

Daniel McGrory: a natural reporter remembered

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In the latest of our guest-blogs, the former Times editor, and POLIS board-member Peter Stothard pays tribute to the outstanding Times reporter Daniel McGrory who died this week.

At a POLIS board meeting last week we had a brief discussion of which journalists we might invite to talk about the practical issues of reporting on terrorist threats. I suggested immediately Daniel McGrory, The Times's chief reporter on Islamic extremism in its many and various modes, veteran of Finsbury Park and Madrid, Beirut and Bali, 9/11 and 7/7.

A few days later [The Times reported](#) that its own reporter was dead – suddenly and at home after a trip to Pakistan. Danny's [obituary](#) makes an important point about a side of journalism that was once normal but is now abnormal, almost hidden.

I quote:

“He was not a reporter who liked to project himself into the story. Returning from a trip abroad, he would often decry the ever-growing tendency of journalists, who had faced danger, to write in the first person. He could never write: “How I dived into the ditch as bullets flew over my head.”

He was a natural reporter who recognised a story for what it was, pursued its possibilities to the very end and crafted a tale which enlightened and enlivened the pages of the newspaper for which he was working. He did not expect praise. He was always too modest to put himself up for honours.

One of his favourite phrases was: “It could have been worse.”

These were the words he used when he came close to a violent death in the early part of the war in Iraq in 2003. He was approaching Basra in his hired car, along with a number of other journalists in their cars, when they were ambushed by militia.

The cars in front swerved off the road and drove away. McGrory did the same but the spraying bullets hit his car and missed him by inches. Under sustained fire he managed to turn the car round but it was seriously damaged. The readers of *The Times* never learnt of the escape of this intrepid reporter.

He just continued to write about the war and put the experience to the back of his mind. Within 48 hours, his car repaired, he was back in business“.

Danny would probably not have wanted to talk to the POLIS conference or any other journalism event. But it would have been well worth our trying to persuade him – and not just because of his knowledge of terror.

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