

THIS IS SEAN FLYNN. HIS FATHER  
WAS ERROL FLYNN. SEAN WAS  
DESTINED FOR MOVIE STARDOM, BUT  
HE CHOSE A DIFFERENT PATH. HE  
DROVE A MOTORCYCLE INTO COMMUNIST  
HELD-TERRITORY IN CAMBODIA ON  
APRIL 6, 1970 AND WAS NEVER SEEN  
AGAIN. THIS IS A STORY ABOUT  
YOUTH, WAR, AND DEATH. ABOUT  
LOVE, FRIENDSHIP, AND GETTING THE  
PHOTO. THIS IS HIS STORY. BY HIS  
FRIEND, PERRY DEANE YOUNG.

#MISSING

THE MANY MYSTERIES OF SEAN FLYNN





Beautiful. That was how Michael Herr described Sean Flynn in his brilliant book, *Dispatches*. Sean was indeed beautiful, no question about it, and outwardly calm no matter how desperate the situation. He had the perfect manners of an old-fashioned gentleman, and yet there always seemed to be inner voices calling to him from some dark place deep within, urging him on to mysterious ventures. How else do you explain his obsession with weapons. His fascination with mortal combat in Vietnam. And, of course, his final journey down a road in Cambodia he knew he might never return from.

Sean's actor father, Errol, had the grace to say, "he looks like me, but better." And Errol himself was no slouch when it came to looks. For nearly 30 years he was the ultimate swashbuckling hero to moviegoers the world over. Errol was Ivanhoe and Don Juan and Jeb Stuart and

Captain Blood and General Custer and Gentleman Jim Corbett. As film executive Jack Warner said of him: "He was all the heroes in one magnificent sexy, animal package." His escapades off camera only added to that image.

Errol was a fantasy figure to millions of people, but he was the very real father of my friend, Sean. It didn't help that his son grew up in the precise physical image of his father. Sean's mother, the French-born actress, Lili Damita, had been the real star when she met the poor Australian actor on a boat to America in 1935. Lili had starred in several major silent movies, but, like so many others, she was unable to make the transition to talkies. After marrying Errol, she never made another movie.

After Sean was born in 1941, Errol would write in his memoir, *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, Lili's real career became suing him for all he was worth. She took Sean to live in Palm Beach, Florida, as far away from Errol and Hollywood as she could get.

One of his grade school teachers remembers Lili running so hard in the parent-son races she fell on her face. "I was mother, father, everything to him," she told me. "I did it all myself." She felt a young boy should know all about guns so she took him to have shooting lessons from a colourful character with a range outside town. It was the beginning of Sean's lifelong fascination with weapons.

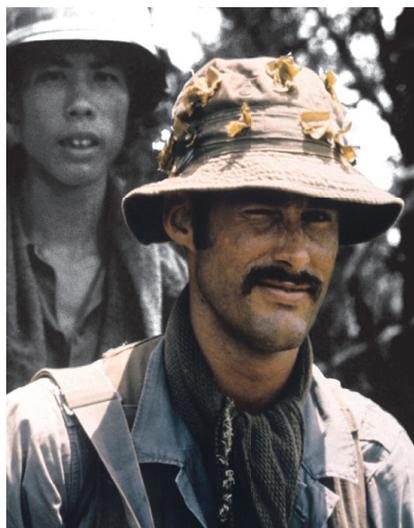
Sean was a senior at the Lawrenceville School in October of 1959 when Errol died in Canada, at the age of 50 and in the company of his teenage girlfriend, Beverly Aadland. When young Sean attended his father's funeral at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in

**“  
As an actor, Sean was  
as unconvincing as his  
father had been a  
true natural**

Glendale, CA, he caught the eye of all the old pros in Hollywood.

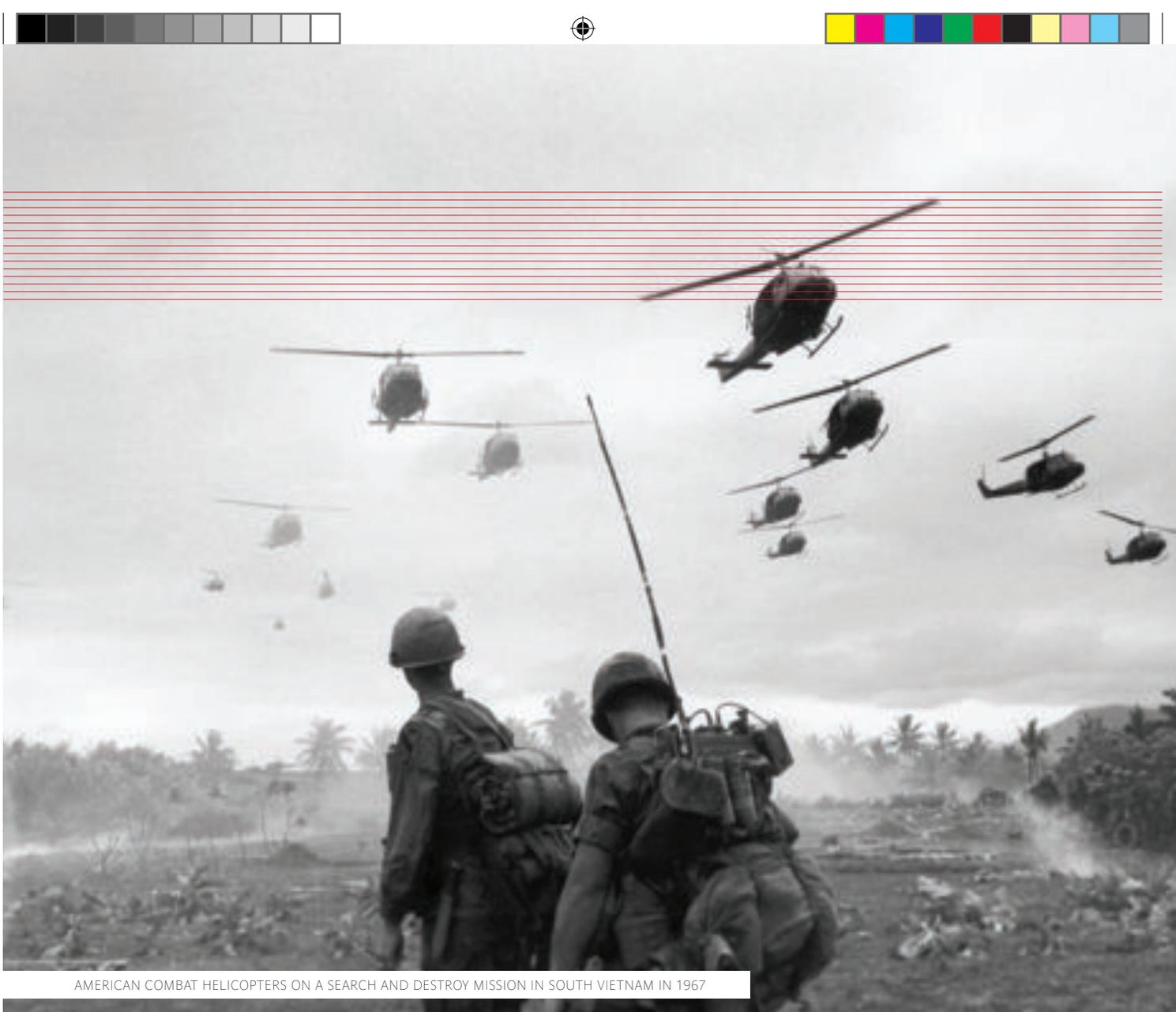
Hy Seeger, George Hamilton's agent, said, "He was maybe the most beautiful boy I had ever seen." George had also grown up in Palm Beach and he and Sean had been friends since they met before a judge on separate speeding charges. When the 20-year-old George was filming *Where the Boys Are* in Fort Lauderdale in 1959, he got a walk-on part for his friend Sean, who was 18.

Sean's mother was ferocious in her opposition to a film career for her only child. It would take a year before she relented and allowed him to sign with Seeger as his agent.



SEAN FLYNN AND TIM PAGE WORKING AS PHOTOGRAPHERS IN VIETNAM





AMERICAN COMBAT HELICOPTERS ON A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN 1967

By that time, Sean was a freshman at Duke University. He had been at Duke only about three months when he got the offer from director Harry Joe Brown to star in *The Son Of Captain Blood*, a sequel to his father's first big film, which Brown had also directed.

As an actor, Sean was every bit as stiff as his father had been natural and convincing in his cutthroat roles. One reviewer said Sean, "seems like a nice boy, which is going to be his handicap for some time to come." When Sean set off to film another B movie in Spain in 1961, he left Hollywood for good, returning only

for one or two brief visits. Only one of his movies was ever seriously reviewed. His mother gave him her mother's apartment in Paris that became his base camp for various hunting trips to Africa.

When he set off for Vietnam in January of 1966, he was pursuing "the sole great adventure," and one his father had never experienced. Errol was ridiculed for playing heroes in the movies but was ineligible for service in the Second World War. The Hearst papers sent him to cover the Spanish Civil War, but he turned tail and ran at the first signs of danger.

Sean arrived in Saigon carrying two suitcases, a suit, an attaché case, a camera and a tennis racket. A letter from *Paris-Match* got him his accreditation. Having never worked as a journalist or photographer, he set off to cover the war.

He had no deadlines, so he was able to stay out with the troops as long as he wanted. The Green Berets adopted him as one of their own. A Green Beret officer told me: "The guys fell in love with him; they thought he was the greatest thing going. They identified with him because he was willing to take his share of the



chances." No other correspondent had such access to missions. And Sean came out with pictures such as the ones of prisoners being tortured, which nobody had gotten before.

The stories under Sean's byline were not the shallow observations of a movie swashbuckler, they were sensitive stories about the "real stupidity of war."

In one, Sean described an American captain crying as he watched a Vietnamese child dying of shrapnel wounds. After he moved into moving film, Sean began stockpiling hours and hours of film with the ambition of producing the ultimate documentary on war.

After the "Five O'clock Follies" – the daily American press briefing – one day in Saigon, Sean encountered Tim Page. They became instant friends, the war's odd couple. On the surface, the two seemed polar opposites and yet they would become the kind of bosom buddies that can only happen in the midst of war. Tim was every bit as gregarious as Sean was careful, contained, polite. Invited to an embassy party, the two showed up in Viet Cong style black pajamas.

Timothy John Page was born May 25, 1944 in a suburb of London. He was 21 years old when he managed to get the only pictures of a coup in Laos that led to a staff job with UPI. It didn't take long for Tim to move on up to *Life*; that's where the money was.

Tim was first wounded by "three pieces of shrapnel up the bum" in September of 1965. During the Buddhist riots in Danang in July of 1966, Tim was hit in the hand and face, with blood spurting all over him. Sean commandeered a Marine jeep, strapped Tim on the front on an

old wooden door and sped off to the military hospital. After this, Tim was taking no-risk assignments like a visit to the Coast Guard cutter, *Point Welcome*. Incredibly, the ship was bombed and strafed by American F-4 fighter jets on nine different passes. Two Coast Guardsmen were killed. Tim counted 800 pieces of shrapnel in his body and carefully saved his hospital bills and mailed them to the Secretary of the Air Force.

If Sean had a charmed reputation as one of the lucky ones everybody wanted to be with, Tim was the opposite. One colleague said he was "a walking magnet for shrapnel." A collection was taken up to get him out of the country. He left with Sean to film the worst, and last, of his bad movies, this one called *Cinq Gars Pour Singapore* or *Five Guys For Singapore*. Tim went off to America where he proudly got himself arrested (for drugs) on stage with The Doors.

When the Singapore film had its premiere in Paris, Tim and Sean were together again, arriving in Tim's taxi in jeans and T-shirts. One night at the Ritz in London, George Hamilton got a call from hotel security that two suspicious guys in black pajamas wanted to see him. "That's no Viet Cong," said George. "That's Errol Flynn's son."

George had a reputation for going out with President Johnson's daughter while dodging the draft. Sean said he ought to see the war for himself, "things are more clear-cut there." That made no sense to George and he urged Sean to come back and resume his acting career. Sean had taken fencing lessons and done all the superficial things, but he had never

taken acting lessons "and he had the depth to be a good actor."

George never saw his friend again. The next thing he heard, Sean was in the Six Day War in Israel and then he was back in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive began in January of 1968. I had arrived in Saigon the night before Tet and had made the rounds of all the New Year's Eve parties. At 3am, my office called and said, "Come to work if you can get across the street."

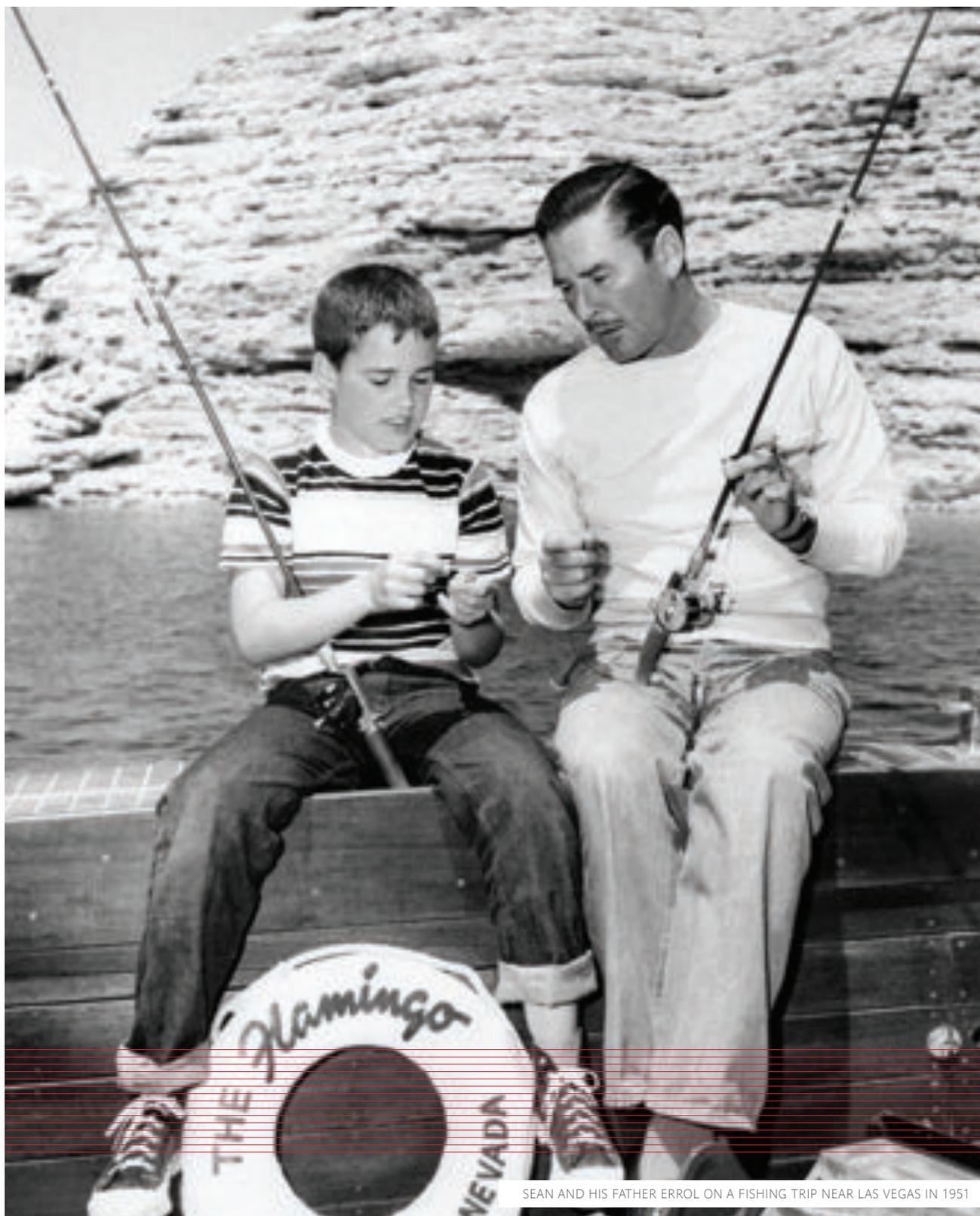
I covered the fighting in Saigon, then flew to Danang where I was in and out of the siege at Khe Sanh and the battle for Hue. To me, it was all so overwhelming it never seemed quite real to me. I was watching a movie and so never felt the very real dangers. And, one afternoon at the Danang Press Center, Sean Flynn walked onto the set of my movie.



“ Sean turned up in Saigon with a suitcase, a suit, a camera and a tennis racquet



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SEAN AND HIS FATHER ERROL ON A FISHING TRIP NEAR LAS VEGAS IN 1951





Understated does not begin to describe him. Soft-spoken, almost shy, he seemed an utter contradiction to the legend that preceded him. He quietly asked if I wanted to walk down along the riverfront with him. It is the quiet times like this that I remember: hanging out at the little cottage of our soul mates, Dana and Louise Stone, lazy afternoons at the Pink House on China Beach.

Off course, Tim was not far behind. He showed up one night at the Saigon airport – with all his camera equipment, but with no visa, no money and no accreditation. A group of us went out to help him through customs.

Tim had arrived just before “mini-Tet” and with money from a *Life* magazine cover, he was staging lavish banquets for his friends in no time. He soon recruited me to join him in renting the other half of a huge apartment on Tu Do Street where Sean and UPI photographer Nik Wheeler lived.

It was an open clubhouse. John Steinbeck IV, son of the author, was soon a regular. John explained that he and Sean were instant friends “because we both had a name that was only partly our own.”

For my own goodbye to Vietnam, the whole group took off for a weekend jaunt in December 1968. I then set off on my own tour of the Orient, from Hong Kong to Singapore to Bali and then back up the Malay peninsula to the Thai capital, Bangkok.

Sean and I were in Vientiane, Laos, when he received a telegram from Saigon: “VOTRE AMI EST GRAVEMENT BLESSE ET PEUT-ETRE MOURIR.” [Your friend is gravely wounded and perhaps to die.] After a wild night out, we flew back to Saigon to see Tim.

I could not imagine a more hideous end to our war adventure as we slowly made our way down the long rows of mutilated young soldiers now laid out like sides of beef, their lives ruined at such a young age. Tim was not expected to live and if he did, he might never walk again. Tim, of course, is a survivor. He would go on to a distinguished career as a photographer and author of books.

Sean, meanwhile, wrote out his own will and then took off to Indonesia, where he fell in love with a high

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**Sean and Dana drove  
around a Communist  
roadblock and into  
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school girl named Lacsmi. The next we heard, Sean was in jail. A taxi driver had assumed his girlfriend was a prostitute and arranged a paid date for her. Sean went after the driver, his john and his Mercedes, with a baseball bat. We never heard how Sean got out of that one, but he was soon back in Saigon with tales of his idyllic life in Bali. He was going to live out his life on that peaceful isle.

Dana and Louise were now living in the old apartment. They had left the war for good but, like Sean, Dana was always drawn back to it. He became a CBS cameraman and was sent into Cambodia just days before the American incursion.

Sean couldn't stand the idea of missing out on this new phase of the war and he soon joined Dana at the Hotel Royale in Phnom Penh.

Dana and Sean rented two bright red brand new Suzuki motorcycles. The

next morning the two set for the town of Chi Pou near the Vietnamese border.

A government-led tour for other correspondents caught up with Sean and Dana, some would remember overhearing them. The two sat arguing at a teashop. Dana talked about the danger of what Sean wanted to do; Sean said of course it was dangerous “but that’s what makes it a good story.”

Sean tossed Dana’s keys into a puddle and set off alone. Dana quipped, “Sean’s trying to scoop me” and rushed after him. The other correspondents watched in amazement as the two drove around a Communist roadblock and headed into enemy territory.

By that time, I had a newspaper job in New York. Although Herr had described Vietnam as “the happy childhood none of us ever had,” he had also written of the aftermath when “it seems the dead have only been spared a lot of pain.”

When a friend at UPI called up to tell me they’d been captured, I blurted out: “I wish to hell I were with them.”

You could not grieve for them as you would for others lost in the war. They were there because they wanted to be there; and they were fully aware of the dangers that took their lives.

Their images will live on in that last photograph of them alive and young and setting off on yet another adventure. There’s Sean on his motorcycle, dressed in the latest shades from Paris, a floppy jungle hat, T-shirt, cut-off shorts and flip flops as he set off to die. ■

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*Perry Deane Young is the author of Two of the Missing, Remembering Sean Flynn and Dana Stone*

