, FO371/84178, Public Record Office (Kew, England). For the belated discovery of this, see, for example, San Hun Choe, "S. Korea Shot Thousands During War, Reports Say," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 2000.
16. Quoted in Braestrup, *Battle Lines*, p. 51. Tom Lambert was temporarily banned from the war zone because that dispatch was judged to provide "aid and comfort to the enemy."
17. Jeffrey Smith, *War and Press Freedom: The Problem of Prerogative Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 169-70.
18. Braestrup, *Battle Lines*, pp. 47-60. At the same time, US President Harry S. Truman tried to muzzle military officers, such as General Douglas MacArthur, commander of UN forces in Korea, who dissented over war aims. Smith, *War and Press Freedom*, pp. 171-72.
19. Robert C. Miller, "We Haven't Been Getting the Facts about Korea," *The Reader's Digest*, December 1952, p. 29.
20. Ronald J. Caridi, *The Korean War and American Politics: The Republican Party as a Case Study* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 190-98.
21. Rosemary Foot, *Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 206-22.
22. William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 222.
23. The Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] to the Commander in Chief, Far East ([General Matthew B.] Ridgway), 9 July 1951, and Commander in Chief, United Nations

Command [UNC] (Ridgway) to JCS, 10 July 1951, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], 1951, Vol. VII: *Korea and China*, part 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), pp. 639, 648-49. The correspondents also pressured the UN command. See, Robert Eunson, "Press Restrained from 'Roaming' Around Kaesong," *Editor and Publisher*, 21 July 1951.

24. Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, p. 67.

25. Eunson, "Press Restrained."

26. A Special Correspondent, "Negotiating at Panumjom - II," *The Economist*, 1 August 1953.

27. Both Alan Winnington and Wilfred Burchett recalled that one American journalist had used the "white Commie" characterization on their initial meeting. See Wilfred Burchett, *Again Korea* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 33 and Alan Winnington, *Breakfast With Mao: Memoirs of a Foreign Correspondent* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p. 128.

28. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, pp. 53-63.

29. John Jenks, "The Enemy Within: Journalism, the State and the Limits of Dissent in Cold War Britain, 1950-51," *American Journalism* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2001).

30. Wilfred Burchett, *At the Barricades: Forty Years on the Cutting Edge of History* (New York: Times Books, 1981).

31. John Dille, *Substitute for Victory* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), pp. 103-104; "Strange Case of Two Traitors," *U.S. News and World Report*, 2 October 1953; Arnold Dibble, "Red Correspondent's Spite Jails US Newsmen," 17 October 1953 (No newspaper indicated.) Clipping contained in Alan Winnington file, Box 25, Norwood Allman Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, CA.

32. Miller, telephone interview by author, 14 June 2000. Miller summarized the difference this way: "If you want to go out and have a beer with someone, Burchett was the one."

33. "Mouthpiece for the Reds: The Strange Role of Wilfred Burchett," *U.S. News and World Report*, 27 February 1967, p. 20. Despite this claim, there was never any conclusive evidence that Burchett had become a party member.

34. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 128.

35. This is a role that Burchett played most of his life, most significantly in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. See, "Mouthpiece for the Reds," and Burchett, *At the Barricades*.

36. "A Personal Question," *Time*, 6 August 1951, pp. 36-37; "Winnington Arrives at Kaesong," (London) *Daily Worker*, 26 July 1951.
37. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 129.
38. George and Ruth Barrett, "We're Getting Smarter at Panmunjom," *The Reporter*, 16 September 1952, p. 23.
39. Miller, interview, 14 June 2000.
40. For some of the correspondents' racial attitudes, see Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 338.
41. Miller, interview, 14 June 2000.
42. Allen Raymond, "Press Freedom vs. Army Regulations," *The Reporter*, 24 June 1952.
43. "Korea Conferees Stage 'Marathon' Cease-Fire Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 August 1951.
44. Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, pp. 45-47.
45. Wilfred Burchett, *This Monstrous War* (Melbourne: Joseph Waters, 1953), p. 176; "Ridgway Delays Resumption of Kaesong Cease-Fire Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 August 1951; Stueck, *The Korean War*, p. 227; Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, pp. 129-30; Raymond, "Press Freedom vs. Army Regulations"; "Reds Suggest Breakdown," *New York Times*, 2 August 1951; "Truce Talks Hinge on Yielding by Foes," *New York Times*, 3 August 1951.
46. Miller, interview, 5 June 2000. General Matthew B. Ridgway, the UN Commander, held one of his few press conferences to discuss the negotiations, and acknowledged that American negotiators had not provided the press with "full and timely" information. See Lindsay Parrott, "Ridgway is Acting to Avert Incidents in Truce Talk Zone," *New York Times*, 16 October 1951.
47. A Special Correspondent, "Negotiating at Panmunjom - II," *The Economist*, 1 August 1953.
48. Lindsay Parrott, "Peiking Radio is Busy," *New York Times*, 12 October 1951.
49. Raymond, "Press Freedom vs. Army Regulations."
50. Antoinette May, *Witness to War: A Biography of Marguerite Higgins* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 191.
51. Marguerite Higgins, "Korea Reds Get Story to World Ahead of Allies," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 October 1951.

52. Ray Erwin, "Panmunjom's Peace Parley's no Picnic," *Editor and Publisher*, 8 March 1952.

53. Barrett, "We're Getting Smarter at Panmunjom."

54. UNC Faux Pas, Korean War, 1951-53 (General Notes), Box 11, W.H. Vatcher Papers, Hoover Institution.

55. Erwin, "Panmunjom's Peace Parley's no Picnic."

56. Ridgway to JCS, 20 March 1952, FRUS, 1952-54, Vol. XV: *Korea*, part 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 108-9.

57. George Barrett, "Red Newsmen Cite Hurdles to Truth," *New York Times*, 24 November 1951.

58. Murray Schumach, "Chinese Reds Slew 2,513 US Captives, Eighth Army Charges," *New York Times*, 15 November 1951; The Chief of Staff, United States Army ([General J. Lawton] Collins) to Ridgway, 15 November 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. VII, part 1, p. 1137. The source, Colonel James Hanley, alleged that an additional 3,600 Americans had been killed in captivity earlier. This all came shortly before the prisoner of war (POW) issue was scheduled to come to the table, but the UN command insisted there was no connection.

59. Stueck, *The Korean War*, p. 245.

60. Burchett to his father, 18 December 1951, quoted by Robert Manne in *Agent of Influence: The Life and Times of Wilfred Burchett* (Toronto: The Mackenzie Institute, 1989), p. 19.

61. Murray Schumach, "Red Says Dean, Interviewed Friday, Told of Trek and Plan to Cheat Foe by Suicide," *New York Times*, 24 December 1951; "Men at War: The Dean Story," *Time*, 31 December 1951.

62. Stueck, *The Korean War*, p. 250.

63. Burchett, *At the Barricades*, p. 169; Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 138.

64. "'Father Christmas' Sends PW Camp Pix," *Editor and Publisher*, 2 February 1952. For example, see "U.N. Prisoners of War in Red Camp as Photographed by Another Prisoner," *New York Times*, 26 January 1952; "U.N. Soldiers Held Prisoners by Communists in Korea," *New York Times*, 14 February 1952; "POW Gets a Love Letter," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1952.

65. "Text of Annual Report of Directors of the Associated Press," *New York Times*, 22 April 1952; "War Photographer Cited," *New York Times*, 4 May 1952.

66. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 139.
67. "Pix Indicate Famous PW in Fine Trim: General Dean Healthy and Fit in Communist Prison Camp," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 1 February 1952. Before his interview with Burchett, Dean's living conditions were actually much worse than those pictures would indicate. See Major General William F. Dean, *General Dean's Story* (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 244. The British-based Reuters news agency refused Winnington's offer of pictures of British POWs. See, "Grist for the Mill," *Time*, 18 February 1952; and Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, pp. 145-46.
68. Mac R. Johnson, "Ridgway Warns Reporters on Deals with Reds," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 8 February 1952.
69. Quoted in Billy C. Mossman, "Command and Press Relationships in the Korean Conflict," prepared for House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information, 1966 (Copy at US Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair), pp. 21-22. Winnington claims that the Western agencies offered to pay them to avoid charges of collaboration, but that he and Burchett instead asked for liquor, tobacco, chocolates, and razor blades. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, p. 139.
70. Mossman, "Command and Press Relationships."
71. "Trafficking with Red Newsmen is Censured," *Editor and Publisher*, 9 February 1952.
72. Bill Fitzgerald, "Panmunjom Reporters 'Spanked,'" *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 8 February 1952.
73. "Photos Censored in Tokyo," *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 February 1952.
74. Bill Barnard, "Panmunjom Booze? Only 'Anti-Freeze,'" *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 9 February 1952.
75. George Barrett, "Truce Reporters Held Indiscreet," *New York Times*, 8 February 1952.
76. Burchett, *At the Barricades*, p. 170; Burchett, *This Monstrous War*, p. 269.
77. Erwin, "Panmunjom's Peace Parley's no Picnic."
78. "Truce Transcript Kept from the Press," *New York Times*, 16 February 1952. The Chinese radio was actually transmitting a story Winnington had written for the *Daily Worker*.
79. The germ warfare allegations were the sorest point with the British and Australian governments, and spurred claims that Burchett and Winnington helped interrogate

American prisoners of war, who then produced "confessions" of germ warfare. See, for example, Lachlan Strahan, "The Devil Down Under: Wilfred Burchett and his Critics," *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 19 (1988-1989), p. 95.

80. "Newsmen Praise Clark for Korean Truce Setup," *Editor and Publisher*, 1 August 1953; Barrett, "We're Getting Smarter at Panmunjom."

81. "Strange Case of Two Traitors," *U.S. News and World Report*, 2 October 1953, p. 22.

82. Gavan McCormack, "Korea: Burchett's Thirty Years War," in Ben Kiernan, ed., *Burchett Reporting the Other Side of the Word, 1939-83* (New York: Quartet, 1986), p. 180.

83. David Chipp, interview by author, London, 28 May 1998. David Chipp was the Reuters correspondent in China in the 1950s. The British government had seized Winnington's passport in 1954, but returned it in 1968, apparently forgiving him for his Korean activities. Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao*, pp. 177-78.

84. Denis Warner, "Who is Wilfred Burchett?," *The Reporter*, 1 June 1967.

85. Burchett, *At the Barricades*, pp. 274-79. In the introduction to the book, Harrison Salisbury described Burchett as a "well-informed, useful source and a warm and decent friend."

86. Murray Fromson, "Parallels in Crisis," *Saturday Review*, 1 June 1968, p. 29.

87. "Mouthpiece for the Reds: The Strange Role of Wilfred Burchett," *U.S. News and World Report*, 27 February 1967, pp. 19-20.

88. The *New York Times* correspondent George Barrett summed up the distaste in his article titled "Truce Reporters Held Indiscreet," *New York Times*, 8 February 1952.

89. David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 251.

90. "Mouthpiece for the Reds."

91. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 147; John R. MacArthur, "Witness in Hanoi," *Columbia Journalism Review* 35, no. 5 (January-February 1997), p. 47.

92. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 54.

93. May, *Witness to War*, pp. 232-54; Miller, interview, 14 June 2000; Liz Trotta (George Barrett protégé), telephone interview by author, 1 June 2000.

94. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 146.

95. Raymond, "Press Freedom vs. Army Regulations."

96. Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War*, 2nd ed. (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 7-8.