**General Information**

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**Description**

Patricia Hangen, author of "Tell Him That I Heard" shares memories of her husband, NBC News correspondent Welles Hangen, who was captured and presumed killed in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. This segment includes Welles Hangen's final report while following the Cambodian Army.

**Keywords**

Citation

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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

Transcript

Wife of NBC News Correspondent Welles Hangen Recounts His Life as a Journalist

TOM BROKAW, anchor:
May 31st, 1970, when war was raging in Southeast Asia, NBC News correspondent Welles Hangen set out from Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, to cover the news in the town of Takeo, fifty miles to the south. It was a dangerous mission, Welles knew that, but it had been along a road that he’d been on only a day or two earlier, when he filed this report about the ill-trained Cambodian army and what had been going on there.

WELLES HANGEN reporting (File footage):
Cambodian paratroops, who invariably travel on foot, moved about five miles down the country’s main north-south highway toward a hoped-for rendezvous with South Vietnamese forces to the southeast. The Cambodians met stiff resistance from about fifty Vietcong entrenched in the hamlet of Prey Nhoek, 35 miles south of Phnom Penh. One Cambodian soldier was killed and two others wounded, one of them shot through the foot. Once inside the hamlet, the Cambodians found one dead Vietcong and several blood-stained foxholes. Villagers said at least ten Vietcong were wounded but had been carried away. The Cambodian paratroop battalion is the best unit in a lackluster army. They are learning on the job while they slowly try to clear Cambodia’s main north-south highway.

They may eventually link up with American and South Vietnamese forces in Takeo, south of here. The problem is that the Cambodian’s rate of progress is so slow, that the Americans may be gone, and the South Vietnamese no longer welcome, by the time this vital highway has been cleared and the paratroops
have reached the main city in the south. This is Welles Hangen, NBC News, at Prey Nhoek village, in Cambodia.

BROKAW: Welles went off down this road on his attempt to reach Takeo, and he has not been seen or heard from since that time. The two members of his camera crew, Roger Colne, an Australian national, and Yoshihiko Waku, a Japanese, he was ambushed by guerillas, all three were captured. And as of this morning, nearly seven years later, we still aren’t entirely certain of what has happened to Welles Hangen and his colleagues, although he has now been declared dead by the courts. His wife, Patricia Hangen, is with us this morning. She has just written a book about their life together, called “Tell Him That I Heard”, about their life and the various news fronts of the world. Mrs. Hangen, first of all, thank you for coming in this morning. And I-- I’ve known about your life for some time because all of us I think who were coming up at NBC News when Welles was there, admired him greatly. He was the quintessential foreign correspondent, I think, and it’s best summed up in how you met and how you lived together. He met you during an earthquake in Greece and life never really settled down after that, did it?

PATRICIA HANGEN (Author, “Tell Him That I Heard”): That’s true, Tom. It just kept going, from that point on. Never dull.

BROKAW: You were married and had a honeymoon in a civil war in Lebanon?

P. HANGEN: That’s right, uh-huh. Welles came home one day and said, “Why don’t we go up to Lebanon?” And I thought, “What a wonderful idea for a honeymoon.” Then I found out we were going to cover a revolution. And it went on that way from then on, because I had accreditations as a pressperson, too, so, which is sort of like a visa to get in to the places he was going. And so we were able to do these things together.

BROKAW: One of the most riveting passages in the book is when you went off with him to a cable office so he could file a radio report and then sniper fire opened up and you had to make your way back through the streets of Beirut, just the two of you, kind of on your own.

P. HANGEN: Yes, that’s right, uh-huh. But you know what I learned from that, Tom? I learned how very careful and very cautious Welles always was when covering a story. And I’ve always been very grateful that we did these things together because we had such a closeness and I knew that he was being intelligent in his coverage of stories and not foolhardy. I also knew that he was out there, even in Cambodia, a story which he didn’t like, but he was out there because he believed that a fully informed American public is essential to the survival of our democratic republic. And he was-- he felt very privileged to be out there getting facts back to us so we could shape our own policies, so instead of being led like sheep. And I think that all newsmen, yourself included, have that feeling and that’s why we’re all in this business.

BROKAW: I don’t know if many of us carried it off as quite as well as Welles did, on the other hand. You lived in the Middle East, you were in Egypt where Welles, for a time, was declared persona non grata.

P. HANGEN: Right.

BROKAW: And you lived in New Delhi, where he covered the Congo situation for five months in absence.

P. HANGEN: Yes.

BROKAW: Then Bahn, then Hong Kong.
P. HANGEN: Yeah, right.
BROKAW: It was a very nomadic lifestyle. Did you ever wish that it would just end? That you couldn’t keep this up? It was hectic, it was dangerous, you could never really settle down?
P. HANGEN: No, I loved it, too. I really did. We, of course, when our children joined us, it was different. We wanted very much to have a family. And I chose then not to go with Welles covering these stories because we did want to make a home and have a family. We have a beautiful family. So we combined the two things, really.
BROKAW: Was the toughest time when you were living in New Delhi, and he went off to cover the situation--
P. HANGEN: It was hard. It was our own only real separation. And we had been so close, so very close, up to that period, and he went off to the Congo in 1960, ’61 for five months. We thought it would be a few weeks, and it turned out to be five months. And we couldn’t communicate. There were no cables, we couldn’t write to each other because the Congo was closed, in effect, and it was difficult because for the first time we--we weren’t close and it was hard to handle. But when he came back, we solved it.
BROKAW: What about the practical side of being the wife of a foreign correspondent moving as swiftly as you often had?
P. HANGEN: You never unpack.
BROKAW: And you can never accumulate a great deal I suppose?
P. HANGEN: No, no.
BROKAW: Because it always has to fit into crates of one kind or another.
P. HANGEN: That’s true, yes, absolutely.
BROKAW: But the tradeoffs are pretty good, aren’t they?
P. HANGEN: Oh, right, yes. Well, we were living history as it was happening really, Tom. And it’s a tremendous way to live. Especially when you believe what you’re doing is important, for the survival of our country, if you will.
BROKAW: When he went off to Cambodia to cover what you knew was a dangerous situation, um--
P. HANGEN: I was with him.
BROKAW: You were there until the final-- You flew to Cambodia, to Phnom Penh, and you were there for the final three days?
P. HANGEN: Yes, I was. And I was-- I learned while I was in Phnom Penh that this was the most chaotic story I think Welles had ever covered, because, as you recall, nobody knew where the Vietcong was, nobody knew where the North Vietnamese troops were. We didn’t even know where Cambodian government troops were for that matter. And newsmen were trying to link up with those Cambodian government troop movements because that’s where the story was. They weren’t out there looking for trouble, they were really trying to gauge where the warfront was going. And they had to rely on their own hunches because there was no communication whatsoever. However, being there with him, those days, I saw that he was operating just as cautiously and just as intelligently as he ever had before. And so I went back to Hong Kong feeling very confident that he’d be back.
BROKAW: In fact, one of the last things that he told you before you went back to Hong Kong, is that we
always come back to the capital at night.
P. HANGEN: That’s right. We never take foolish--
BROKAW: So when word first came that he didn’t return to the capital that night, you had a very
ominous feeling about something.
P. HANGEN: I did. Well, it was more than ominous actually. I-- I experienced ESP on that, Tom. Welles
really told that he was all right, that I was not to worry, and that he would be back. And, of course, that’s
what gave me, and gave the children, strength to go on because we were sure he would come back.
BROKAW: And the fact is, we later learned that he was all right, at the outset at least.
P. HANGEN: Exactly, right.
BROKAW: That they were led away by-- by the rebels.
P. HANGEN: By uniformed-- uniformed troops, which-- instead of guerillas.
BROKAW: Right.
P. HANGEN: You know, this was terribly important. And they were given a warm meal and kept in--
taken to a hut and then they were taken away in a jeep, which meant they were being taken care of.
BROKAW: Eyewitnesses later told us this.
P. HANGEN: Right, yes.
BROKAW: I remember reading a couple of years ago, you saying that you had such great faith because
Welles was such a survivalist and that’s how we always struck me.
P. HANGEN: That’s true, right.
BROKAW: He had great emotional stability, he never was easily excited about anything.
P. HANGEN: Right. And great inner resources, as you recall.
BROKAW: Right.
P. HANGEN: Any-- any situation over which he had the slightest bit of control, he could-- he could
handle it without any question and-- and knowing that made all the difference to us.
BROKAW: Recently, there has been a mission to North Vietnam, as you know, and a lot of people are
concerned about MIAs. Do you think that we’ll hear any more about Welles Hangen?
P. HANGEN: I don’t know, Tom, I would hope that we will. And certainly this is one reason that I wrote
the book. Not only to share this marvelous life with other people, but also with the hope that we can
continue this search because it was the first time in history, as you know, that newsmen were captured and
held prisoner. And I think it’s a freedom of the press issue at this point. And I think that we must continue
the search, we must find out what happened in order that it can’t happen again. In Angola or anywhere
else, you know. Newsmen must be free to report so that the world knows what’s happening. Otherwise,
we’re in trouble.
BROKAW: Pat Hang-- Pat Hangen, who shared very fully the life with one of our best correspondents,
Welles Hangen, who disappeared in Cambodia seven years ago. Thank you very much for coming by.
P. HANGEN: Thank you, Tom.