



# The story of Dan Coggin

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**D**AN Coggin, the celebrated journalist, has penned stories of other people in the leading magazines, newspapers and wire services of the world during his long career spanning over 40 years and now it is our turn to write the story of his life, or rather the tragic final days of his life. This is not the story of how he lived but how he embraced death while making a journey back to the country whose birth he witnessed and chronicled, and also made his humble contribution in its emergence, the land of the Bengalis, Bangladesh. Dan Coggin was the Foreign Correspondent of the TIME magazine, from 1965 to 1972; those were the days when few weekly magazines dominated the world media and a passing reference in TIME or NEWSWEEK could ensure a person his place in posterity. Those were the days before the emergence of CNN and global reach of television, and Foreign Correspondents were well-known to the readers and respected by the politicians and policy-makers every where. Those were the days of Middle-East crisis unfolding itself, Vietnam war gradually escalating to become bloody and Foreign Correspondents Club or FCC was the sought-after place

in various cities like Beirut, Saigon, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Singapore, Jakarta, Hong Kong and Tokyo. Asia was the hotbed of conflict and Dan was stationed in Asia, since 1964, first as Associated Press representative and later on from 1965 to 1972 as the Foreign Correspondent of TIME. It is quite understandable that Dan told many stories and he also had many more to tell. He was responsible for TIME magazine's news coverage at various periods in nearly 40 countries from North Africa eastward to Middle East and Asia. He covered the Vietnam war during the crucial 1966-1968 period, the 1970 invasion of Cambodia, Indonesia's 1965-66 anti-communist bloodbath, various Middle East turmoils, two India-Pakistan conflicts and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. He had numerous important contacts with Presidents and revolutionaries like Sukarno, Nasser, Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Yasser Arafat and others.

Needless to say, what

interests us most in Dan's long journalistic career is the 1971 episode. But one can also point out that while covering the 1969 mass upsurge in then East Pakistan, he interviewed Maulana Bhasani, the firebrand socialist, and depicted him as "The Prophet of Violence". In the report with the same title published on 18 April, 1969 issue of the TIME he wrote: "Wreathed by a wispy beard, his face reflects an almost other-worldly serenity. As he plays with his grandchildren in a tiny village 60 miles north of the East Pakistan capital of Dacca, Abdul Hamid Bhasani, 86, looks the part of a Moslem maulana or guru and to millions of Bengali peasants, he is. But the kindly grandfather is also Pakistan's most outspoken advocate of violence". The report had long been forgotten but the title, given by the Foreign Correspondent, endured the test of time. What more can a Foreign Correspondent cherish!

But there were more to

come as history unraveled itself with the brutal and treacherous attack by the Pakistan Army on civilian population of Bengal in March 1971 and the subsequent declaration of independence marking the beginning of Mukti Juddho, the liberation war. Dan was among the Foreign Correspondents who were thrown out of the country by the army on the first available flight to Bangkok. The terror unleashed by Pakistan Army was continuing unabated as East Pakistan was successfully cut off

from the outside world since there was no one to report and no way to send news outside the country. In these circumstances Dan quickly returned to India and took the risk to cross the open border to be inside the country to collect news about the massacre as well as the homegrown resistance. Dan followed in the footsteps of Simon Dring of the Daily Telegraph in reporting the war that the Pakistan army forbade to cover. Simon was the first journalist to provide eyewitness account of the genocidal atrocities and Dan was first to report about the nature and extent of popular resistance. Even if the soldiers managed to reach Kushtia, the townspeople were more than ready to fight again."

As darkness

approached, we were able to visit two neighbouring villages, with about 25 guerrillas living among the local folk in each. The guerrillas were mostly men in their 20s, some ex-college students, others former soldiers, militiamen and police."

Dan was in Dhaka again

'East Pakistan : Even the Skies Weep.' He again entered the occupied territory with the Freedom Fighters and wrote: "Leaving the road behind, I entered a strange world where water is seasonal king and the only transport is a large, cane-covered canoe known as the country boat. For seven hours we plied deeper into Gopalganj sub-division in Southern Faridpur district. The two wiry oarsmen found their way by taking note of such landmarks as a forlornly decaying maharajah's palace and giant butterfly nets hovering like oversized flamingos on stilts legs at waters edge.

In June 2011 a young

Bangladeshi film graduate Anindo Atik working in New York came across the name of Dan Coggin and his reports in TIME. Anindo hails from Kushtia and was planning to make a documentary film on Kushtia's resistance. He searched for Dan's contact and finally could talk to Dan living a secluded life in San Francisco, California. Dan was overjoyed with the enquiries made by a young Bangladeshi about reports he had written 40 years ago. As a friend of Liberation War Museum (LWM) Anindo informed us about Dan and LWM invited him to come to Bangladesh in December 2011 to deliver a lecture during the Victory Day Celebration. That is how we came in contact with Dan Coggin and enthusiastically started to exchange e-mails developing ideas about how he could effectively contribute to Bangladesh's struggle to memorialize the past. He heartily accepted our invitation to be among the people he came so close to in 1971 and humbly stated, "I do hope you can take into account my wishes for no special treatment and as much time as possible to enjoy the company of ordinary people, like me, and all

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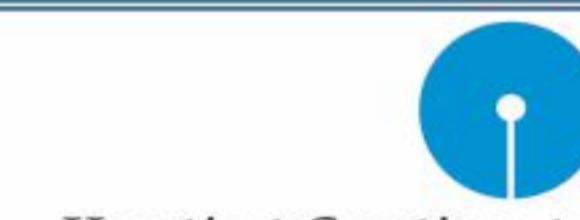
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