

individuals and upon our field, and we can only be thankful that he was among us. A leader of this quality does not often come along.

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Walter Francis Vella (1924–1980)

Walter Vella was struck and killed by a bus in Bangkok, Thailand, on December 30, 1980. He had arrived in Bangkok a few days earlier to participate in the ceremonies for the 100th anniversary of the birth of King Rama VI on January 1. Vella's most recent book, *Chaiyo! The Role of King Vajiravudh in the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1978) was to be presented to the King of Thailand on that occasion.

A native of San Francisco, Vella entered the University of California at Berkeley in 1942 but was soon drawn into military service. Placed in an ASTP program, he began his study of Thai language and was then assigned to serve with the OSS in the China, Burma, India Theatre of operations. Taking a discharge in Asia, he stayed on for a year in Thailand working as a code clerk in the U.S. Embassy. He returned to Berkeley and finished his B.A. degree in 1948. He then went to work for the State Department as a political analyst on Thailand. A year later he was back in Berkeley where he completed his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, concentrating on Thai language and history. While a Ph.D. candidate at Berkeley he wrote *The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand* (Berkeley, 1955), an insightful survey of the effects of Western institutions and ideas in Thailand. His doctorate was awarded in 1954 on a dissertation, which later appeared in book form under the title *Siam under Rama III, 1824–1851* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: The Association for Asian Studies, 1957). This book made extensive use of Thai language sources, integrating these into the information contained in basic Western-language histories of Thailand.

While at the State Department, Vella met Dorothy Burgeson; they were married in June 1951. She has worked closely with him on his research and publishing, being listed as co-author of his latest book. With their two sons, Eric born in 1953 and Paul born in 1954, the Vellas left Berkeley in 1955 to work on the HRAF Handbook on Thailand, which was being prepared at Cornell University; Vella was co-editor of the handbook. There were no academic jobs available in the Southeast Asia field at the time, so in 1956 Vella took a one-year Ford Foundation postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University to study international relations. The next year, 1957, he accepted the position of head of the John G. White Orientalia Collection of the Cleveland Public Library; he remained in this post until 1962. During these years he wrote chapters on Thailand for edited composite volumes and contributed pieces on Thailand to various encyclopaedias. His involvement with bibliographic work at this time bore later fruit in his publication of the *Summary Report/Conference on Resources for Research on Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1963) and *Asia: A Guide to Basic Books* (New York, 1966).

In 1962, Vella was appointed Associate Professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Hawaii. In 1965 he was promoted to Professor and held this position until his death. While at the University of Hawaii he taught courses in the

history of Southeast Asia and the history of modern Thailand and Burma and conducted graduate seminars in Thai history. Under his guidance a number of graduate students have received their M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. Among other activities in Hawaii, he was involved in the training of Peace Corps volunteers for Thailand, was a member of the Advisory Council for International Relations, served as chairman of the History Department from 1967 to 1969, was chairman of the Southeast Asian Studies Program from 1970 to 1975, a position he reassumed shortly before his death. Nationally he was active in the Association for Asian Studies, serving on its Board of Directors and the Southeast Asia Regional Council from 1971 to 1974. He has also served for many years on the board of directors of *Asian Perspectives*. Internationally he was a member of the Association of Historians of Asia, last attending and presenting a paper at the 1974 meeting in Yogyakarta.

In Hawaii Vella assumed an active role in the promotion of various publications. Best known of these is the English translation of G. Coedes's classic study *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1968). He edited a volume in the Asian Studies at Hawaii series on *Aspects of Vietnamese History* (Honolulu, 1973). He was also the promoter and editor of the Hawaii Southeast Asian Studies Working Papers, begun in 1973; this series now numbers over twenty titles. Most recently, since the publication of the *Chaiyo!* book, he had been working on a study of the nineteenth century Thai poet and man of affairs, Sunthøn Phu.

The death of Walter Vella in mid-career is a loss to the scholarly world, especially in the area of Thai studies. His colleagues and students at the University of Hawaii and elsewhere will miss his active support, generous assistance, and warm concern in the areas of scholarly activity. It was with students and for students that he spent much of his days in the History Department and the Southeast Asian Studies Program of the University of Hawaii; for them his death will be a great loss. For his colleagues his departure robs them of an active and concerned participant in both scholarly and university affairs.

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