

# DATELINE - SAIGON

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Directed by Thomas D. Herman

Narrated by Sam Waterston

## FIVE REPORTERS CONFRONT A SUPERPOWER



Photo by Horst Faas

David Halberstam  
*New York Times*

Malcolm Browne  
*Associated Press*

Neil Sheehan  
*United Press International*



Peter Arnett  
*Associated Press*



Horst Faas  
*Associated Press*

“If the government is telling the truth, reporters become a minor, relatively unimportant conduit to what is happening. But when the government doesn’t tell the truth, begins to twist the truth, hide the truth, then the journalist becomes involuntarily infinitely more important.”

David Halberstam, *The New York Times*, in **DATELINE - SAIGON**

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Dexter Filkins, the celebrated former *New York Times* war correspondent, now writing for *The New Yorker*, says David Halberstam, one of **DATELINE — SAIGON'S** central characters, remains a role model for many who report from conflicts around the world. “In Iraq, when the official version didn't match what we were seeing on the streets of Baghdad, all we had to do--and we did it a lot--was ask ourselves: what would Halberstam have done? And then the way was clear. David taught us a great lesson--and not just to the reporters in Iraq, but to anyone who has ever tried to hold his government to account. And that is, the truth is not just a point of view. Truth does not adhere to the person who shouts the loudest. And truth does not necessarily belong to the people with the most power.”



### SUMMARY:

**DATELINE - SAIGON** profiles five Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists – *The New York Times's* David Halberstam; The Associated Press's Malcolm Browne, Peter Arnett, and the legendary photojournalist Horst Faas; and United Press International's Neil Sheehan.

With all the high-stakes drama of *All the President's Men*, the film chronicles their controversial and groundbreaking reporting during the early years of the Vietnam War as President Kennedy is secretly committing US troops to what is dismissed by some as a “nice little war in a land of tigers and elephants.” Five young reporters take on a superpower – and who wins?

Involuntarily, they are drawn into a war of their own that pits the journalists against government officials and ushers in a new era of journalism that seeks to hold the government accountable.

”We all arrived rather innocent. We didn't think we were innocent. I thought I was an experienced reporter, but I'd never had this kind of thing before.” David Halberstam, *The New York Times*.

Today we know the story's end, but few realized then how important their reporting was, and how our protagonists and their colleagues continue to serve as role models for today's front-line reporters around the globe.

**DATELINE - SAIGON** illuminates the difficulties of reporting war by focusing on America's most important and controversial case study: Vietnam, the war that established many of the ground rules for coverage of wars that followed and ignited an antagonism between the media and the military that unfortunately endures. The parallels to the challenges journalists face in reporting today's conflicts - and the consequences of not getting the story out - will become disturbingly obvious to the viewer.

**DATELINE - SAIGON** is geared to generations born after the Vietnam War as well as to the generation that lived through it but never knew the personal sacrifices made to report the truth - a struggle today's reporters continue to face. The “Saigon Boys” have much to teach us about reporting the truth in the face of government resistance.

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**DATELINE-SAIGON** was filmed over a 12 year period in the United States, the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Vietnam, and Iraq. The film features multiple interviews with key characters, some of whom are no longer living, and rare archival motion picture and still photographs, some of which come from private archives and will be seen publicly for the first time.



### EARLY PRAISE FOR DATELINE-SAIGON:

“A masterful epic. The film’s lessons have clearly not been properly absorbed, which makes the Vietnam pattern so deftly conveyed so relevant today.” **Peter Grose**, former editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine and former *New York Times* Saigon bureau chief.

“One of the finest films ever made about contemporary journalism. It shows how a handful of brave reporters brought truth about the Vietnam War to Americans, despite every effort by our government to stop them. A moving tribute to the power of the press and the ability of journalists to resist the dictates of power.” **Stephen Kinzer** award-winning author of *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War*; former *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* correspondent.

“**DATELINE-SAIGON** produced a wave of sad nostalgia for a war and a time when America lost its innocence and later a conflict in which it had only marginal national interest. It was a time though when young journalists learned to cover a different kind of war, and became the educational tool for informing the American people about the realities of what was happening in Vietnam.” **Marvin Kalb**, award-winning correspondent for CBS and NBC News.

"A compelling tale of young reporters telling truth to power in a bygone era of journalism in the dawn of America's ill-conceived military interventions overseas." **HDS Greenway**, *Washington Post* Saigon reporter and author of *Foreign Correspondent, a Memoir*.

“America's descent into full-scale war in Vietnam remains a puzzle. **DATELINE-SAIGON** --at once riveting and sobering--moves us closer to an answer.” **Thomas Patterson**, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press, Harvard University.

“Powerful and haunting and important...Every reporter’s dream is to have the fate to cover such a big story.” **Charles Sennott**, co-founder *Global Post* and former *Boston Globe* foreign correspondent.

“Very moving. A great tribute to the journalists who first put the Vietnam War on the front page of American newspapers. They were an inspiration to the rest of us who followed them into the paddies and jungles of Vietnam to report on the war. They were my heroes and have now become the stuff of legends. An important documentary of an important era of journalism. Five stars.” **Don North**, former ABC correspondent and a senior producer of the award-winning documentary, “The Ten Thousand Day War”.

“Riveting, utterly gripping, beautifully edited, couldn’t take my eyes off it for a second... an incendiary document.” **Christopher Lydon**, former *New York Times* correspondent; host of WBUR’s Radio Open Source.



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### BACKGROUND:

**DATELINE-SAIGON** is produced and directed by Boston-based filmmaker, **Thomas D. Herman**, a Co-Producer of the Emmy-award winning feature film “**Live From Baghdad**” starring Michael Keaton and Helena Bonham-Carter. Herman spent twelve years researching, filming, and interviewing over 50 writers, photojournalists, radio and television correspondents, government officials, historians, and others for this project. “The film is about a group of journalists who risked their lives to bring back a story no one wanted revealed.” Telling the truth about what was happening in Vietnam, Herman says, illustrated a shift away from traditional media support of any US war effort. “It was a revolution in attitude and a revolution in how news was distributed and how news was consumed.” But after the Vietnam War journalists never again gained the access they had there. “Reporters were shut out of every war since Vietnam,” CBS newsman Morley Safer says in the film.



Herman’s interest in the story began after reading David Halberstam’s seminal book, *The Best and the Brightest*. “I had always been curious about the heated controversy surrounding his reporting and that of others critical of the war. Was their reporting fair? Were these reporters responsible for our “losing” the war? I was a CNN field producer in Vietnam during the 25th anniversary of the end of the war in 2000. While there, I met a number of men and women who had covered the war, some still working reporters, some back in Saigon for a journalists reunion. The stories I heard on that trip of how the war was reported were dramatic and moving, and the reporters themselves were compelling and interesting characters. These reporters wrote the first draft of one of the most important and controversial chapters in American history. The stories behind that first draft are fascinating and largely unknown. It is also an exciting adventure story, a story of both personal and national coming of age and loss of innocence.”



Producer/Director Herman describes why he decided to focus on the five journalists featured in **DATELINE-SAIGON** and how their work continues to influence foreign reporting around the world. “What was especially compelling about these five – David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Malcolm Browne, Peter Arnett, and Horst Faas - is they were among the first to report that story on the ground in Vietnam was vastly different than that being reported by the government in Washington. They were among the first skeptics. They were all young, unknown, and relatively inexperienced when they arrived in Vietnam in 1961 and 1962, but were all to become legends. While they were naturally competitors working for competing news organizations, they were forced to draw together, literally under fire, and in the face of powerful government pressure, to report a story the government tried to hide. Their work in reporting the reality of the war, in speaking truth to power, blazed the trail for Vietnam reporters who followed them.”



### DISTRIBUTION & OUTREACH:

Distribution plans include seeking broadcasts and screenings in US and international markets, film festivals, educational screenings via partnerships with journalism schools, media conferences, workshops, and professional journalism associations. Through a robust social media presence, the film will engage journalists and students from around the world via the film’s website which will be an educational resource rich in material *not included in the film*, providing additional videos and multi-media platforms about various relevant aspects of journalism, foreign reporting, lessons learned, etc.

For more information about **DATELINE—SAIGON**, please contact Tom Herman,  
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