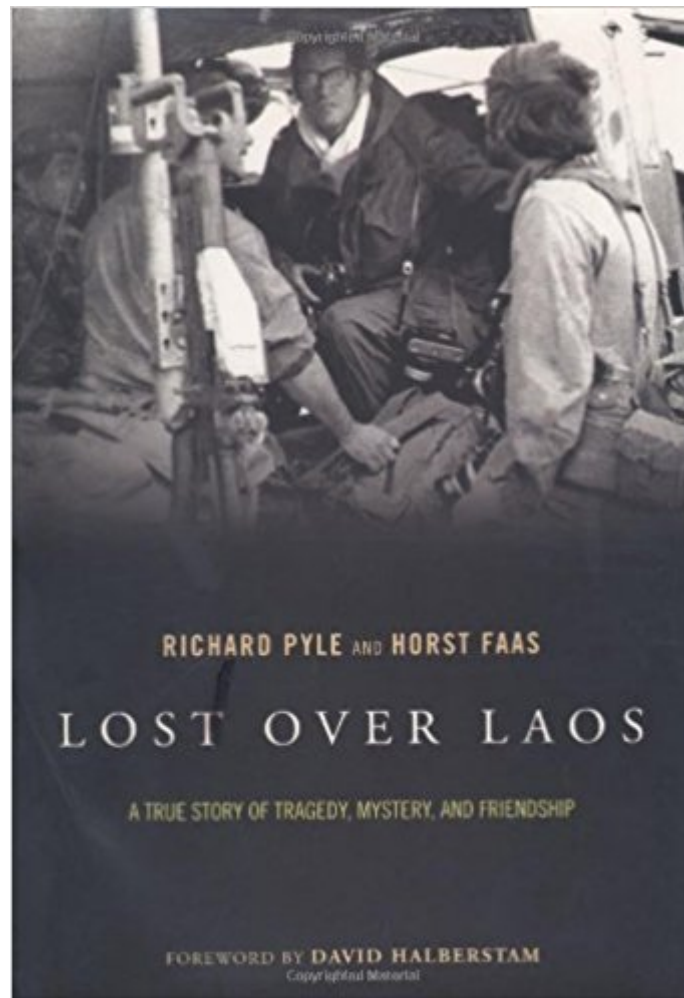




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# Lost Over Laos: A True Story Of Tragedy, Mystery, And Friendship



## Synopsis

In 1971, as American forces hastened their withdrawal from Vietnam, a helicopter was hit by enemy fire over Laos and exploded in a fireball, killing four top combat photographers, Larry Burrows of Life magazine, Henri Huet of Associated Press, Kent Potter of United Press International, and Keisaburo Shimamoto of Newsweek. The Saigon press corps and the American public were stunned, but the remoteness of the location made a recovery attempt impossible. When the war ended four years later in a communist victory, the war zone was sealed off to outsiders, and the helicopter incident faded from most memories. Yet two journalists from the Vietnam press corps- Richard Pyle, former Saigon Bureau Chief, and Horst Faas, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer in Vietnam-pledged to return some day to Laos, resolve mysteries about the crash, and pay homage to their lost friends. True to their vow, twenty-seven years after the incident the authors joined a U.S. team excavating the hillside where the helicopter crashed. Few human remains were found, but camera parts and bits of film provided eerie proof of what happened there. The narrative of *Lost Over Laos* is framed in a period that was among the war's bloodiest, for both the military and the media, yet has received relatively little attention from historians. It is rich with behind-the-scenes anecdotes about the Saigon press corps and illustrated with stunning work by the four combat photographers who died and their colleagues.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Da Capo Press; First Edition edition (March 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0306811960

ISBN-13: 978-0306811968

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 6.3 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #534,072 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Vehicle Pictorials > Aviation #304 in Books > Engineering & Transportation >

Transportation > Aviation > History #617 in Books > History > Asia > Southeast Asia

## Customer Reviews

This deeply moving and personal recollection of the lives and work of the only four combat journalists killed during the 1971 U.S. invasion of Laos is an excellent short history of an important

part of the Vietnam War as well as a fascinating insiders' look at the rugged life of civilian photographers during wartime. Former Saigon bureau chief Pyle (Schwarzkopf: The Man, the Mission, the Triumph) and Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Faas (Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina) worked together for the Associated Press in Vietnam and were close friends with the men who died, which adds depth to their biographies: Larry Burrows, whose famous work for Life magazine made his name "the most closely identified with pictures of armed conflict in Indochina;" the Vietnamese-born Henri Huet, whose work earned the Overseas Press Club's Robert Capa Award; the passionate young Kent Potter, who threatened the United Press International "to resign if forced to leave the war zone;" and Keisaburo Shimamoto, a seasoned Vietnam correspondent with the "high-powered" French agency Gamma who had just returned for his third tour of Vietnam as a freelancer. Pyle provides an excellent look at the history of North Vietnam's use of Laos for its Ho Chi Minh Trail to arm its soldiers in South Vietnam, and he shows how its success provoked President Nixon's invasion of both Laos and Cambodia. Most moving is Pyle's account of how he and Faas returned to Laos 27 years later to search for-and successfully find-the wreckage of the dead journalists' helicopter, along with some of their personal and photographic effects, a journey that becomes a tribute to every journalist who covered the Vietnam War. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Two journalists who survived their years covering the Vietnam War recount the tragic end of four who did not: Larry Burrows of Life, Henri Huet of the Associated Press, Kent Potter of United Press International, and Keisaburo Shimamoto of Newsweek. All of these photojournalists died in February 1971 when the Huey helicopter carrying them into Laos was shot down by North Vietnamese gunners. A taut narrative (by Pyle) combines with haunting photographs (taken and selected by Faas) to tell two stories: the first of how four brave men lost their lives in pursuing their hazardous profession, the second of how Pyle and Faas painstakingly pieced together the fragmentary information that has surfaced over the years about their colleagues' deaths. The first story exposes the inscrutable twists in the line separating life from death; the second highlights how patient investigators slowly accumulate clues as to the four men's deaths. A work of homage by journalists who have learned far more from their profession than how to beat a competitor to the newsroom. Bryce Christensen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Pyle knows his stuff and he knows how to tell it. He zeros in on a chopper crash during the Vietnam war in which several veteran correspondents and combat photographers are killed and uses it as a

pivot point to relate the hazards and adventures of covering the war. He was there and he recalls a lot. He also remained dedicated to the mission of following up after the war to find out exactly what happened in the crash, why and exactly where it happened. It is an intriguing search that brings back in a rush the entire traumatic experience. An exciting read that sparks memories of a compelling era. Highly recommended.

Dead professionals remembered thru the eyes of their peers - who decades later found their crash site. The photojournalism world lost probably four of the top 10 of the time when their VNAF helicopter got blasted from the air by the NVA. Each are profiled as individuals from how they came into the profession until the day they died. Then this book continues with Faas' and Pyle's interest in finding their final resting place. They joined a team of military anthropologists and archaeologists and investigated possible sites in the jungle. A very interesting read.

Lost Over Laos brought back many memories and a few surprises. The biggest surprise was learning that Kent Potter was probably one of my students at the Naval Schools of Photography in 1966. Although the authors referred to the school as "The Marine Corps Photography School" in Pensacola, FL, it was actually the Naval School of Photography. All Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard photographers received their training there from 1925 until 1998 when the school was relocated to Fort Meade, MD. As it so happened, I was an instructor at the school from 1965-1969, I don't recall actually instructing Kent, but if he went through the school in 1966, he would have had to have been in one of my classes. Wonderful book with a lot of memories. Highly recommended. Art Giberson Chief Photographer U.S. Navy, Retired

This book describes the world of photojournalists in the Vietnam work and focuses on the death of four photojournalists in a battle over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos during the US government's semi-covert war against the North Vietnamese in that country (the pilots of their aircraft were South Vietnamese and their death occurred during a South Vietnamese attack against NVA supply lines). The book also describes the effort to find their remains and the authors' attempt to give meaning to their loss. The photojournalists who died included two of the most celebrated of the war and two younger men of great skill. In a relatively short text, the book manages to tell their stories and the story of Vietnam War photojournalism in a manner that is reverent without being professionally aggrandizing. By coincidence, I visited the village where the search for remains took place a few months before the authors and their time in that place was particularly evocative for me. The

authors offer a perspective on the war that is complex and, in some ways, more hawkish than other first-hand retrospective war accounts, although too skeptical to really fit the conceptualizations of hawk and dove that characterized the times. Given the many parallels that some have drawn between Vietnam and our own era, this is a book that thoughtful critics and partisans of the Iraqi conflict should read. My only complaint is that book does not include enough of the award winning pictures of Larry Burrows and his fallen colleagues.

Great photos, organized reporting on the victims and the events. Makes the Vietnam War descriptions sound plausible and as tragic as if it were the 60's again. I would recommend to all, but especially journalists and newspaper photographers.

So well written. I couldn't put it down once I started. A fascinating account of the successful search for four lost battlefield friends. Fast and Pyle deserve a lot of respect for their tireless efforts, and for their well written documentary.

Whilst this book speaks to the story of 'finding' the crash site, what it really describes is the courage, doggedness and craft of photographers of a bygone era.

In today's news of Afghanistan and Iraq...sometime we forget the 58,000 US lives lost in Vietnam and over 250,000 wounded with life changing dire circumstances. The book follows the war through the photojournalist eyes of the likes of Larry Burrows and his comrades as they risk their lives to bring the true face of war to the homefront. On that fateful day with operations into Laos/1971, four acclaimed journalist and photographers lost their lives...this is their story brought by one of their own. Some will say...Vietnam..why! Many will also say Iraq...why! Good reading for those who experience the Vietnam War..

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