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HARVEY ART SERVICE

EDITORS' NOTE

A mystical
fear of cameras

"One thing almost all Communist countries have in common is a kind of mystical fear of cameras," says Photographer Harry Redl, now covering eastern Europe for us. "It's like the fear of the supernatural or something akin to the American Indian who used to believe you literally captured the soul of a person when you drew his picture. From China to Czechoslovakia, bring out a camera and everyone down to the grubbiest street urchin thinks he's a deputy sheriff."

Redl has been stopped and interrogated by rickshaw drivers in Indonesia, paprika growers in southern Hungary and Red Guards in China. In Cambodia he was ordered by police to shoot off a couple of frames to prove his camera wasn't actually an explosive device. He once stood on the bridge connecting Hong Kong with mainland China and engineered a victorious photographic face-off with a Communist Chinese border official on the other side. "With my 300 mm lens and his 90 millimeter apparatus, I had him beat from the start," says Redl. "He kept ducking behind barriers, his head and camera popping up to grab a quick frame of me, then he would scurry for cover and finally just turned tail and fled."

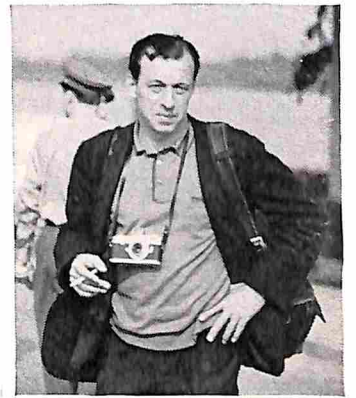
Beating the odds, matching wits with impossible situations, finding the soft spots along closely guarded borders are the challenges of working on Communism's fringe.

In Cierna early in August, with roads blocked to photographers and journalists, he hiked over cow pastures and wheat fields, then through the main street of the village past Russian and Czech security, cameras bulging from inside his jacket, and arrived in time to photograph the presidiums of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia emerging from the railroad station.

Last week, within hours after the announcement of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Redl was speeding toward Prague from his home on the outskirts of Vienna. After unsuccessful attempts at a half dozen border points, he finally was able to convince border guards that he was really only going to Czechoslovakia for a much-needed vacation. Once in Prague, he had to convince Czech patrols he was working for LIFE and not Soviet intelligence. He pinned a photograph of Dubček to his lapel, and from then on nobody asked any questions.

Redl, 42, was born in Austria, served during the war with the German navy in the Baltic Sea, and was captured by the Americans in 1945. He spent a year working as an interpreter for Canadian forces. In 1950 he emigrated to Canada, taking various jobs in Vancouver as a waiter, logger, shipping clerk and lampshade maker. A friend brought him a Rolleiflex in 1952, and that started him on his photographic career. In 1956 he moved to San Francisco, where he began working on assignment for LIFE. In 1961 he shipped out to Hong Kong on what began as a vacation and turned out to be six years of work covering the Vietnam war, Communist uprisings in Indonesia and events in Laos, Cambodia and Communist China. A year ago, he moved to Vienna, predicting that eastern Europe, quiet for the last 10 years, was sooner or later going to erupt. It erupted sooner than he expected.

"I also felt it was time to leave Hong Kong," Redl says. "I didn't want to be one of the old Asia hands holding my gin and tonic in hands shaky with age."




HARRY REDL

LIFE

THE WINNERS But What a Week

Humphrey and Muskie
stand before the Democratic
convention in Chicago

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