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“A Hero of Our Time” by William Shawcross

The following article about Fred Cuny written by William Shawcross appeared in The New York Review of Books on November 30, 1995.

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Fred Cuny set out from his hotel room in Ingushetia last April, leaving on the table by his bed a copy of John le Carre's newest thriller, "Our Game" whose main character, Larry Pettifer, has dedicated himself to defending the Ingush people against their Russian attackers; he then disappears. Cuny had become passionate about the Chechen cause, and hoped he could arrange a cease-fire between the Russian and Chechen forces. He never returned. After making a long and painful search, his family now believes he was murdered, although his body has not been found.

Cuny was a man of some mystery. An expert in dealing with man-made disasters, he had been both close to and critical of the US government. The demand for services such as his has, unfortunately, been growing fast. Earlier this summer, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned in its annual report that the human consequences of local wars and forced immigrations were becoming more and more grave. There were, the report said, fifty-six conflicts being waged around the world. Some 21 million people were being forced to leave their homes as a result, and of these at least 17 million became refugees. Another 300 million people were affected by disasters unrelated to war, such as earthquakes and floods. The Red Cross urged that fundamental changes be made in the way the world responds to disaster and to suffering. One of the few people who actually showed how changes could be made was Fred Cuny. That is why his loss is such a disaster.

A very tall, strongly built Texan, Cuny was trained as an engineer and city planner and spent much of his life working abroad to help people--literally millions of them--who were in great difficulty, whether in Africa, Southeast Asia, Kurdistan, Bosnia, or Chechnya.

He was born in 1944 and grew up in Forest Hills, Texas, the eldest of four brothers. His father, Gene, was a television station executive, his mother, Charlotte, a teacher. When he was a boy, his main passion was for flying. He first took flying lessons in his early teens, wanting to be a fighter pilot, and he hoped to get a Marine commission after graduating from Texas A & M. But he was suspended in his sophomore year after a group of classmates put burning car tires in the wing of the dormitory where the seniors lived. It was the sort of escapade in which Fred might well have been involved. No one in his own part of the dormitory was willing to inform on the others and all of them were punished. Fred later moved to a smaller school, Texas Animal & Industrial College, in Kingsville, Texas, about 120 miles from the Mexican border, where he joined the ROTC to keep his military hopes alive.

In those days he was, according to his father, Gene, "to the right of Barry Goldwater." His self-confidence verged on arrogance. (Throughout his life his self-esteem was impressive, and to some, infuriating.) But one of his political science teachers, a liberal, encouraged his class to get involved in local issues. Fred began to look into the conditions of migrant farm workers, some of them employed near Kingsville. As he got to know them, he changed his political views, took up their cause, and became active in local Democratic politics.

He went to the University of Houston to study urban planning--a discipline which was later to prove invaluable. But one day he was hit by a taxi; his leg was crushed and he had to have a steel rod inserted in

it. This ended his dream of becoming an Air Force pilot, and he abandoned all thought of military service. But he continued to fly, and he particularly liked to fly engineless gliders. Soaring, he told me, gave him great joy.

In the late Sixties, while working as a city planner for the Texas firm of Carter and Burgess, he was sent to various little towns along the Texas border that had serious sanitation problems. Mosquitoes were everywhere and disease rates were high. His son Craig recalls that his father immediately saw that simply paving the roads would get rid of stagnant pools of water and enormously improve public health.

He began to realize that he had a special knack for finding practical solutions to problems; and he discovered that he liked working among the Mexicans on the border. He talked about this years later, after we became friends, although he was usually reluctant to talk about his feelings. He preferred to tell tall stories, especially to shock his liberal aid worker colleagues--for example, by saying that the reason he got involved in humanitarian causes was that early in the Sixties, when he was in charge of building the runway at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, he suddenly found that "Miguel," one of his gang, had accidentally been buried under the cement. It was too late to save him. In fact, Fred was then working on designing the rail system between the different air terminals, not on laying down the runway. His view was that facts should never be allowed to interfere with a wider truth. But I think that something did happen to a man on the project which made him decide to change the direction of his life.

His experience in Biafra in the late 1960s had the most powerful effect on him, Fred told me. The relief programs during the civil war there--the first large-scale humanitarian efforts of the postcolonial period--were, he said, the "mother" of all such operations since. Many people who took part in them went on, like Fred himself, to work on relief programs for other disasters during the Seventies and Eighties.

"Biafra," he told a BBC interviewer, "was where we first came to grips with dealing with famines, and the different ways of dealing with them--either food aid or market interventions. We still use the yardstick of Biafra to measure our performance in other disasters. It's the defining moment."

Cuny had studied African history at college, and in 1969, at the height of the war between Nigeria and the Biafran government, which was largely made up of members of the Ibo tribe, he flew to Lagos. He went to see the Nigerian minister of the interior and said, "I'm from Texas. I'm here to study the war and try to suggest what can be done to get in humanitarian aid when it's over." The minister said, "That's interesting. Let's see your passport." He thumbed through it and ripped out Fred's Nigerian visa, saying, "We don't want anything to do with these damned Biafrans and all you Americans that are helping them, and we want you out of here in 24 hours."

Fred was taken to the airport under armed guard. He then flew to Biafra, offered his services, and found he could be useful in organizing the airlift which kept the new country briefly alive. The planes included ancient Constellations, C-97s, DC-4s, DC-6s, some left over from the Korean War, even from World War Two. "Spare parts flying together in close formation, we used to say." The pilots included mercenaries, Israelis, Air America pilots from Vietnam who had come "to redeem themselves," idealists, war protesters. They were, Fred said, "the world's largest flying zoo. ... Even in the crew of one airplane, you'd find five different reasons why people were there. Some guys were there simply for the adrenaline rush--that was big when you were flying in at night, turning the plane around under fire."

The aid groups involved included the Red Cross--as usual, the best organized--Inter Church Aid, CARE, and some ad hoc private groups. As always, they had different motives. Some workers were idealists trying to save the Ibos, who were thought to be facing genocide; some states and companies had their eyes on the Biafran oil fields and were trying to break up Nigeria. "All sorts of political agendas were being played out through the aid programs," Fred said.

He quickly understood something that has been evident, and not sufficiently understood, in many disasters since. Food distribution acted as "a gigantic magnet pulling people out of the fields into the towns and out of the towns to the airport. The first thing I recognized was that we had to turn the system around and get people back into the countryside away from the airfield."

The other huge problem was public health. "I kept thinking if we could just get people to start building better drains and focus on planning, far fewer people would be sick. In one of the camps the water was 20 inches high--simply because it was built on very low ground. But there were few engineers in the relief agencies in those days.

"People in the agencies would say, 'We don't know how to dig latrines.' I'd say, 'Well, the armies of the world have millions of manuals on latrine digging, you know. Can't you get some of those?' They said, 'We don't know who to approach.'"

In those days the relief agencies were very unprofessional. They concentrated on the most obvious things --often just handing out food. They didn't try to discover how people normally got their food and then try to restore, as much as possible, the usual system of distribution. The assumption, Fred said, was that "we had to bring everything in for them."

Seeing that engineers in the field were just as important as doctors and pilots, Fred stopped helping to run the airlift itself and tried instead to see what could be done to prevent further famine. One of his first surprises was to find how much food there was in the markets. "There's always food in famines. The problem was that people in the rural areas couldn't afford to buy much of the food they were producing. They had to sell it to speculators and food was being hoarded."

Fred had a radical solution. He said to some of the aid officials, "Let's bring in money, create a real currency, pump in dollars. That'll be a lot cheaper than having to fly everything in." The money could be used by the agencies to buy the food locally and then redistribute it.

By then, however, few people were taking account of the actual situation. Horrifying accounts of Biafra's starving children appeared regularly on television and led to a single, emotional, worldwide reaction: "We must send food." The main concern of the relief agencies became control of the incoming food.

Famine, Fred saw, was selective, and often hidden. It affected between 15 and 20 percent of the people. The groups at highest risk were children under five and mothers trying to protect them. "Families make a self-conscious or subconscious decision to transfer food within the family to support the working males--any boy over five. So in rural societies an invisible thing happens--the kids of two or three years old simply die."

As for outsiders trying to help, they went, he said, through a series of stages. At first "there's a reluctance to touch anyone. You're afraid you're going to pick up a disease yourself. Then very quickly the kids break through that. They want to touch you, hold you. Next thing you know, you're carrying weak kids everywhere you go. You become involved with particular children. Then what you're doing is fighting famine for the individuals you know, and when you lose one you take it very hard."

When he was asked how he coped with the depressing effect of such situations, he said, "Drinking and chasing women." (Some years later, a bout with hepatitis forced him to switch from whiskey to Dr. Pepper. He never gave up on women.)

In Biafra there was a debate whether the airlift was prolonging the war--the debate has occurred in almost every comparable emergency since, most recently in Bosnia. The real worry, Fred said, was that Biafran propaganda had convinced the world that the Nigerians would commit genocide if they won. "Nobody knew whether they would or they wouldn't and it was the devil's decision. What do you do?"

In 1970, toward the end of the war, Fred became convinced that the food lift was indeed prolonging the war and that the rumors of genocide were much exaggerated. He left Biafra, losing some friends whose emotional commitment to the Biafran cause would not allow them to accept his conclusions. The Nigerian army, under General Gowon, turned out, in fact, to be remarkably merciful in victory; and this, Fred said, had an effect on the subsequent attitudes of relief workers. "In Cambodia, in 1975, we all felt at the end, 'Let's shut everything down and pull out. Let the government collapse. The Khmer Rouge can't be that

bad.' And then look what they did. You can never know. It depends--a few personalities can change the whole thing."

After returning from Biafra, Fred Cuny founded a company called Intertect Relief and Reconstruction Corporation in Dallas, which specialized in giving technical assistance and training in disaster relief for the UN and volunteer agencies, such as the International Refugee Committee. In those days the idea of a private company engaging in humanitarian aid was unusual, and he made very little money. According to an article in the Dallas Morning News, Fred "once wept and hugged a friend from the State Department who had helped him get small contracts that kept him solvent." On the other hand, he said, he discovered that people didn't listen to him unless they had paid for his views.

In the Seventies, Fred and Intertect were involved in dozens of disaster relief efforts in, among other places, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand, and India. In Calcutta, his father recalls, he argued with Mother Teresa, telling her bluntly that her plan to build concrete housing was wrong for Calcutta's muddy soil. After the Guatemala earthquake of 1976, he recommended repairs to roads so that food could be delivered directly. He wanted to dispense with airlifts carrying both food and blankets--the arrival of blankets merely put local blanket makers out of work. He tried to demonstrate to tribal councils of Guatemalan Indians how to rebuild the houses in their villages by using cross braces to prevent roofs from crashing down in the event of another earthquake. He showed them how to recycle materials from their shattered houses rather than rely entirely on new materials. Cuny was always tough about spending an unnecessary dollar, unusual in a world where the common response is to throw money at disasters. In 1977, after the Peruvian earthquake, he devised a scheme to make the houses much stronger and more stable by adding small amounts of motor oil to the production of adobe.

Oddly, it was not until the end of the Eighties that Cuny began to be known to senior American officials. In 1988, when he went to Armenia after several earthquakes occurred there, Julia Taft, the Bush administration AID official who accompanied him, was worried when he insisted that the plastic sheeting they had brought with them be used for sheltering animals rather than people. Fred convinced her that livestock was the only asset people had, and must be protected.

At the end of the Gulf War, Robert Fisk of the London Independent saw Cuny in southern Iraq, where he was attempting to rescue some of the Shia Muslims who, with Western encouragement, had rebelled against Saddam Hussein, only to have the US and other Western nations stand by as Saddam crushed their revolt. When wounded Shias arrived in desperation at Allied lines, they were pushed back, until Cuny, backed up by one brave junior US officer, insisted that the lines be opened. "Americans should be helping these people, not turning them away," he shouted.

He then went to Kuwait to help to restore the city's devastated water supply, and to northern Iraq to help deal with the 400,000 Kurdish refugees who had fled to the mountains along the Turkish border after their own uprising against Saddam had failed. There he won the confidence of Morton Abramowitz, the American ambassador to Turkey. At a meeting in memory of Cuny in Washington this September, Abramowitz, now president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, recalled that he was incredulous when Cuny told him that the Kurds could be returned to their own villages in two months. "I told him, 'Fred, you're full of crap,' but Cuny just went on talking nonstop, as he often did." After two hours Cuny convinced the ambassador it could be done--and with the help of the US military forces, under General John Shalikashvili, he went on to organize one of the most successful refugee assistance programs in recent decades.

He insisted that, wherever possible, the Kurds must be returned to their own houses or to abandoned houses, rather than placed in big tent cities, as some aid agencies were advocating. He wanted, as Abramowitz said, to save not just lives but the local way of life--to give people reason for hope by encouraging them to begin farming and trading again. And in fact the Kurds in northern Iraq have been able to reconstitute a society that works better than most observers had ever expected.

"Fred Cuny was the expert on almost everything we did. To me he was the hero of that operation," General Shalikashvili said recently. After his success in northern Iraq, he had little difficulty in getting a hearing from US officials, whether in the White House, the Pentagon, the CIA, or AID, although his

advice was often ignored. In the summer of 1992, Fred went to Somalia and reported that the situation was "one of the worst that relief agencies have ever faced." To see what could be done, he made his own study of the warring clans; he observed the markets in provincial towns, and analyzed the international response to the food shortages caused by the clan wars. The feeding stations established by the aid agencies, he found, were acting as a magnet for rural Somalians, and food had become a form of currency. He recommended a US military intervention, but one that would be limited to protecting rural distribution of food, so that people in the countryside would not be drawn into the towns. He pleaded with the commanders of the peace-keeping forces, particularly the American officials in charge, not to get involved in what he called "the concrete snakepit" of Mogadishu clan politics. If they had listened to him, a disaster might well have been avoided.

After Somalia he went to Albania to help restore its school system, and then to Bosnia. In 1993 George Soros decided to contribute \$50 million to alleviate the suffering in Bosnia. He sent a small group--including Mort Abramowitz, Aryeh Neier, president of the Soros Foundation, Lionel Rosenblatt, president of Refugees International, and the aid expert Mark Malloch Brown of the World Bank--to Geneva, Zagreb, and Sarajevo to find out how the money could be spent most effectively. Some of the UN officials they talked to in Geneva were not hopeful that much could be done.

"We decided to send for Fred," said Rosenblatt who, like Brown, had known Cuny since they had worked together in refugee camps in Thailand. When he arrived Cuny decided that instead of spreading Soros's money thinly throughout Bosnia, it should be concentrated on restoring the basic utilities in Sarajevo--water, gas, and electricity among them. At the end of 1993, I flew to Sarajevo with Soros, Neier, and Rosenblatt. The huge Russian transport plane, hired by the UN, was filled with iron piping, purchased by Soros, which was to be used for one of Fred Cuny's plans--restoring the gas pipelines running through the city so that people could heat their apartments. The freezing cold had been destroying lives, and morale was desperately low.

Fred met us at the airport and drove us in an armored car through Serb roadblocks into the dark city. That evening, when I was in his office at the International Rescue Committee, Damir Lulo, his principal Bosnian engineer, came to say that the water purification project they had already set up was in desperate need of diesel fuel to keep its jackhammers going. We went to the UN Commander's headquarters nearby to see if we could beg or borrow some. But General Briquemont was in Zagreb and no such permission could be given. We then raced in the armored car up the hill to an abandoned tunnel in which, with immense ingenuity, Cuny had set up a water purification plant for the entire city. This plant is perhaps his most impressive single accomplishment. Water was one of the most precious commodities in Sarajevo. Thousands of people had to draw it from the river with buckets every day, and were often shot down by Serb snipers as they did so.

When we arrived at the plant, the jackhammers were still pounding; someone had scrounged some diesel fuel, and the lights were still on. I saw a fantastic structure of pumps and water tanks that looked like the engine room of an aircraft carrier. The pumps had all been manufactured in Texas--but the tanks had to be specially designed so that they could be shipped into Sarajevo on C-130 transport planes. It had taken twelve C-130 flights to get them there. Fred showed me detailed drawings of how each huge section of the plant had been slid off the plane onto trucks. He had devised the system so that each plane could be unloaded in only seven minutes, thus minimizing the risk of its being hit on the runway by Serb fire.

The water was pumped up from the river below the road. In the tunnel it passed first through a "skid" consisting of three chemical containers, which added a flocculant, a substance that gathered together in little balls the dirt and other particles suspended in the water. The liquid was then sprayed onto a clarifier, where the heavier material was separated off into a sludge line; this was pumped into the storm-sewer system and back into the river. The clarified water passed through three filters--anthracite, sand, and garnet--and was then chlorinated and pumped up the hill to an old reservoir that had been built in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and had been abandoned for years until Fred had it restored. The water then ran by gravity through the city. The project, a remarkable combination of ancient and modern systems, cost only \$2.5 million.

By then this plant and another he was building nearby were nearly finished, so that, as Cuny said, "60,000 people will have water twenty-four hours a day. Another 60,000 for a few hours a day." When a combination of politics and corruption delayed the system's being turned on, Cuny was outraged, but eventually it was turned on and it worked. As Damir Lulo told me, "Everyone who walks through the tunnel says, 'Thank God.'"

The group with Soros also visited some of the streets where Fred had arranged for pipelines to be laid to bring gas to nearby houses. In one house where refugee families were living, the broken glass had been replaced by sheets of insulation that Fred had had flown in. The rooms were heated by a simple device he had imported; turned on its side, it could also be used as a stove. Other families were growing vegetable seeds in window boxes --Fred and his colleagues in the International Rescue Committee had had these flown in to supplement the UN diet of beans and rice.

The next time I went to Sarajevo, I stayed with Fred in the cold, unheated house he shared with others from the International Rescue Committee. He was above all a practical man, but he constantly reflected on his experience and wrote about it. He gave me dozens of analyses, reports, proposals, and other papers he had written on how to deal politically with the war in Bosnia, on the threat of the mafias in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, on the foolishness of the UN and the cowardice of governments.

One evening we went to a Bosnian bar whose owner was holding a party in Fred's honor and had commissioned a portrait of him. Fred saw a beautiful young woman and fell in love--as he often did. (His brother Chris said recently that after Fred was reported missing in Chechnya, women called the family in Texas from all over the world, saying they had a special relationship with him.)

When Fred came to London in the autumn of 1994 we planned to write a book together on "postmodern warfare," the largely ethnic conflicts that plague so many parts of the post-cold war world. He had another new project, he told me--"reform of the international system," no more, no less. After his work in Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia, Fred had become convinced that the entire mechanism for dealing with international crises had to be reconsidered--that the system was itself in crisis. He showed me a memo he had written: "Too many lives are being lost, too many resources are being wasted, there are too many delays. Operations are poorly planned and... there is no accountability within the international humanitarian system."

Far too many disasters, he said, were being dealt with by inexperienced humanitarian workers--the average age of an NGO field director in Bosnia was only twenty-eight, and only one in eight had been in an emergency situation before. NGOs had very little institutional memory. Major field operations were almost always hampered by at least five factors:

1. Slow deployment. In Bosnia it took the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (in many ways the most effective UN agency today) eight months to mobilize NGOs.
2. Inadequate logistical support. For example, the obvious need to stockpile supplies in strategically located places has not been adequately recognized.
3. Poor cohesion among the units sent. In Bosnia the NATO forces on the whole had been working reasonably well, but the East Europeans, particularly the Ukrainians, were a disaster--negligent, and in some cases corrupt. In Somalia the Italian forces boycotted the commander's instructions and then withdrew.
4. Bad relations between the UN and NGOs. This happens almost everywhere. In northern Iraq things worked well as long as the US military was in charge--after that, quarrels broke out among different humanitarian agencies.
5. Inadequate rules of engagement. In Bosnia the UN was restricted to protecting UN personnel and equipment rather than civilians. The rules for the no-fly zone required that a hostile plane must be

intercepted in the act of carrying out an attack. Once it had done so, it could only be escorted out of the zone'. The constant dilemma for peace-keeping forces is to what extent they can meet force with force.

Fred was also struck by the failure of major countries and the UN to approach crises systematically and come up with strategies to prevent or contain them. He was particularly concerned about the increasing tendency of governments, particularly Western governments, to use humanitarian action as a substitute for decisive political, let alone military, action--as has been evident for years in Bosnia.

In 1994, after a year of discussion, he joined Morton Abramowitz and Mark Malloch Brown in an attempt to urge more vigorous and effective action by the "international community." They wanted to set up a new private agency, the International Crisis Group, that could encourage governments to sponsor more effective approaches to dealing with international disasters. They argued, in Cuny's words, that "success was a result of, first, early reaction; and second, good accurate information; and third, a comprehensive, balanced approach to solving, not just treating the problem." The International Crisis Group would be designed to help government do that, at least in situations where something could be accomplished. Abramowitz said recently, "Fred was a realist--he knew that not every crisis could be prevented or brought to a speedy end, or that governments' reluctance to engage could be overcome. But he refused to believe we could not do better."

Had the Crisis Group existed at the time of Somalia, what might it have done? In another memo, Fred outlined some of his views on this question. There were, he wrote, warnings of civil war as early as January 1991. Yet the UN had no plan; it evacuated its staff and appointed a low-level UN Development Project economist as special representative. In the UN's absence, the Crisis Group would have worked out a comprehensive plan for food security in Somalia. "For example, over 85 percent of all rural people earned over half their income from sales of livestock, yet not one relief agency had a program to deal with livestock--for restocking herds or providing price supports for animals." This meant that one of the most effective ways of dealing with famine was wholly ignored. Fred would also have warned the military against the dangers of sending in too much food and too large a force. Above all, he would have tried to persuade the military to stay out of Mogadishu.

In July this year, the International Crisis Group was formally set up in London. Its main effort now is to work out a strategy and detailed recommendations to avert or limit crises, and then to persuade governments to do what it believes has to be done--if necessary, by taking military measures. Fred was to be one of the key members of the group, which will greatly suffer from his loss. "Fred was irreplaceable because he combined strategic, engineering, and logistic senses," Lionel Rosenblott said.

Early this year Fred went to Chechnya on behalf of the Soros Foundation. He got to know the Chechen military leaders and thought he could arrange a cease-fire. He also came up with a detailed plan to evacuate forty thousand elderly Russians from the region--using one hundred Hungarian buses.

On his return he wrote a severely [critical analysis of Russia's attack in Chechnya](#) in these pages. "It is ironic that the Chechen rebels are fighting the Russian army to protect a section of a city full of Russian grandmothers," he wrote. It was unusual for him to state his views publicly--as a rule he preferred to harangue officials rather than appear in print. But he felt, he told one of the editors, that Chechen civilians were suffering greatly from the Russian offensive and the situation was hardly known; he therefore thought he should describe what was happening.

At the end of March Cuny went back to Chechnya, still believing, with his characteristic self-confidence, that he could help arrange a cease-fire. He called Aryeh Neier from neighboring Ingushetia to make three recommendations: that the Soros Foundation set up a medical center to deal with a feared outbreak of cholera; that it put together repair kits to enable people to rebuild their shelled homes; and that it start an emergency radio station to help trace the missing and separated.

On March 31 he set off for Chechnya with two Russian Red Cross doctors and a young woman interpreter, Galina Oleynik. He was apparently trying to reach the Chechen leader, Dzokhar Dudayev, to try to put to him his plan for a cease-fire. By April 7 radio contact with the party was lost--though the

Soros Foundation's office in Moscow received a handwritten note from Galina Oleynik saying that the group was delayed but all right. Elisabeth Socolow, in the Soros Moscow office, was alarmed. The day before he had left, discussing journalists who had disappeared in Chechnya, Fred himself had said to her, "If anyone is missing for four days, he's dead."

The US government--unlike the embassy in Moscow--was slow to react. Lionel Rosenblatt went to Russia from the US to try to find Cuny. By the end of the month he was joined by several members of Fred's family, including his brother Chris and his son Craig. The family hoped someone would demand a ransom so that Fred could be released to coincide with the meeting between Clinton and Yeltsin in May. No one did. Clinton raised the question of Fred's disappearance with Yeltsin and met with the family just before he left Moscow. Immediately afterward, the family heard that a body, with the face burned out by sulphuric acid, had been found, but it turned out not to be Cuny's. Dudayev announced that he was setting up a search committee.

Cuny's son Craig and his brother Chris, together with other members of the family, continued their search through the summer. They managed to trace the party's movements until April 7 and then were left with nothing but dozens of false sightings, and demands for money in exchange for dubious information. They were shot at and shelled by the Russians; they met with Chechen and Ingush officials who extorted money from them; and they were lied to by almost everyone. One night their house in Ingushetia was raided by masked robbers who tied them up and took their satellite phone, a laptop, and a copier. Despite Clinton's appeal to Yeltsin, the Russians hindered rather than helped them.

"By the end of May I was pretty sure he was dead all along," said Craig. But nothing, the family was told, could be confirmed. Eventually they were given the name of a rich Chechen merchant who said he could help to reconstruct what happened. He asked for nothing from them and they came to believe the grim account he pieced together.

At a Moscow press conference Chris Cuny summarized the family's conclusions and suspicions based, he said, on a variety of sources including written testimony. Since the end of March, he said, Russian intelligence operatives had spread lies about his brother and his group, saying that Fred was anti-Islamic, and that the Russian translator and doctors he was traveling with were spies. This produced the results the Russians wanted. On April 4 Fred and the rest of his group had been arrested by Chechen fighters at Stari Atchoy, and they were held while their papers were sent to Chechen headquarters. Dudayev himself was said to have congratulated the fighters who arrested them. On April 12 Fred and his companions were passed higher up the chain of command and into the custody of Abu Masayev, head of Chechen intelligence. On April 14 they were executed.

Then, Chris Cuny said, once the international alarm was raised and search parties arrived, the Chechens must have realized they had killed someone of importance--and so they destroyed the remains. The wife of one of the Russian doctors traveling with Cuny had a heart attack and died soon after hearing the news of the party's disappearance.

At his Moscow press conference, Chris Cuny said: "Let it be known to all nations and humanitarian organizations that Russia was responsible for the death of one of the world's great humanitarians." Most of the people I know who followed Fred's career, and knew about his last mission, did not think Chris Cuny's comments an exaggeration. Nor was Mort Abramowitz exaggerating when he said of Fred's work in Iraq and elsewhere that "Fred had more insight into what was needed for humanitarian assistance than dozens of groups." His family and Intertect's staff now intend to try to keep the company going. At the memorial meeting in Washington celebrating Fred's life it was clear that he had touched people in a remarkable way. He certainly touched me; I think he was a great man.

The most enduring memorials to Fred are the hundreds of thousands of people he has helped--and the effect he has had, and will have, on the ways governments and other organizations try to relieve the suffering caused by disasters throughout the world.

--November 2, 1995