

[ HARDCOVER: UK ]

## The lure of the frontline

Those who think war reporting is about glamour and thrill-seeking will be disabused by this first-hand account

BY JANINE DI GIOVANNI  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

*The Secret Life of War* weaves in and out of several wars on several continents, but is essentially about fear. We all have different ways of conquering or confronting fear. For foreign affairs editor Peter Beaumont, it meant going to the places that scared him, into the heart of war for nearly two decades, exposing himself to danger and injury, even after he saw colleagues killed and injured. He became numbed to the suffering even as he meticulously recorded it. For Beaumont, reporting was not only his métier, but, in some way, his calling.

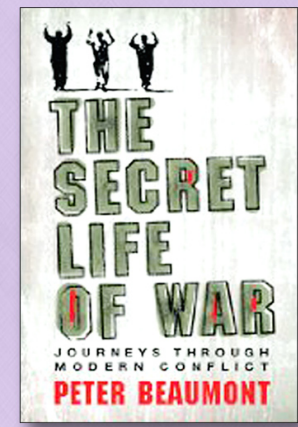
He began, like most of us, known as the "luckless tribe" by William Howard Russell, in the brutal series of backyard wars in the Balkans and continued to roam the world — Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon. Along the way, he encountered visions of horror that most people never find in their nightmares: ambushes, firefights, the aftermath of suicide bombings, or being stuck on an American military base in Iraq "waiting for the bad stuff to happen."

Bad stuff happens often and with alarming intensity for Beaumont. But what separates his book from the dozens written by journalists — particularly after the 9/11 crisis bred a new generation of reporters who found war reporting "glamorous" (trust me, it is not) — is his honesty and his humility. He is able to diagnose his own need to return to war the way a junkie feeds on heroin. He also touches a sensitive subject that most of us don't want to face — post-traumatic stress disorder and its effect on war reporters — and tells us about his sessions with a counselor.

It is a subject that needs to be addressed. In 2000, Canadian psychiatrist Anthony Feinstein began a research project with a group of us who reported war. He observed us like bugs under a microscope and the results were alarming to say the least: drug abuse, broken relationships, alcoholism and the inability to sustain any prolonged contact with "healthy" individuals (women were greater alcoholics than men). A predisposition to PTSD is often genetic, but it is clear the sustained proximity to war increases the rate sharply.

Beaumont is self-aware. He knows it is not normal to feel more alive in a war zone than real life, but he is helpless to contain his desire to be where the story is. One afternoon, he has lunch with a reporter turned human rights activist who gently prods him about his relationships and his drinking. He already knows

### Publication Notes



THE SECRET LIFE OF WAR: JOURNEYS THROUGH MODERN CONFLICT

BY PHILIP JENKINS  
208 PAGES  
HARVILL SECKER

his state of mind isn't healthy, but he cannot help feeling: "Who am I if I am not in war zones?" He mourns his lack of time with his two children, the lack of attention to his wife.

Beaumont writes beautifully, and calmly, even when describing the fiercest and most emotive moments of war. He allows the reader into a hallowed environment where friends bond for life, because they nearly die together. And as readers, we watch him grow and change and eventually face the music: is this it for the rest of my life?

There comes a point for most war reporters when we leave it all behind. One night, Beaumont lets a 60-year-old reporter share his floor in the West Bank while on assignment. The man is respected in his field, but Beaumont has an epiphany that this is not who he wants to be when he grows up. That epiphany is crucial. Mine came staring down a column kilometers long of dead bodies in Congo and realizing that I felt nothing at all. A colleague once told me she quit when she realized she was writing the same line to describe rape victims, no matter where the war was: "She wore a yellow tracksuit ... it was covered in blood."

At the end of this haunting book, a pensive Beaumont contemplates his future, with a new partner. He has a chance, he feels, to move ahead without the nightmares, the adrenaline kick faster than any drug, the inevitable collateral damage to family and friends. He's not sure where he is going, but he knows he is glad to be alive.



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We will definitely run for president and we are bound to win.

— Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukrainian Prime Minister

## 'Gas princess' turns up the heat

For Ukraine's prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, the line between friend and foe is very thin

BY JONATHAN STEEL  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

It was one of those ghastly days — collapsing into bed at 4am after an official trip, up again too soon for a cabinet meeting on the economic crisis, and then an interview with a British journalist. When she arrives for our meeting, Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine's prime minister and Europe's second most powerful woman, has not even had time to produce the trademark peasant-style plait that normally hovers on her head like a halo: her hair is combed into a loose bun.

Tymoshenko first came to international attention during Ukraine's so-called Orange Revolution in 2004. She and the pro-Western presidential candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, stood on the barricades for 13 days with tens of thousands of supporters demanding a re-run of elections. The supreme court decided there had been fraud and after a new election he became president and she prime minister.

But the two soon fell out, and Yushchenko sacked Tymoshenko in August 2005. Since then their long-running feud has been a major disappointment for the young people who put them in power, and the despair of foreign governments, EU officials and investors.

Appointed prime minister again after winning parliamentary elections in 2007, Tymoshenko now misses no opportunity to criticize her former ally for "purposely impeding the government's work." She is looking forward to the elections, due in January: "We will definitely run for president and we are bound to win," she says.

She is ahead in the polls, but Ukraine's economic woes have dented her ratings. The recession has hit eastern Europe very hard, and Ukraine and Latvia have suffered most of all. Sales of Ukraine's main export, steel, are down by 40 percent. Real wages started to slip in December and by February were down by 13% from the year before. Unemployment is forecast to reach 10 percent — and this is probably an underestimate.

It has all come as a shock, especially to the country's new middle class. The

economy has been booming for five years and hundreds of thousands of them took loans to buy cars and flats in US dollars. But Ukraine's currency, has now lost 40 percent of its value, and families will struggle to repay their inflated debts.

On top of that looms the constant crisis over gas. Ukraine hit the world headlines in January when Russia cut supplies owing to unpaid Ukrainian bills. Ukraine then cut supplies to much of the rest of Europe. Tymoshenko has made three trips to Moscow to resolve the crisis, the most recent one last week. Now she claims there is no chance of another cut-off "because we achieved a true breakthrough by concluding a contract with Russia for 10 years. We have completely removed any political implications from the gas price and gas transit calculation formulas. Ukraine has become dramatically more independent, both economically and politically."

The woman once regarded in Moscow as an enemy (in Vladimir Putin's early years in power there was an arrest warrant against her) is now seen as the Kremlin favorites. They like her role in balancing Ukrainians' pro-EU aspirations with a keen sense of Russia's interests and the need for co-operation, unlike Yushchenko "who never misses a chance to poke Moscow in the eye," in the words of a European diplomat.

Even if the gas crisis is history, the wider economic crisis is ever present. Deadlock in the Ukrainian parliament meant that Tymoshenko had to use governmental decrees to pass various measures, including steeper taxes on tobacco and alcohol, to curb the ballooning budget deficit. Thanks to her tough approach, the IMF has agreed to release US\$2.7 billion in a loan aimed at stabilizing the economy and restoring confidence. Analysts now see little risk of a total collapse of the economy, but recovery will be slow.

Was there a chance of street protests, I ask, an economic orange revolution? "In this newly democratic society if people are unhappy with something

they have the right to take to the street — we respect this," she says. "We have people protesting in front of government buildings and the government listens. But I would like the government and the people to stand tall. By taking to the streets we cannot eliminate the global economic crisis. We have to work hard."

Sometimes dubbed the "gas princess," Tymoshenko was typical of the first wave of capitalists in the dying months of the Soviet Union. A leader of the young communist league, the Komsomol, she took the route of many other colleagues in starting small businesses by privatizing Komsomol assets, in her case in her native Dnipropetrovsk, a steel town in eastern Ukraine. She and her husband (she married at 18) also copied videos in their living room and rented them out or sold them.

Thanks to her new capital plus good contacts, she became managing director of the grandly named Ukrainian Petrol Corporation in 1991, and four years later the president of United Energy Systems (UES), a company which imported Russian gas and sold Ukrainian products in Russia. She became a multimillionaire.

In 1996, she became a member of parliament for the party led by Pavlo Lazarenko whose government had awarded UES its main import license. He later left Ukraine to escape money-laundering charges, only to be convicted in California. In 1999 she founded her own party and emerged as a battler against corruption. Her zeal was rewarded with arrest in 2001 by the authoritarian regime of Leonid Kuchma for alleged fraud. She spent six weeks in jail, not knowing if it could be six or 16 years, until a judge ordered her release.

"Prison was a transformational experience. She came out a radical," says Taras Kuzio, the editor of *Ukraine Analyst*. Now she portrays herself as the first person to fight corruption. "Ukrainians cannot help noticing that our 17 years of independence have not been a period of sustained reform. They are really only beginning now: profound

reforms with respect to investment climate, pensions, and energy efficiency as well as efforts to improve the environment," she says.

The constant battles between Yushchenko and the various prime ministers which followed the orange revolution have heightened calls for constitutional reform. The main opposition party led by Viktor Yanukovich, wants to move to a parliamentary system with a largely ceremonial president. Tymoshenko's party is talking to them about the changes. This itself is a huge shift from 2004 when she and Yanukovich were on opposite sides of the barricades. Ukraine's media is full of speculation that the constitution may be changed so that she remains as prime minister with Yanukovich as a weak president.

One element in a deal with Yanukovich, who is firmly against NATO membership, could be a shift in Tymoshenko's support for joining the alliance. The Kremlin would be delighted. Ukrainian analysts suggest they could agree on a constitutional change saying Ukraine will keep its present "non-bloc status" rather than seeking to enter NATO. Diplomats say she has back-pedaled since demanding a "membership action plan" from NATO last year.

Ukraine can not live "in a security vacuum," Tymoshenko tells me. But she highlights the obstacles to NATO membership — barely 20 percent support among the Ukrainian public, and division between Europe's NATO members over the wisdom of getting Ukraine in. In the meantime Tymoshenko and her team are focusing on improving ties with the EU.

So, why no plait? "I got home at 4am and didn't have time to produce it. I think women have to change their hairstyle from time to time." Interviewees sometimes ask if its artificial or genuine. What's the answer? "It is real." Giggling, she fiddles at the back of her head, bringing down a Rapunzel-style cascade of blonde hair.

I make my excuses and leave.

[ HARDCOVER: UK ]

## Game, set and love match

The first biography of Wimbledon champion, heartthrob and sporting rebel Fred Perry offers an insight into his off-court exploits

BY JAMIE DOWARD  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Fred Perry is best known today for the chain of leisurewear that bears his illustrious name. But almost three quarters of a century ago, he set Wimbledon ablaze when he won the men's singles — a feat that no Briton has achieved since. He was feted internationally, but in the genteel world of the 1930s no mention was made of his extraordinary love life.

The first biography of the tennis star, *The Last Champion*, paints Perry as the heartthrob of his day: flirting with Hollywood and dating some of the world's most beautiful women, while governments sought his services for propaganda purposes.

The book, written by Jon Henderson, the *Observer's* tennis correspondent, spells out how Perry's glamorous life was a far cry from his humble origins: his father, Sam, had worked in a factory before becoming a powerful figure in the Co-operative movement and a Labour member of parliament. But Perry's immense talents — first at table tennis, eventually becoming world champion; then at lawn tennis — propelled him to

international stardom.

It helped that Perry had matinee-idol looks. "He is 6ft (1.82m) tall, weighs around 12 stone (76kgs); sculptors declare his physique perfect ... women fall for him like ninetins," Henderson quotes one star-struck commentator as having said. "When he goes to Hollywood, male film stars go and sulk in Nevada."

Away from the tennis courts, women and the silver screen were Perry's great loves. Once, while staying at a Boston hotel, Perry and an American tennis player tied bed sheets together to lower themselves down to the floor below to make a social call on two female players.

Perry was briefly engaged to an English actress, Mary Lawson, but went on to marry four times. His first marriage was to divorcee Helen Vinson, an actress from Texas; the second, to Sandra Breaux, a model with film ambitions; and the third to Lorraine Walsh, whose drink problem is thought to have contributed to their break-up. All three maintained that Perry had been cruel to them, although Henderson suggests this was largely legalese employed by their divorce lawyers. Perry's

fourth wife, Barbara Rise Friedman, stayed with him for 40 years.

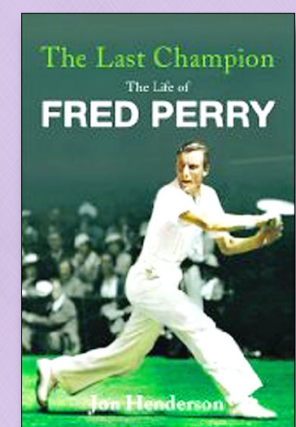
But the book's most intriguing suggestion is that Perry enjoyed dalliances with some of Hollywood's leading ladies. He briefly dated the original blonde bombshell Jean Harlow, of whom the Hollywood trade paper *Variety* once noted: "It doesn't matter what degree of talent she possesses ... nobody ever started possessing what she's got."

He went on to become a close confidant of screen star Bette Davis, of whom he said: "We were always easy and natural in each other's company ... Not exactly family, but almost."

Perry also romanced Marlene Dietrich while coaching her at tennis. According to Dietrich's daughter, Maria Riva: "Fred Perry taught my mother to play tennis with great patience and lots of little passionate hugs, punctuated with rapid kissing between flying balls."

At the time, Dietrich was also engaged in a lesbian affair with Mercedes de Acosta, a Cuban-American poet referred to as the "smitten Spaniard" by Riva. "I sort of hoped the smitten Spaniard might arrive and witness the

### Publication Notes



THE LAST CHAMPION: THE LIFE OF FRED PERRY

BY JON HENDERSON  
304 PAGES  
YELLOW JERSEY PRESS

Englishman at work, but my mother was very skillful in keeping her admirers from overlapping," said the star's daughter.

Hollywood leading man Clark

Gable's former lover Loretta Young also set tongues wagging when she turned up on Perry's arm at Wimbledon, although she played down suggestions of a serious romance. "You can bank on it that I'm not going back to America as Mrs Perry," she told the press.

At the height of his career, film studio RKO offered Perry a contract for two movies at US\$50,000 each, but the Lawn Tennis Association, the amateur game's governing body in England, talked him out of it.

Perry's on-court prowess was second to none. "Perry's forehand was merely the deadliest weapon in an armory full of menace," Henderson notes. "He executed his backhand — distinguished by its short backswing — with the powerful efficiency of a butcher laying into a carcass."

It was this ability that saw Perry, a teetotal pipe-smoker, win Wimbledon in 1934, 1935 and 1936, completing a sporting hat-trick that made him one of the world's first truly international sportsmen.

In 1937, he turned professional, after becoming disillusioned with the LTA, upset that it had done little to offer him incentives to remain an amateur. He hired an American

promoter and took US citizenship the following year.

Henderson believes that decision, compounded by his desire to stay in America when war broke out, cost Perry a knighthood. He was called up in 1942 and served in the US Air Force, spending most of the war in California as the military hierarchy tried, unsuccessfully, to find a propaganda role for him.

Perry's failure to secure a knighthood was in some ways in keeping with his character. He had always felt like an outsider. His friend Dan Maskell, the veteran BBC tennis commentator, recalled: "He was not typically British; there was an aggressiveness and dedication about him that was out of step with the contemporary attitude towards sport."

Indeed, Perry was even known to deviate from the very English sense of fair play. American champion Jack Kramer recalled how Perry would antagonize his opponents by saying "very clever" whenever an opponent played a particularly good shot. "Very clever" drove a lot of opponents crazy," Kramer said.

When Perry turned professional,

an official from the International Lawn Tennis Club of Great Britain wrote to inform him that he should never wear the club sweater again. "I made sure he wouldn't have to worry about that," Perry said. "I sent a sleeve to him as a present."

Though a perennially disappointed nation desperately hopes that a successor will now emerge to emulate Perry's success, aficionados of the sport doubt that England will see his like again.

At Perry's funeral in 1995, a friend recalled how "simply fun to be around" Perry had been — friendly and a bit of a rascal. He told how one day Perry walked into a locker room and declared: "Thank God I'm not playing me today."

In 1957, more than 20 years after winning his last grand slam title, Perry was approached by a Soviet delegation to help the USSR challenge the west's hegemony at tennis. He made two visits to advise the Soviet bloc countries.

On his first, he pushed his hosts to make a grand political gesture, calling on them to allow a player to compete at Wimbledon. Anna Dmitrieva, 17, became that player, and reached the final in the junior tournament in 1958.