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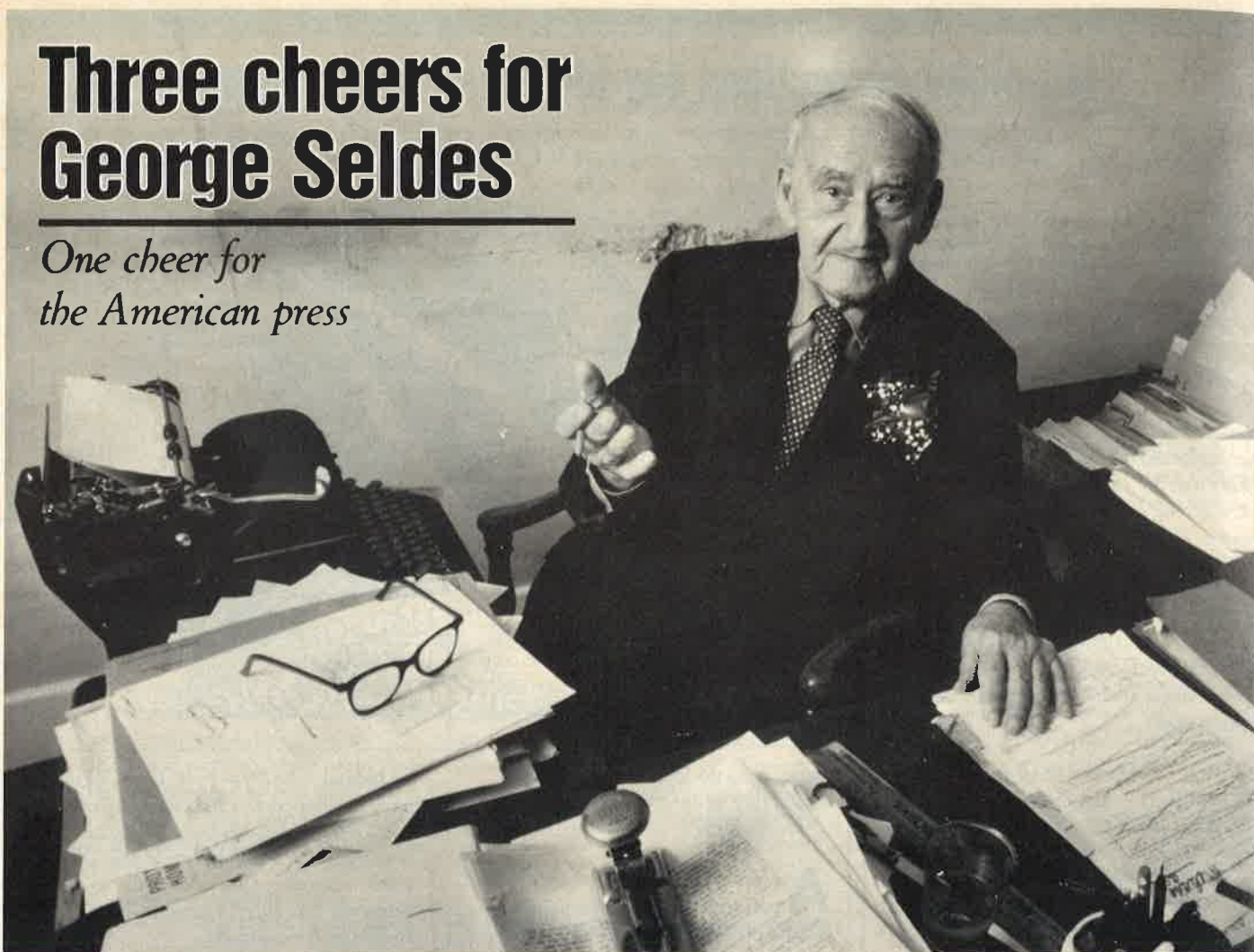
George Seldes

Shooting straight for 75 years

Convention agenda; censure debate

Three cheers for George Seldes

One cheer for the American press



By Carl Jensen

I have a fantasy. It is to hold a seminar for America's leading agenda setters. You know. People like the 10 men in America who let the rest of us know what we're supposed to talk about. Ben Bradlee. Tom Brokaw. Max Frankel. David Gergen. Henry Anatole Grunwald. Peter Jennings. John Quinn. Dan Rather. Richard Smith. William Thomas.

It would be a day-long class in basic journalism, since I believe these media superstars could use a refresher course about now.

Guest speakers would include Donna Allen, Ben Bagdikian, Noam Chomsky, Nicholas Johnson, Jessica Mitford, I.F. Stone, and Herb Schiller. These are people who have some fairly strong ideas on how the press could do a better job.

The primary purpose of the seminar would be to stimulate the media giants to rethink their news judgment. In a casual roundtable discussion format, we would explore questions such as what is truth, what is reality, what are facts, what do we

Foreign correspondent and press critic George Seldes at work in his home in Hartland-4-Corners, Vermont.

cover, what don't we cover, what *should* we cover? And, is it possible to practice responsible journalism and still make a profit?

To date, the only problem I've had in arranging my fantasy seminar is in selecting a proper textbook for background reading. Traditional texts I use in my teaching, such as Curtis MacDougall's *Interpretative Reporting* and Dennis and Ismach's *Reporting Processes and Practices*, are exemplary introductory journalism texts, but they lack the vigor with which I want to stimulate our guests.

But now, Ballantine Books has solved the problem with the publication of *Witness to a Century* by George Seldes. The author, mentally vigorous as he approaches his 97th birthday, would be the honorary moderator of this super seminar.

Do not be dismayed if you don't immediately recognize the name George Seldes, a man who has practiced some of the world's most aggressive and

penetrating journalism for more than 75 years. Seldes, after all, has been the object of one of the longest running "non-conspiracies of silence" in press history.

He earned this singular honor, one suspects, because of his passion for reporting the truth and for regularly castigating the major media for *not* publishing it.

And, despite Seldes' half century of on-target press criticism, I suspect that if you were to ask journalists who the best known living press critic is today, the majority would answer Reed Irvine and his misnamed "Accuracy in Media" conservative group.

The explanation for that response is simple. A cursory look at *The New York Times Index* for the past 10 years will reveal that "AIM" Irvine has more than 25 citations; Seldes, on the other hand, has two. But even two NYT citations in 10 years is an improvement over the past. When I talked to Seldes in 1982, he mentioned how his name had been

blackballed from *The New York Times*.

Recently, though, he learned that the *Times* will review *Witness*, a welcome change after being a media nonperson for 45 years. The *Times* and nearly every other newspaper in the country ignored Seldes' *Even the Gods Can't Change History*, which was published in 1976.

(That book, *Gods*, was a journalistic blockbuster, by the way. It revealed how the news is slanted, how media myths are created, and how the media intentionally misrepresent the news. The publisher contacted 300 newspapers across the country; three of them reviewed the book.)

I.F. Stone, the nationally-acclaimed investigative journalist and editor of *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, which kept a critical eye on Washington from 1953 to 1971, recommends Seldes' new book, *Witness*, to "all aspiring newspaper men and women with fire in their bellies."

I also recommend it to journalists whose fires have been dampened. In fact, both journalists and non-journalists will find themselves captivated by the book. It is a warmly-written and personal insight into world history. One can read *Witness* for sheer pleasure and still learn a great deal about how the world works, as well as how the press has functioned, or malfunctioned, through the years.

When we talk about George Seldes, we are talking about a journalist who is a key link in the chain of America's greatest inspirational journalists. Lincoln Steffens, the golden muckraker, inspired George Seldes, who, in turn, inspired I.F. Stone, who, in turn, inspired Carl Bernstein, who, along with Bob Woodward, inspired a generation of investigative journalists.

Seldes, a journalist's journalist, was on the scene as a foreign correspondent during some of modern history's most important events and reported what he saw, from World War I through the rise of the Cold War.

Unfortunately, what he saw happening was not always what the media managers wanted to tell the American people about, and thus his copy was often suppressed or censored.

In frustration, Seldes published his own weekly newsletter, *In Fact*, from 1940 to 1950. A clamorous critic of both the government and the press, *In Fact's* original slogan was, "For the millions who want a free press." Later, the slogan became, "An antidote for falsehoods in the daily press."

We often say that a responsible

The AP's misreporting of the story rekindled the Moslem enthusiasm for a holy war

watchdog press enlightens the public and that an enlightened public changes the course of history.

Had America's press provided in-depth coverage of the kinds of issues raised by Seldes during the first half of the 20th century, it's possible that we would not have had to endure the Cold War, the McCarthy era, Vietnam, Watergate, or the Iran-*contra* debacle in the second half of the century.

In *Witness*, Seldes documents critical events that were censored, falsely reported or ignored by our news media. Consider just a few of the events recorded by Seldes that might have helped change the course of history — if they had been accurately reported by the nation's media at the time.

● *World War I.* Seldes said the biggest story of his journalism career was his interview with Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg following the World War I armistice. He and three other journalists got the exclusive interview by driving into Germany in violation of the armistice regulations.

In tears, Hindenburg, who had directed the German war effort and military strategies, confessed that the Germans lost the war on the battlefield. That story was censored by the U.S. Army, which didn't want to OK a story obtained in violation of the truce. And, too, the Army was also under pressure from other journalists who didn't want their papers to know they had been scooped.

Seldes suggests in his book that if Hindenburg's statement conceding that Germany lost the war on the battlefield had been widely publicized, Hitler would not have been able to appeal to the masses with his claim that Germany lost World

War I because of a "stab-in-the-back" from Socialists, Communists, and the Jews.

(See page 19 for an excerpt from *Witness* that recounts the Hindenburg episode.)

● *The Damascus Massacre.* The Associated Press, in what Seldes refers to as one of the greatest falsifications of history in our time, reported the massacre of 25,000 Moslem men, women, and children by the French army in the bombardment of Damascus in the mid-1920s. After warning people to evacuate, the French had shelled a section of the city in an attempt to put down an Arab uprising in the French-governed territory.

While Seldes was sympathetic to the Arab liberation movement, he was a journalist, first and last. And he was the only reporter on the scene when the "massacre" occurred. He toured the section of Damascus that had been shelled, and counted 308 bodies. He estimated that, because some bodies were buried in rubble, the death toll might be as high as a thousand.

His eye-witness reports for the *Chicago Tribune* were overwhelmed by the Associated Press's 25,000-killed dispatch, written by a reporter far from the scene who had picked up atrocity rumors from Arab nationalists.

The AP story made headlines around the world, and an event that never happened contributed to the rapid rise of the Arab independence movement and rekindled the old Moslem enthusiasm for *jihad*, or holy war, which continues to the present.

● *The Marxist Menace in Mexico.* Seldes' boss, Colonel Robert Rutherford McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*, sent Seldes to Mexico in 1927 to report the "coming war" with the United States.

While the Associated Press frightened the public with reports of "the spectre of a Mexican-fostered bolshevist hegemony" in Central America, Seldes found that the real intrigue was centered in the U.S. embassy and among representatives of American oil interests, who wanted to topple the government so they could grab Mexico's oil reserves.

Seldes wrote a series of 10 columns about what he found in Mexico — five reporting the official State Department line and another five reporting the other side of the issue based on what he had observed or verified himself.

The *Tribune* ran the first five, supporting American business interests, but never ran the second series. That was

when Seldes decided to quit the *Tribune*.

To this day, we still seem to suffer from false State Department-generated threats of a "bolshvist hegemony" in Central America.

The scenario for the latest "red scare" in Central America, for instance, was established in 1981 by then Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who warned America of "Soviet-Cuban aggression" in El Salvador.

Haig's warning was based on "secret documents" supposedly taken from rebels captured in El Salvador and published in a State Department White Paper that was subsequently discredited. Indeed, the covert intrigues of Reagan's "Secret Team" in Nicaragua are hauntingly similar to those of the "imperialist interventionists" observed by Seldes 60 years ago. Thanks to CIA-paid Central American journalists, we are fed "news reports" no less biased than the earlier Associated Press dispatches.

Just as Colonel McCormick and the *Chicago Tribune* censored George Seldes in 1927, today's leading media are ignoring the work of freelance investigative journalists like Martha Honey and Tony Avirgan.

An investigation by Honey and Avirgan into the La Penca, Nicaragua, press conference bombing on May 30, 1984, uncovered a network of CIA operatives, *contra* leaders, Cuban-American terrorists, and right-wing mercenaries. Their findings also led to a lawsuit by the Christic Institute, a public-interest law firm in Washington, D.C., which is exposing many of the same individuals who participated in the arms deals with Iran and the diversion of funds to the *contras*.

The full extent of the "Secret Team" being explored in pre-trial discovery proceedings in a U.S. District Court in Miami has yet to be aired in Washington, D.C. — or in our national press.

● *The invasion of Spain*. Seldes says that if the world's free press had printed the truth about what was happening in Europe and particularly in Spain in the '30s, the civilized nations of the world would have rallied to support the Spanish Republic rather than abandoning it to be destroyed by its fascist enemies.

Nearly everyone who went to Spain between 1936 and 1939 knew the war was a prologue to World War II, in which Hitler and Mussolini planned to take over all of Europe, Russia, and, eventually, the United States. Spain was their proving ground.

Incredibly, the biased U.S. coverage

America's industrial and financial giants collaborated with the Nazis

of the Spanish tragedy did not end in 1939. Recently, some survivors of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade returned to Spain to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the conflict. They were widely acclaimed in Spain and their return was well publicized in Europe but not in the United States media.

Brigade members sent me photos, European articles, and a plaintive letter wondering why American press coverage of that tragic conflict remains biased to this day.

● *World War II*. Seldes notes, in brief, that one of the least publicized stories of the war was corporate American support for Hitler and Mussolini *during* the war as well as before the war.

The non-conspiracy of silence about corporate America's complicity with Hitler and the Nazis continues even to this day. One of the top overlooked stories of 1982 was a book titled *Trading With the Enemy* by Charles Higham.

In the book, Higham documented that some of America's industrial and financial giants, including DuPont, Ford, Chase National (now Chase Manhattan) Bank, ITT, General Motors, and Standard Oil of New Jersey collaborated with the Nazis either for monetary gain or because they had executives who were Nazi sympathizers hoping for a German victory — and German/American industrial cooperation after the war.

According to Higham, most of these firms were interlocked with German industrial giants such as I.G. Farben, whose many enterprises included an operation the world knows as Auschwitz.

This is a story Seldes tried to get the press to report in 1942; four decades later it was still being ignored.

If the press had pursued the story

aggressively over the decades, President Eisenhower's valedictory warning about the dangers of a military-industrial complex in the United States might have made more sense to the American people.

Seldes' exposés, which often went unpublished in the mainstream media, were not limited to international politics. His story of a Harvard professor who helped star football players "earn" their degrees was rejected by the *Harvard Illustrated Monthly* as "treason." It is only recently that the media have started to expose the underside of intercollegiate athletics.

Seldes also was one of the first critics of the way the press ignored the connection between tobacco use and cancer. Had the national press reported the dangers of cigarette smoking with the same intensity and consistency that Seldes did in *In Fact*, tens of thousands of Americans probably would not have suffered the painful death of lung cancer, heart disease or emphysema.

Even today, nearly 50 years after Seldes first publicized a warning that a growing body of medical evidence demonstrated that cancer and tobacco use were linked, there are still some in the media who prefer to ignore or downplay the issue rather than to antagonize their tobacco advertisers.

More than half a century before Ben Bagdikian and Herb Schiller tried to warn us about media monopolies, Seldes told about a U.S. Senator who was trying to do the same thing.

Senator R.F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, wrote Seldes, warned that "The great corporate newspapers of this country are owned by special interests and run in these interests, or they sell their editorial columns for cash for any interest that may come along."

Like Seldes, Senator Pettigrew was a victim of the media censorship of his time. Today the media monopoly warnings of Bagdikian and Schiller are trampled in the media merger mania indulged in by Wall Street bulls.

A key question for the fantasy seminar is whether the kind of media bias and censorship encountered by Seldes could occur today. Based on a national media research project I have conducted since 1976, I would say that it not only could occur but that it does.

Project Censored annually reveals a number of stories and issues that are suppressed, overlooked, undercovered,



Seldes (center) and other correspondents who covered the fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1922.

or just plain censored by the same non-conspiracy of silence that Seldes warned about. Here are some of the issues highlighted by the project in the past 11 years.

- 1976 — The intrigues of the Trilateral Commission; the threat of unregulated gene splicing; the life-endangering record of the Dalkon Shield IUD.

- 1977 — The monumental problems associated with the decommissioning of nuclear power plants; the massacres in Cambodia; environmental problems posed by acid rain.

- 1978 — The implications of faulty Nuclear Regulatory Commission power plant inspections; the health hazards posed by the Third World asbestos industry; the unresolved problems associated with irradiated food.

- 1979 — Genocide in East Timor; industrial nations dumping products in Third World nations that were illegal to sell at home; the tobacco industry's fight against self-extinguishing cigarettes.

- 1980 — Distorted media reports on the crisis in El Salvador; the excesses of the National Security Agency; men, women and children who were dying of starvation in Africa.

- 1981 — Racial injustice in

Greensboro, North Carolina; the intractable problems posed by radioactive waste; the training of Central American terrorists in Florida.

- 1982 — Fraudulent product safety tests; the mysterious Lyndon LaRouche.

- 1983 — Israeli arms to Central America; America's PIK (Payment in Kind) agricultural disaster; Nelson Mandela and South African politics.

- 1984 — The myth of a Soviet military buildup; links between the CIA and death squads in El Salvador; the health threat posed by chlamydia.

- 1985 — The aerial war in El Salvador; American aid to the Nicaraguan contras; media merger mania; the unexplored ramifications of GWEN (Ground Wave Emergency Network).

- 1986 — The Christic Institute's story of the Secret Team; the destruction of veterans' radiation records by the Veterans Administration; nerve gas production in residential areas; lethal plutonium payload scheduled for the space shuttle.

The failure of the media to provide substantial coverage of these stories, and others like them — at the time when it was most vital that the public know about them — suggests that the press has not

made much progress since Seldes first appeared on the scene.

While there are a number of contenders for the most important, least-covered issues of their time, I would suggest that the fattest sacred cow — in recent media history, at least — was Ronald Reagan during the first six years of his administration. The media even promoted the president's "teflon coating" to excuse their ineffective coverage.

The fraudulent Haig White Paper in 1983 should have awakened media watchdogs. It didn't. Since then, the administration has conducted a systematic assault on our free flow of information, including overt censorship, restricted access, new classification procedures, as well as an official disinformation policy.

Anyone doubting the scope of the administration's efforts at information control should contact the Washington Office of the American Library Association for a copy of *Less Access to Less Information By and About the U.S. Government: 2*. In 33 pages, it documents the administration's recent efforts to restrict and privatize government information.

When future historians write about the

decline of America in the final years of the '80s, they'll surely cite the economic, political and social policies of the Reagan administration that helped lead us to the economic and moral abyss that now confronts us.

The irony is that those historians will fail to record the role of the press, which permitted — in fact, encouraged — those policies with a lack of critical reporting.

Another question that deserves discussion during the fantasy seminar is, What qualities made George Seldes such a good journalist?

In addition to an inquiring mind, retentive memory, and a critical perspective on society, Seldes was not a second-hand journalist. He did not depend on tips and rumors provided him by "reliable sources." Indeed, it is interesting to compare Seldes' contacts with those of our leading journalists today.

Seldes' sources included a veritable cast of thousands, including people such as Williams Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, General John Pershing, General Douglas MacArthur, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Albert Einstein, Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, Lord Beaverbrook, Sigmund Freud, General George Patton, Jr., Nikolai Lenin, Benito Mussolini, Leon Trotsky, Bernard Baruch, Eleanor Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover, Harry Truman, Henry Wallace, and Marshal Joseph Broz Tito.

I know of no journalist who has comparable access to today's international newsmakers. Too often, what is presented to us today as news is some second- or third-hand self-serving bureaucratic doubletalk leaked to a journalist by an unidentified "highly placed source."

And on the rare occasion when a journalist gets that exclusive interview with an original source, we sometimes discover that the newsmaker was well paid for the interview.

News has become largely a matter of entertainment, ratings, circulation, and profits. The compulsion to discover the truth and report it that drove journalists like Steffens, Seldes, and Stone is no longer a powerful driving force today.

Instead of discussing the content of news programming, the issue often seems to focus on whether viewers like to see Dan Rather in a sweater, or whether viewers respond to Peter Jennings' earnest charm.

(CBS probably spent more money researching the impact of Rather's

sweaters on ratings than it did in investigating the implications of Ronald Reagan's support for the reactionary World Anti-Communist League. Surely CBS, the second largest media company in the country, with revenues in excess of three billion dollars, can afford to support investigative reporting beyond what it does for *60 Minutes*.)

Despite the tawdry commercialization of the Fourth Estate in the last decade, George Seldes concludes *Witness* on an optimistic note. In it, he recalls a recent interview with Bill Moyers in which a surprised Moyers finally asks Seldes if he is defending the American press now.

Seldes responded that we should all be defending the press against the attacks of people like our "acting" president, crooked journalists and editors, and those who would intimidate the press through million-dollar libel suits.

No argument there. For all its faults, the American press is still our only hope for maintaining a well-informed nation of activists; surely we must never give in to those who would gag the press.

Nonetheless, there is a serious argument about how much the press has changed since the days when Hearst sold out editorially to Hitler, and no one, including Hearst's most bitter rivals, printed a word about it. While Seldes only mentions this charge briefly in *Witness*, he devoted a chapter in *Even the Gods Can't Change History* to documenting the extraordinary \$400,000-a-year deal in the mid-'30s between Hitler and Hearst.

(The Nazi money was laundered through Hearst's International News Service, said William E. Dodd, the U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1933 to 1937.)

While there are "no Hearsts accepting money from Hitlers . . ." today, Seldes says, the present surely cannot be characterized as another golden age of muckraking.

While there is no conspiracy on the part of the press to deprive the public of information it needs, there are a variety of factors that lead to a general breakdown in the information flow.

These include the fear of libel suits, the influence of advertiser pressure, the increasing complexity of some issues, self-serving sources, the urgency of deadlines, inadequately prepared journalists, well-meaning but misguided patriotism, a misconception of public interest, and a compulsion to entertain readers, viewers and listeners at the

expense of substance.

Further, these difficulties are all exacerbated by the need to show a profit in the next quarterly report. Together they force the press to go for the news at least resistance. Investigative journalism is time consuming, expensive, and potentially hazardous to corporate profits. And that's not what media lawyers, accountants, and stockholders want to hear.

Unfortunately, there is no George Seldes among today's working journalists to record these shortcomings of the media. Indeed, I know of only one journalist who even comes close to following in his footsteps, and that is Gunter Wallraff of West Germany.

While Wallraff has exposed some of the biggest economic and political sacres in Europe, including the press, he is still little known in the United States. However, like Seldes, he should be required reading for today's budding journalists as well as those who have lost their bloom.

Perhaps the most important tip Seldes has for journalists is the advice his own father, a druggist, gave him: "Question everything; take nothing for granted."

I would add I.F. Stone's warning that "When covering the Capital, the first thing to remember is that every government is run by liars."

The Seldes story is about more than just a series of failures on the part of the press; it is also about ethics, responsibility, and guts — three values not found in abundance in journalism today.

It is fitting that Seldes published his book on the 200th anniversary of our constitution. By reminding the press of its past failures, he also reminds it that the First Amendment is more than a constitutional defense against libel or a shield for pornography; it is also an awesome responsibility we must not shirk. The press has no higher calling than to enlighten the public.

And finally, it is time for the press to correct a gross miscarriage of justice. George Seldes has devoted more than three quarters of a century to journalism and to improving journalism. Yet he has never been awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Let us hope that *Witness to a Century* wins a 1987 Pulitzer Prize. He and the American people deserve no less.

Carl Jensen is a professor of communications studies at Sonoma State University in California and director of Project Censored.

News not fit to print

After American forces entered World War I, then called *The Great War*, there was considerable competition among American reporters for spots in the Army's press section. General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing, commander of the American forces, had created just 21 slots for correspondents. Though Pershing had little use for the press, says Seldes, he did provide plush accommodations for them, as well as cars — Cadillacs — to get around in.

Press section correspondents were nominally part of the Army, though they represented civilian newspapers and news services. They wore uniforms and carried the rank of captain. They wore no insignia of rank, however, because they didn't want doughboys to have to salute them.

In May 1918, Seldes joined the press section. He represented the Edward Marshall Syndicate, which served about 30 American newspapers. In the following excerpt from *Witness to a Century*, Seldes describes a never-printed interview with Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg, the German commander who later became president of Germany.

By George Seldes

Hindenburg Confesses: U.S. Won the War. This was the biggest story of the war, certainly the most important news story of my journalistic three-quarters of a century, an important paragraph in the history not only of the United States, but of the world, and, so far as I know, it has never been published by anyone but me and appears in no historical work.

It all began Armistice Day in an accidental conversation among four of the 21 of the press corps who happened to be in one group watching developments: Herbert Corey, who, like myself, wrote feature stories and sent them by mail to a syndicate; Lincoln Eyre of the *New York World*, *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and affiliated papers; Cal Lyon of the *United Press*; and me.

From the wild behavior of millions of



General John "Blackjack" Pershing is flanked by the members of G-2D, Pershing's Army Press Corps. Seldes stands to the far right, next to Edwin L. James of *The New York Times*.

human beings, soldiers and civilians that day, it was apparent that few, if any, thought of the millions of dead, the hundreds of thousands of men blown to pieces, the many more millions wounded, the pain and suffering on a scale previously unknown in history.

I do not remember which one of us — it was not me — who suddenly said: "This must not happen again," and there, while walking in no-man's-land, we stopped and solemnly shook hands and pledged each other to devote the remainder of our lives to writing the truth about this war — as a warning to the world that it must never again be repeated.

In the story I later wrote for the Marshall Syndicate, I concluded that "if the angel of the Lord had appeared before us on that battlefield and said to each one, 'Would you give your life to prevent another such war?' all four of us would gladly have gone out and died."

We four also decided that day that military discipline no longer applied to newspaper correspondents, and that we could break the Armistice regulations, drive into Germany, see for ourselves what really was going on there, and attempt to interview Field Marshal

Hindenburg.

Success or failure, it turned out to be the greatest adventure of our lives.

It all began quite peacefully. We took our two Cadillacs — although we were technically entitled to one car each, the Army never had enough to supply more than 10 or 11 for us. General Pershing had a Locomobil, the only one in France, and brigadier generals got Dodges.

We drove from Luxembourg through a large part of France the Germans had held since 1914. One town, St. Menehold, was intact, and every store was ready for business except that there was nothing inside, and no one outside to buy — not a human being, not even a dog.

Deserted in 1914, it was too far from the trenches for even a stray shell to damage it. It was ghostly, even frightening. The roads were excellent; we drove fast and soon came upon the entire German Army in retreat.

At the sight of American uniforms there was a moment of surprise or fright among the soldiers. Then a high officer — we figured him to be at least a colonel — came over to see what the commotion

was all about and gave a brisk order: "Take them into the woods and shoot them."

While Eyre was trying to explain, shouting now, that we were not fighting soliders but journalists, a sailor with a red armband arrived; everyone seemed respectful to him, and he asked a few questions. Eyre explained. The sailor became a friend; he suggested we go to headquarters in Frankfurt, find the sailor he named who was running that city, and ask for transportation to Kassell, where Hindenburg was now stationed.

And, to Eyre's question, he pointed to the armband, which read *Arbeiter und Soldatenrat*, Workers and Soldiers' Council. He, and all the sailors running a vast part of Germany, were from Kiel; they had mutinied in the last days of the war and were now ruling the country.

We went to Frankfurt. The authorities there, headed by another sailor with an armband, told us to send our Cadillacs back to the American Army. He found a car for us — it had no rubber tires, but something, perhaps rope, on the rims — and we traveled so slowly we might just as well have walked.

But we somehow got to Kassell and put up at the best hotel — magnificent, but totally foodless. The sailor in charge listened to our request, and the next morning, after Hindenburg had refused to see us, telephoned to someone at headquarters to send Hindenburg's personal auto for us, and to order Hindenburg to talk to us.

The Hindenburg car had rubber tires. The officers at headquarters gave us a formal if not too friendly reception. We began diplomatically, each in turn asking a question: Was it starvation that forced the end of the war, was the first question. My colleague was diplomatic enough not to say "surrender." Another asked if the demobilization was continuing successfully. Then it was my turn.

I could not rudely ask "Who" or "What won the war," but I did manage, thanks to a diplomatic interpreter, to ask what ended the four-year stalemate. As I noted it immediately after we left the room, Hindenburg made this historically important answer:

"I will reply with the same frankness: the American infantry in the Argonne won the war. I say this as a soldier, and soldiers will understand me best. . . .

"Germany could not have won the war

— that is, after 1917. We might have won on land. We might have taken Paris. But after the failure of the world food crops of 1916, the British food blockade reached its effectiveness in 1917. So I must really say that the British food blockade and the American attack decided the war for the Allies. . . .

"The Argonne Battle was slow and difficult. But it was strategic. . . . The Americans are splendid soldiers. But when I replaced a division, it was weak in numbers and unrested, while each American division came in fresh and fit and on the offensive.

"The day came when the American command sent new divisions into the battle and when I had not even one broken division to plug up the gaps. There was nothing left to do but ask for terms. . . .

"From a military point of view the Argonne Battle as conceived and carried out by the American command was the climax of the war and its deciding factor. The American attack continued from day to day with increasing power, but when two opposing divisions had broken each other, yours were replaced with ten thousand eager men, ours with decimated, ill-equipped, ill-fed men suffering from contact with a gloomy and despairing civilian population.

"I do not mean to discredit your fighting power. I repeat: without the American blow in the Argonne we could have made a satisfactory peace at the end of a long stalemate or at least held our last positions on our own frontier indefinitely — undefeated. The American attack won the war."

Then Hindenburg said, "*Mein armes Vaterland, mein armes Vaterland*," and sobbed and bent his head, and wept.

I saw Hindenburg crying.

What makes this interview historic news of world importance, and not merely an American story, is the admission that the war was won fairly in the field — no excuses, no blaming starvation (the British blockade), or betrayal at home (the Ludendorff myth).

Nazism was founded on a total (or totalitarian) lie: that Germany did not lose the war on the battlefield, but because of the *Dolchstoß*, or stab-in-the-back, "by civilians," "by Socialists," "by the Communists," and "by the Jews." [Field Marshall Erich] Ludendorff originated the *Dolchstoß* legend, as it was

soon known, and Hitler armed it.

One man could have stopped this falsehood, but he did not speak out again. The man who had declared forthrightly that the war was a stalemate that neither side could have won, that the American divisions broke the balance and won the war, now kept silent. The last hero of the German war became, finally, a coward. Hindenburg betrayed not only himself, he betrayed the German people, he betrayed history.

If the Hindenburg confession had been passed by Pershing's (stupid) censors at that time, it would have been headlined in every country civilized enough to have newspapers, and undoubtedly would have made a lasting impression on millions of people and become an important page in history; and I believe it would have destroyed the main planks of the platform on which Hitler rose to power, it would have prevented World War II, the greatest and worst in all history, and it would have changed the future of all mankind.

Of course, few could realize its importance until more than a decade later when Hitler became *Der Führer*. We in G-2D did not think it worthwhile to give up our number-one positions in journalism in order to be free to publish.

Almost equally to blame with General Pershing and his advisers, notably General Denis Nolan, chief of intelligence, was a minority group in the press corps whose spokesman was the superegotistic but nevertheless brilliant journalist Edwin L. James of *The New York Times* news service.

Led by Mr. James, these colleagues, who without doubt would be blamed by all their editors for being scooped on the biggest story of the war next to the Armistice, demanded of Pershing that he fire the four adventurers and forbid us to publish a word of the Hindenburg confession.

The U.S. Army bowed to *The New York Times*. It compromised somewhat by permitting us to remain in the corps, but only on condition that we never write or publish the story. (Years later, when it had lost all its significance except as a page in history, the story appeared either in liberal weeklies or in histories and reminiscences.)

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