

Distinguished Nevadan Nomination Form

Deadline: December 31

Please send all nominations to:

Dean J. Gould, Chief of Staff & Special Counsel

Board of Regents

4300 South Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89119 e-mail: dean_gould@nshe.nevada.edu Fax: (702) 889-8495

1. **Salutation:** Mr.
2. **Nominee's Name** (*please ensure correct spelling*): Frank W. McCulloch
3. **Nominee's Mailing Address:**
4. **Nominee's Phone Number: Work:** N/A
5. **Employment History** (*attach additional material if necessary*):
 - 1941-42: United Press International
 - 1942-45: U.S. Marine Corps Reserve
 - 1946-1953: Reno Evening Gazette, General assignment reporter, legislative reporter, sports editor.
 - 1953-60 (except for 1956-57 when serving as Time Magazine reporter in New York): Time-Life News Service, Correspondent in Los Angeles; bureau chief in Dallas and Los Angeles.
 - 1960-64: Los Angeles Times, Managing editor
 - 1964-68: Time-Life, Bureau chief, Hong Kong and Saigon
 - 1968-69: Life Magazine, Bureau chief, Washington, D.C.
 - 1969-72: Time-Life, Bureau chief, New York
 - 1972-75: Learning Magazine, Palo Alto, Calif., vice president and editor
 - 1975-80: Sacramento Bee, managing editor
 - 1980-85: McClatchy Newspapers, executive editor. (Member of McClatchy Board of Directors 1979-85).
 - 1985-1991: San Francisco Examiner: Managing editor

6. Educational Background *(attach additional material if necessary):*

Bachelor's Degree in Journalism, Phi Beta Kappa honors, University of Nevada, 1941.
Editor, Sagebrush student newspaper, 1941

7. Reasons for Nomination: *(Please include outstanding accomplishments, achievements, and contributions to Nevada and its people. Please be specific and provide considerable detail. You may attach additional pages if necessary.)* ____

Frank McCulloch is the most accomplished and distinguished journalism graduate in University of Nevada history with a career spanning more than 50 years.

McCulloch, a 1941 graduate of the university, launched his career as a journalist at Nevada as editor of the campus newspaper, Sagebrush. Following graduation and the end of World War II, McCulloch was an award-winning investigative reporter and editor at Time Magazine, Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee and San Francisco Examiner.

As Saigon bureau chief for Time-Life News Service from 1964-67, he ably directed what has been described by many as one of the world's most talented assemblages of war reporters and photographers. His trademark shaved head became known to both American generals and Vietnamese citizens.

McCulloch's influence on American journalism over the past half-century is considered immense. He played an instrumental role in shaping war reporting, and also is considered one of the nation's foremost leaders in the continuing fight to maintain First Amendment freedoms for journalists.

Said Warren Lerude, professor of journalism at Nevada: "Frank has been a guiding influence for generations of journalists, not only for our University of Nevada graduates, but journalists all over the world who have admired his brilliance as an editor and a reporter."

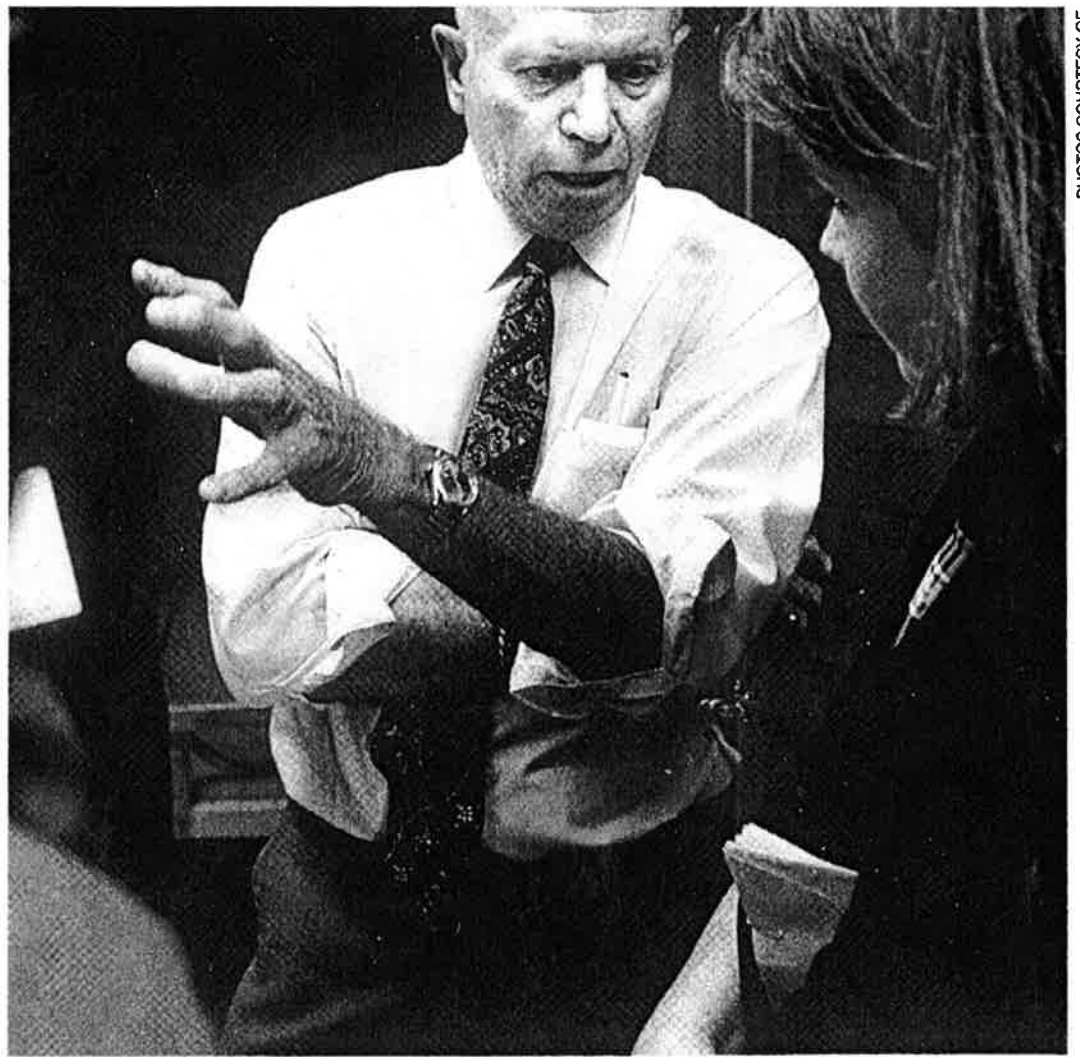
(Please see additional attachments)

8. Other NSHE Awards *(please list other awards this individual has received):*

- Honorary Doctorate, Commencement Speaker, University of Nevada, Reno, 1967
- Scripps Distinguished Lecturer (twice), UNR Reynolds School of Journalism, 1972 as Time-Life News Service Correspondent and 1983 as McClatchy Newspaper Executive Editor

9. Nominated by Regent: Dr. Jason Geddes

Breneman, then
editor of *Image*,
but she doesn't
look terribly
impressed."



THE VISIONARY

Fernley's
Frank
McCulloch
really pulled
it off in the
big time.

By Warren Lerude

At 72, Frank McCulloch is a University of Nevada graduate with a visionary future. His legendary five decades of distinguished journalism took him from Vietnam's bloody battlefields to covering the power plays and personalities of Hollywood, the White House, and the rollercoaster ride of New York publishing. But even considering the drama from his globe-trotting past, it is the future that fires his imagination these days.

Recently retired as managing editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, McCulloch, journalism class of '41, turned briefly to gardening and hiking around his Sonoma, California home. But the instinct that took him through

the decades to the world's news hot spots is being summoned to action again. The offers: Return once more to Vietnam on special assignment for *Time* magazine to examine the controversial war he covered so extensively; dig reflectively for the University of California at Berkeley's oral history project interviewing the Golden State's legendary newspaper leaders; dig deeply into the present guiding young journalists at the Center for Investigative Reporting in San Francisco; dig imaginatively into documentary filmmaking at the University of Southern California's cinema school teaching students how to do the hard research work of reporters.

Frank McCulloch was never meant to simply sit around. Even in an editor's chair. He had to be moving, always, with the vision fired by his special intelligence. Some joked, not without seriousness, that "Frank McCulloch was the only authentic genius ever to graduate from the University of Nevada." That could be debated. But his vision is certain. It has always inspired his assertive performance, which is why Columbia University in the City of New York singled out his editing and reporting leadership with its "Distinguished American Journalist Award."

His distinction has been carved out of imagination and competitiveness. When he was day managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in the early 1960s, he learned the august *New York Times* planned to come to the Pacific shores with a West Coast edition. McCulloch summoned this writer, then a rookie reporter for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, into his *Times* office and exclaimed: "We're going to send them right back to New York." How, the new reporter wondered, would McCulloch and the *Los Angeles Times* beat back the invasion of the *New York Times*, then regarded generally as a far superior newspaper?

"Business news," he said. "We're planning to build a stronger business report with staffing and space."

It was an innovative idea for American newspapers at the time. He offered the young reporter a job with the free-wheeling instruction: "Just keep moving from Fresno to the Mexican border. Just keep moving and keep writing about business."

The *L.A. Times* won the contest and the *New York Times* went home to Manhattan.

Fighting it out with the *New York Times* while running the *L.A. Times* was a big city trip for the boy from small town Fernley, Nevada. And in his major league journalistic performance, he covered notables ranging from Presidents Truman, Johnson, Nixon and Ford to Generals LeMay and Westmoreland, writers Hemingway and Steinbeck to what a *San Francisco Examiner* story



"Vietnam, about 1966. This was on a Marine Corps sweep about 20 miles west of Danang."



"The one labeled 'confrontasi' on the front shows Sukarno, who then ran Indonesia with an iron hand, and yours truly in a confrontation over something I'd reported in *Time*. He was threatening to throw me out of the country, and I told him I didn't think that would be a very good idea for either of us. He finally backed down. The pained gentleman with all the ribbons is the new British ambassador, who had the ill fortune to present his credentials to Sukarno just before this tiff. The two guys in the middle are other journalists."



"This was in the old Sagebrush office, which was in the long-vanished student union building on Center Street just below the campus gates. I don't know what the clear case of exhaustion was attributable to, although I do remember the caption in the yearbook: 'Dreamin' up an editorial.'"

"Fernley about, I'd guess, 70 years ago. The budding and still hirsute journalist with his sister, Patricia."



identified as the villains Marcos and Sukarno. And toss in, just for interest, movie stars Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.

McCulloch was the last reporter anyone could recall who, in 1958, interviewed the secretive billionaire Howard Hughes – in a prototype of the 707 as Hughes himself piloted the jet for four-and-a-half hours over the Southern California and Arizona deserts and mountains explaining to the newsman how jet traffic would bring in a new era for airplanes.

When *Life* magazine serialized the spectacular story by Clifford Irving purporting to be a biography of the billionaire, it was McCulloch, working at Time-Life headquarters in New York who exposed his own organization's story as a fraud. When McCulloch pinned down details of the literary hoax, he called the *Life* magazine press room in Chicago in the middle of the night and ordered the presses stopped.

"I did it on my own," he recalls with a chuckle now, though it was a severe move at the time. "It didn't sit too well with my superiors. But it would have been a lot worse if the edition had continued to run." McCulloch then turned to *Time* magazine to write his story exposing *Life* magazine's publication of the fraud.

Stirring things up was nothing new for Frank McCulloch who in 1966 reported from Vietnam that President Johnson intended to build up U.S. forces to 540,000. That so enraged the President that he called for McCulloch's ouster from the war press corps and McCulloch's own colleagues in Time-Life's Washington bureau criticized the reporter in the field. But, by 1968, the U.S. forces had in fact grown to 540,000

in Vietnam.

"I wasn't any genius," McCulloch says, "I just had the sources."

Frank McCulloch has developed his sources and his distinction as well as his ability to stir things up from the beginning with Phi Beta Kappa honors on the Reno campus where he edited the student newspaper, *Sagebrush*. He has never paused.

He moved through leadership roles at the *Reno Evening Gazette*, Time-Life News Service in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Dallas, Hong Kong and Saigon, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Learning Magazine*, *The Sacramento Bee* and other McClatchy newspapers and the *San Francisco Examiner*.

He has moved every step of the way with his wife Jakle to whom he proposed in his University of Nevada days – not in such a romantic setting as the shores of Manzanita Lake or the springtime green of the Quad but on turf closer to home. He drove his sweetheart through the beauty of the Nevada desert, then parked

McCulloch's distinction has been carved out of imagination and competitiveness.

the car at the meat packing plant in his native Fernley and popped the question of marriage. He was persuasive. She said yes. And he's been taking her to unusual places ever since.

Around the globe Frank McCulloch's persuasiveness has won approval not merely in the development of ever-changing newspapers but in his constant examination of what he perceives to be the future. Late last summer, when home state Nevada's media organizations ranging in interest from journalism to advertising and public relations wanted a glimpse into their own future, they asked him to share his instinct and vision.

He assessed the present: "All media, print and electronic," he said, "have fallen on very hard times in the last couple of years and these very wide and

deep woes tend to color most assessments of what the future might hold. We are criticized for our failure and perhaps our inability to cover processes instead of events, and that is a legitimate criticism. Events are almost always the results of processes, so, obviously, if we kept you informed about the slow, often undramatic developments that eventually lead to explosions or upheavals, we'd all be better off.

"But there are some problems in that. For one, processes don't seem to have beginnings, middles and ends, the essential ingredients of good stories."

Events, more dramatic to cover, are framed that way, the seasoned journalist pointed out. He cited the collapse of the Soviet Union but he could have been citing the classic of all drama, the *Rise and Fall of the Roman* or any other Empire. He challenged the Silver State media leaders with wisdom he'd picked up in travels that have taken him from Manhattan to Manhattan Beach with a little Manhattan, Nevada, true grit in between.

"How many of you watched and read the events in Peking's Tian An Men Square two years ago? Now, if it had been available, how many of you would have watched or read daily coverage in the months preceding Tian An Men on the social, political and economic processes in China that led to the events in the Square?"

The crowd shifted a bit nervously. The point was made. The partnership of press and readers creates in many respects what the public gets or does not get. It is easy, some McCulloch-challenged minds acknowledge, to criticize the media and it takes some intuitive inward vision and strength to assess one's own burden of responsibility in how the democracy works things out or fails, sometimes tragically, to do so.

McCulloch is concerned for the future not simply of journalism but the democracy it is supposed to serve with enlightenment. He shares thoughts on "something more deeply troubling than woes of recession or a changing society. Let me put this as simply as I can: I think the problems afflicting the free press today have a good deal more to do with public attitudes and today's political climate than they have to do with the recession...or our own very visible warts and blemishes. Here are some of the things that worry me:

"As survey after survey shows, citizens of the U.S. say they support, and indeed believe they support, free speech and free press. But push the questioning a little and it's clear what they really mean is that they support your right to say what you want and my right to publish what I believe only,

"Almost 75 percent of our fellow citizens express deep and growing hostility to the press 'Because it's always full of bad news.' Unless they bear glad tidings, in short, messengers of all sorts don't seem to have much of a future."

repeat only, so long as they agree with it.

"A survey of 2,500 Americans taken in 1990 and 1991 showed that a distinct minority straight-forwardly support the press' right to endorse candidates in races for public office, criticize politicians, criticize the military or publish classified material that has been so designated not for national security but to avoid political embarrassment.

"The public is clearly hostile to a press that departs the official line, whether laid down at the Pentagon or in the White House. There seems to be a growing American yearning, the surveyors found, for more centralized authority. During the Gulf War, in fact, to this day - two out of three Americans said they didn't want to see anything reported that the military didn't want reported.

"And almost 75 percent of our fellow citizens express deep and growing hostility to the press 'Because it's always full of so much bad news.' Unless they bear glad tidings, in short, messengers of all sorts don't seem to have much of a future."

McCulloch, highly honored by the press itself with such plaudits as the

Freedom of Information Award of the Professional Society of Journalists, challenges the press itself to improve its communication with the public for the good of everyone involved.

"Pretty clearly, we've done an abysmal job of explaining to our fellow Americans how a free press fits in a free society, how totally interdependent they are. Either can exist without the other but neither can exist without the other and remain free."

McCulloch's insight, coupled with his courage, have won over the most skeptical of journalists and general citizens, largely because his vision has been locked into history as it unfolds.

Years ago, he shared with this writer, as we looked beyond the windows of his Time-Life office into the urban canyons of Manhattan, that major New York-based magazines would soon die. Speaking in his trademark staccato-like intensity, he reeled off the names of the soon to be deceased: *Life*, *Look*, *The Saturday Evening Post*. Within a year or two, each had ended its decades of distinguished publishing. Reasons? McCulloch saw them coming for three

reasons: dramatic moving pictures on television; proliferation of specialty magazines; and improvement of newspapers.

One could get the impression that such a serious journalist lives a grim, if exciting, life and in McCulloch's case there has been the deadliness of battle in his own service as a World War II Marine to his coverage of combat as a reporter. But he has approached his craft and profession and army of friends and fans with high good humor, too. So much so that upon his retirement, the *San Francisco Examiner* published a special edition with the balding old pro's mug shot at 71 contrasting the *Sagebrush* editor of long ago, he who had hair. And the *Examiner* headlines over the retirement story were "GURU GONE" accompanied by "FRANK-LY, WE GIVE A DAMN" and "McCulloch retires, sort of, after journey from Fernley to Sonoma."

It is there, in the wine country, that Frank and Jakle live near their daughters DeeDee, now 48, and Candace, 43. A son David, 33, died in January after a long illness.

That journey in journalism has won

respect at home as well as abroad. Frank McCulloch has been acclaimed by his alma mater which presented him an honorary doctorate and named him commencement speaker in 1967. He is the only person to serve twice as a Scripps Lecturer in Journalism.

He identifies strongly with the University of Nevada for helping him launch his distinguished career on a journey that continues as his instinct and vision create opportunity for himself and those he will continue to serve. ■



"Dave, Jakle and me at the New York World's Fair on home leave from Saigon in 1965."

From AJR, June/July 2004

Unsung Hero

With his ahead-of-the-curve reporting from Vietnam for Time magazine and influential management stints at the Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee and San Francisco Examiner, Frank McCulloch was one of the great journalists of the past 50 years. Unfortunately, far too few people know that.

By Jason Felch & Marlana Telvick

Jason Felch is a fellow at the Center for Investigative Reporting and has written for the New York Times, the Washington Post, PBS' "FRONTLINE" and "FRONTLINE/World." Marlana Telvick is an independent reporter based in San Francisco and has written for the New York Times, the Washington Post, PBS' "FRONTLINE" and "FRONTLINE/World."

Over the past year, as the conflict in Iraq slid from a quick victory into an uncertain quagmire, Frank McCulloch watched closely as a new generation of journalists began questioning the country's justification for war. Thirty-eight years earlier, McCulloch had seen his own generation reach a similar turning point.

At the time, McCulloch was Time magazine's Southeast Asia bureau chief. He had come to Vietnam in 1963 at the request of Time Editor Henry Luce to "sort out the mess we're in over there," as Luce had put it to him. A former Marine who had missed action in World War II due to a heart murmur, McCulloch arrived in Asia hungry to witness combat and confident that America's preeminent military could get the job done quickly. By 1966, however, a deep skepticism was sinking in, and he began openly doubting his country's presence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of real progress was hard to come by, casualties continued to mount, and McCulloch had come to realize that the government's assessments could not be trusted.

"The similarities between Vietnam and Iraq are damn few, but that's the big one," McCulloch says with trademark bluntness. "The real difficulties of the Iraq endeavor--not to mention the motives for going to war in the first place--were largely ignored. It points to a fundamental weakness in American journalism. Why didn't it occur to somebody to challenge these assertions early on?"

His skepticism about Vietnam, at a time when the nation, his editors and many journalists still thought the U.S. was winning the war, set McCulloch apart, and made him, according to fellow Vietnam reporter David Halberstam, "a legend...one of its best reporters." He was willing to let the facts overrule his personal bias and the conventional wisdom of the day.

Today McCulloch is 84 and lives in a retirement community in Santa Rosa, California, an hour north of San Francisco. His modest apartment is decorated with relics from his years in Asia, including a bust of the Buddha from Vietnam's Cham dynasty, unearthed by bombs dropped from a B-52. The large bookshelf that dominates his living room holds histories of the news organizations--Time-Life, the Los Angeles Times, the McClatchy papers and the San Francisco Examiner--that he played a key role in shaping.

McCulloch's largely unsung career spans a half-century during a pivotal era in journalism. As an investigative reporter, he exposed political connections to the mafia and brushed off death threats from mob bosses. During the Vietnam War, he aggravated President Lyndon Johnson. His editorial leadership transformed the Los Angeles Times, where he went toe-to-toe with Robert F. Kennedy over reporting on the Teamsters. He fought and beat a dozen serious libel actions, establishing legal precedents that still protect journalists. Along the way he cultivated millionaire Howard Hughes as a source, wrote the first cover story on Thurgood Marshall--before he was a Supreme Court justice--and helped bring down another

member of the high court.

McCulloch is most remembered as "a journalist's journalist." Completely bald since his 30s, he looked like the former Marine he was. McCulloch was tough but at the same time showed a decency and easy laughter that made him one of the most well-liked and respected men in journalism.

For all this, the name Frank McCulloch probably doesn't ring a bell for most journalists under 40. After an extraordinary career that shaped investigative reporting, war reporting and First Amendment protections, he may qualify as one of journalism's least-known legends.

McCulloch was born the son of pioneer cattle ranchers in Nevada's Fernley Valley in 1920 and might have become a professional baseball pitcher if journalism hadn't caught his attention in college. "Fast but wild, watch" read his scouting report at the time, but after two years of semipro ball, his father told him he had to go to school.

Entering the University of Nevada in Reno uncertain of his career path and struggling to pay tuition, McCulloch took a job at the campus newspaper that led to stringer work for United Press and the Associated Press. In 1941, the day after graduation from Nevada's journalism school, he arrived at the San Francisco offices of United Press dressed in mismatched clothes and carrying an old green rattan suitcase. "I thought that the folks in San Francisco were the friendliest I'd ever seen because they were all smiling and laughing," McCulloch recalls with a grin. He had his first byline before he had found a place to live. He earned \$15 dollars a week.

McCulloch enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942, but what he calls a "bogus" heart condition kept him stateside. He spent the war writing up the heroic deeds of soldiers for the Marines' public information office in San Francisco. After the war, McCulloch returned to Reno to write for the Reno Evening Gazette, where he got his first taste of investigative reporting, delving into how the mafia was surreptitiously acquiring gambling licenses in Las Vegas. It was where McCulloch learned his legendary ability to cultivate sources--"I started out covering the police beat, which taught me how to talk to people who could become sources," he says. "I made a lot of good friends in the FBI." Sources handed him gambling license applications as they came in and McCulloch investigated them for mob ties. "We had a lot of lovely stuff, death threats," he says. " 'You be careful,' [Las Vegas-based mob figure] Johnny Roselli said to me one day. 'You keep going with this story, you will be very sorry.' "

Lou Cannon, a Nevada reporter who went on to be a political writer for 26 years at the Washington Post and a Ronald Reagan biographer, recalls, "All of us who were journalists in Nevada in those days aspired to be like Frank. He seemed to me to have all the journalistic virtues: He was skeptical. He was fair. He was kind to those less fortunate. He met the test of 'afflicting the comforted and comforting the afflicted.' "

After another stateside stint in the Marines during the Korean War, McCulloch got his start at Time as a stringer in 1951. Two years later he was hired as a full-time correspondent based in Los Angeles.

Later, while serving as Time's Dallas bureau chief early in the civil rights movement, McCulloch wrote about and traveled extensively through the segregated South, an experience he would later describe as scarier than his time in Vietnam. In 1955, he wrote a Time cover story on a little-known black attorney named Thurgood Marshall who had just won Brown vs. Board of Education.

But Murray J. Gart, former chief of correspondents for the Time-Life News Service, who passed away shortly after this interview, says it was McCulloch's decency as a person that made him different in the newsroom. "The care and attention he paid to his staff went well beyond the story of the moment. He cared passionately about his fellow reporters and everyone who ever worked for him loved him for it."

In the mid-1950s, McCulloch set his sights on interviewing the eccentric and notoriously reclusive Howard Hughes, one of the world's richest men. McCulloch says he told Hughes' PR man, "I know I'll never get to see the man, but let me give him 100 written questions. I'll give him a chance to be as careful as he wants."

To McCulloch's surprise, about a week later, his phone rang and an unfamiliar voice on the other end said, "This is Howard Hughes."

"I said some wise-ass thing like, 'Yeah, and this is Mohammed,' " McCulloch recalls. "He said, 'No, this is Hughes.' "

McCulloch estimates that he wrote 10 to 20 pieces on Hughes. Over the next 20 years Hughes would occasionally call McCulloch with a tip, or just to talk. It was one such call years later that helped McCulloch uncover one of the most reckless publishing frauds of the time.

In 1960, when Otis Chandler, son of Los Angeles Times owners Norman and Dorothy "Buffy" Chandler, was named publisher of the paper, he hired McCulloch as a managing editor.

The Times then was not much of a newspaper: small, lacking in imagination and unabashedly conservative. "It was an instrument of the Republican Party, and an acknowledged one," McCulloch says. "The City Hall reporter at that time was a Republican lobbyist. That's how bad it was. Norman and Buffy paid very little attention to the newspaper as a totality. Norman published it, but he saw it as a business enterprise."

But Otis Chandler, just 32 at the time, had big plans for the paper. "I felt the Times was way behind where it should be for the city and the way the area was developing," Chandler recalls. "I thought if we put the paper together editorially, we could become one of the best papers in the country." Chandler replaced 18 of the 19 department heads and brought in a wave of more progressive journalists, such as McCulloch, to make Chandler's vision a reality.

McCulloch infused a new energy and passion for complex stories and substantially stepped up investigative reporting at the paper. In 1961, he proposed a series that would put him head-to-head with the Chandlers, the advertisers and the paper's largely Republican readership. It was an exposé of the John Birch Society, a secretive conservative group with a growing membership intent on "rooting out the communism threat" in the United States. The group's founder, Robert Welch, published an influential newsletter in which he accused prominent people across the country of having ties to communists. Welch also was a close personal friend of Otis Chandler's uncle and had disapproved of the recent changes at the newspaper. When approached, Chandler recalls saying, "Let's go for it. Take whatever resources you need and go all over the country."

McCulloch oversaw what became a carefully worded five-part series by reporter Gene Blake exposing the group's ideological origins and its growing influence across the country. Otis Chandler followed the series with a strident front-page editorial denouncing the society for "smearing as enemies and traitors those with whom we sometimes disagree." Chandler says 30,000 readers cancelled their subscriptions in one week. But despite the cancellations, overall sales of the paper were only slightly affected, and advertisers who left quickly came back.

It was just the start for McCulloch. On a hunch one day in 1961, he called over reporter Jack Tobin and pointed to the Santa Monica hills surrounding Los Angeles. "Find out who owns them," McCulloch instructed. Tobin dug for weeks into public records, turned up nothing and was sent back to keep digging. What eventually emerged was a series of more than 30 stories over two years on the Teamsters Pension Fund, which was being used to buy properties all over the United States for the mob.

Soon McCulloch was getting threats from both Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa and U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who was building a case against Hoffa. McCulloch recalls the day that Kennedy came by the Times for a reception with the paper's executives. When McCulloch, unaware of Kennedy's ongoing investigation into Hoffa, told the attorney general about the pension fund story, McCulloch recalls Kennedy grabbing him by the lapels, saying,

"You're gonna stop this! You're going to spoil my case against Hoffa!"

McCulloch was unfazed. "I said, 'Well, General, I'll stop it if the man standing over there--my boss--tells me to.

Otherwise I won't.' And Otis Chandler stood with me."

While Chandler doesn't recall this specific episode, he says it sounds like a number of similar run-ins with Kennedy at the Times. "If [Bobby Kennedy] didn't agree with you, he'd get in your face," Chandler says. "Bobby could be 10 feet tall when he wanted to. It certainly didn't scare Frank and it didn't scare me...."

"Frank was a brash, young, in-your-face editor...one of the most remarkable people we had the privilege of hiring."

Bob Gibson, who was foreign editor during McCulloch's time in L.A., says of the boss: "He was such an inspiration to everybody in the newsroom. His verve and vitality was very contagious. He had a dynamic effect on the newsroom, from the copy boy on up. Everybody."

It would take a call from Henry Luce, perhaps the most influential journalist in the country at the time and McCulloch's old boss at Time, to pull McCulloch away from Los Angeles and cast him into the Vietnam War, which was just beginning to boil. "He said did I know anything about that mess out in Southeast Asia? And I said no I didn't," McCulloch recalls. "I was flattered when he called."

In 1963, Luce hired McCulloch to serve as chief of all Southeast Asia bureaus for Time, based in Hong Kong. McCulloch, who already had 22 years of experience at the start of the war, was quickly admired by the younger reporters in Vietnam.

"Frank was a generation older than most of us," says "60 Minutes" correspondent Morley Safer, then the 33-year-old bureau chief/correspondent for CBS News in Saigon. Safer met McCulloch in the early stages of the war when there was only a small group of reporters there. "Most of the guys from the World War II era were stodgy, but Frank was psychologically closer to our generation than the 'old farts' generation, looking at the war from the 1960s, instead of the 1940s."

Safer says McCulloch was a formidable bureau chief. "He was a very scary guy, the journalistic equivalent of a Marine Corps drill sergeant," he says. "He could sometimes terrify the guys working for him with his bullet head. He demanded that they get it absolutely right, but at the same time had a remarkable understanding of the problems his reporters faced." Safer recalls, "In his gruff way, he was very compassionate. He was a real soft-hearted guy. Vietnam was not a place where soft-heartedness wasn't obvious."

Initially positive on the war and the job the U.S. troops were doing, McCulloch became disenchanted earlier than most. "Laos is one of the loveliest lands on earth," he wrote in Time in 1964, "and it is a bitter travesty that such a land and the gentle people who inhabit it should be caught up in a war they are ill-prepared to fight but cannot be allowed to lose."

He watched as new arrivals went through the same cycle of disillusionment, and he provided a silent consolation that, along with McCulloch's bald head, earned him the nickname "Buddha."

Zalin Grant, who worked as a reporter for McCulloch in Vietnam, writes in an e-mail: "He was the most respected and best-liked journalist of the war--which of course is ironic because few in the general public have ever heard of Frank, but that's because he didn't have an ounce of self-promotion in his body."

At the peak of McCulloch's four years there, the Southeast Asia bureau of Time-Life was filing 50,000 words a month via teletype. McCulloch's old friends in the Marines more than once put him months ahead of his competitors, but he found that getting these stories into the magazine was a war of its own. His story about the massive build-up of troops in Vietnam, which he learned of four weeks before it became public, was denied by President Lyndon Johnson personally, and Time killed it. Later, Time Inc. Editor in Chief Hedley Donovan told McCulloch he had received a call from Johnson. Tired of seeing his war plans in the magazine, Johnson told the editor, "Donovan, this is the President of the U-nited States....You've got that little bald-headed guy walking around in the tropical sun with no hat on. He's addled. You better get him out of there."

McCulloch's dispatches became increasingly meditative. He maintained it was unrealistic to expect reporters to remain detached, objective observers during a war. "This is a war of agonizingly slow progress for the U.S. and deep set frustration for everyone," he said in September 1965. "I don't know anyone who is not emotionally involved, and this makes reporting

much more difficult for you have to rein yourself in before you are committed to a static position in an ever-changing situation."

In January 1968, McCulloch was pulled out of Asia. Dick Clurman, chief of correspondents for Time-Life, decided that after four years in Vietnam without getting killed, McCulloch's "odds had run out." Says McCulloch: "That was the official reason, but my reporting was too consistently negative on the war and the administration may have put pressure to drive me out."

"When Frank McCulloch leaves for Washington he will be missed by everyone from U.S. generals to Saigon shoeshine boys," wrote Managing Editor George P. Hunt in a farewell report published in the December 15, 1967 issue of Life. "For Frank is one of the deans of Vietnam reporting, and one of the most respected journalists in Asia."

After returning to the U.S., McCulloch became chief of the Washington bureau of Life magazine, then published as a weekly. As part of his orientation, Dick Stolley, the departing Washington bureau chief, gave him a tour of the White House. Walking down the hall, they ran into Lyndon Johnson. "Dick Stolley started to introduce me and Johnson says, 'Yeah, I know. I know him. I know him all the way from Texas.' And gives me sort of a limp hand, shaking, puts his hand on his hips, barreling down at me says, 'I know I gotcha, didn't I?'"

"I don't know whether he was joking, or whether he really thought after that much time he'd [chased] me out of Vietnam," McCulloch says.

Like many vets, McCulloch had returned to an America that had lost interest in the war. "Everyone was covering the protests, but nobody was paying any attention to the war," he says. "That's what outraged me. The casualties were still goddamn heavy, so I arranged to get one week's KIA [killed in action] list three days early. I sent a message all around the states to bureaus and stringers: 'I'll be coming at you with names, and I want you to get the pictures.' We got all but nine photos of all those that had been killed in Vietnam in one week, some 341 or so. Page after page of all these young faces. Close-ups. Plus one on the cover."

The provocative piece, much like the Portraits of Grief series the New York Times would run after September 11, sent a ripple through the country, and is one of the stories McCulloch is most proud of. "That brought the war back to life," he says. "Lyndon Johnson said later that it was that photo spread that had made remaining in Vietnam impossible."

In 1969, McCulloch moved to New York to head Time-Life News Service's bureau, where he organized an investigative "dream team"--Denny Walsh, Sandy Smith, Bill Lambert and Russ Sackett. "This was the best investigative team U.S. journalism ever had," says McCulloch with unabashed pride. "Among them they had 60 years of experience that they brought to bear." The team's investigative reporting led, among other things, to the resignation of Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas and exposure of President Johnson's accumulation of Texas broadcasting licenses while in public office.

Sandy Smith credits McCulloch for the level of reporting they were able to do. "For much too short a time, Frank McCulloch stood alone in the Time Inc. hierarchy as an executive who encouraged investigative journalism," he recalled in a letter. "If a reporter convinced McCulloch that the sources of information were good and the story was straight, McCulloch would push it into Time magazine."

Two important libel suits brought during these years, Cerrito vs. Time Inc. (1969) and Cervantes vs. Time Inc. (1972), established key precedents empowering journalists with reportorial privilege to protect their sources and write more freely about public figures.

The magazine won Cerrito vs. Time Inc. around the time McCulloch started as bureau chief. Time reporter Sandy Smith had identified Joseph Cerrito as a head of the Cosa Nostra crime family in San Jose, California. Cerrito in turn sued Time for libel and argued that because he was not a public official or public figure, he could sue for damages without proving "actual malice." Smith refused to reveal the sources of his information, a clause he had built into his contract with Time-Life to protect "the known and immediate danger to his informants should their names or identity become known." The

court sided with Smith and Time.

Three years later, Time Inc. got hit with a multimillion-dollar suit, *Cervantes vs. Time Inc.*, brought by St. Louis Mayor Alfonso Cervantes. In Life's "The Mayor, The Mob and The Lawyer," reporter Denny Walsh accused the mayor of maintaining business and personal ties with the mob. Cervantes tried unsuccessfully to compel the courts to force disclosure of the identity of Walsh's informants at the FBI and the Department of Justice. The magazine won again.

Lowell Bergman, an investigative reporter with the New York Times and PBS' "FRONTLINE," says today's journalists owe many of their protections to these victories. A few years later, Bergman personally benefited from McCulloch's generosity and experience fighting libel suits.

In January 1972, Howard Hughes suddenly reentered McCulloch's life and sparked one of the most publicized investigations of the 1970s. Clifford Irving, an American expat author, sold a biography of Hughes to book publishers McGraw-Hill, and Life bought the magazine rights to the story. Irving claimed to have met repeatedly with Hughes and to have secured his cooperation for the project. The same day word of the book project appeared in the press, McCulloch, who was presumably the last journalist to have interviewed Hughes at length, got a surprise call from the millionaire. "I never in my life met anybody called Clifford Irving," Hughes told him.

The Irving story quickly grabbed national attention, and journalists across the country began investigating the author. None was able to successfully discredit him, and his claims to have met with Hughes were backed up by 1,000 pages of convincing interview transcripts. Life decided to go to press with a lengthy defense of Irving's story. Seventeen hours into the printing of the magazine, which detailed some of Irving's exploits, McCulloch and L.A. Times reporter John Goldman found Irving sick, exhausted and scared at his lawyer's house in New York. Irving admitted the whole affair had been an elaborate fraud. The 1,000 pages of interview notes were based on McCulloch's own records of meetings and conversations with Hughes, which Life had provided to Irving secretly. "Cliff grinned, and said, 'Yeah, but it was sure a pissar while it lasted,'" says McCulloch. "He was the greatest con man I ever met."

The Life edition was stopped before it hit newsstands, and an exposé of Irving's fraud was rushed out in its place.

McCulloch left Time-Life News Service in the spring of 1972, just months before Life magazine shut its doors. He moved to Palo Alto, California, and worked at an education magazine, but quickly missed the pace of daily news. One night in 1975 he told his wife, Jakie, "I'm going to die of boredom, but I can't bring myself to ask Time magazine or the Los Angeles Times for a job." The next morning he received a call from C.K. McClatchy, editor of his family's Bee papers in California, with an offer.

McCulloch worked as the managing editor of the Sacramento Bee, and in 1980 he was appointed executive editor of all five McClatchy papers: the three Bee papers, the newly acquired Anchorage Daily News in Alaska and the Tri-City Herald in Kennewick, Washington (see "Is McClatchy Different?" August/September 2003).

Under McCulloch's leadership, McClatchy papers ran investigative stories that brought at least seven serious libel lawsuits, all of which the paper fought off successfully, but at no small expense. In November 1979, the Sacramento Bee published a story alleging that California Attorney General George Deukmejian failed to conduct a thorough investigation into charges that Lt. Gov. Mike Curb was associated with organized crime figures. The Bee was sued for that piece unsuccessfully.

In 1981, it was sued over a story that never ran. The year before, the Wall Street Journal accused McClatchy papers of killing an investigative story because the subject, John Garabedian, was a potential buyer of a McClatchy television station in Fresno. The Bee's unpublished article, which had been leaked to the Journal, detailed Garabedian's alleged involvement in an attempt to bribe a deputy district attorney in a case involving shady land deals. At the same time, Garabedian was in negotiations with McClatchy in a deal worth \$13.5 million.

McClatchy and McCulloch denied the story was killed because of the pending sale. Rather, prior to publication, company attorneys had determined that, while accurate, the story might not survive a libel suit, McCulloch says. They turned out to

be wrong: Garabedian filed a \$500,000 libel suit against McClatchy, the Wall Street Journal and nine individuals for reporting that never made it into a McClatchy paper. The suit was unsuccessful.

Then, in November 1983, three McClatchy papers simultaneously published articles about Nevada Sen. Paul Laxalt, who had been a chairman of the Republican National Committee and would become chairman of President Ronald Reagan's 1984 reelection committee. The stories alleged that money was illegally skimmed from a Carson City casino then owned by Laxalt and referenced ties to mob figures. Laxalt sued the Sacramento Bee in 1984. Once again, McCulloch prevailed.

"I must say at this distance, I sometimes wonder whether all the money that was spent to defend the libel suits that I created, and all the energy that went into it, whether it was a good tradeoff or not," McCulloch says. "I'm not so sure now. I'll bet you that very few people remember the stories per se. They remember the libel suits, but I don't think they remember the stories."

But, he adds, "Would I do it again? Yeah, I'd do it again."

McCulloch continued to mentor reporters, even those who didn't work for him. In 1976, Lowell Bergman was named in a \$30 million libel suit for a San Francisco Examiner story about a Chinatown murder. Bergman had contributed as a freelance reporter to the story, which had been published under the byline of staff writer Raul Ramirez. Bergman worked at Rolling Stone at the time, and the newspaper's lawyers took the position that they did not need to defend him when the city cops involved in the murder case named both reporters in the suit. Outraged, Ramirez joined Bergman in mounting an independent defense.

Paul Avery, one of the veteran reporters at the Examiner, told Bergman to talk to his former colleague Frank McCulloch, then managing editor of the Sacramento Bee. McCulloch "couldn't have been warmer or more volunteering," recalls Bergman. "It's very rare in this business to find an executive at a paper that would help someone, especially a reporter that doesn't work for him. Frank had no hesitation to lend his name to a group forming to help defend us nor to challenge another news organization by speaking on my behalf to the Hearst Corp.," the Examiner's owner. Bergman and Ramirez spent the next 10 years fighting the case all the way to the California Supreme Court. In 1986, the court ruled in their favor.

McCulloch showed the same unhesitant support for many others. In the '80s, Kathleen Newton, who has known McCulloch for years, mentioned to him that she was thinking of getting an MBA. "He told me without hesitation: 'That's great! You could be a publisher!'" she recalled in an e-mail. "I will never forget those words. It was the first time that anyone (other than my mother) had ever voiced that kind of confidence in me. As a result of his encouragement, I went on to get an MBA and became a publisher and am [now] owner of the Oregon Coast Newspapers."

It was while McCulloch was at the Sacramento Bee that he got his last phone call from his old source Howard Hughes. As McCulloch recalls, Hughes' assistant said, "Well, we're on the plane, and Mr. Hughes wants to talk to you." After a pause, the assistant came back on and said Hughes wasn't able to talk.

The next day the Associated Press reported that Hughes had died on his plane on the way to Houston for medical treatment.

In 1985, McCulloch turned 65 years old. "I asked C.K. McClatchy if I should retire at 65 and he said yes, to my utter astonishment." So, at McClatchy's request, McCulloch retired--for a week.

The newly retired McCulloch was commissioned to write a magazine story on the Hearst legacy in San Francisco, and he went to the San Francisco Examiner to talk to its new publisher, William Randolph Hearst III. There he ran into his old friend David Burgin, who had just become the paper's editor. "We went to the Washington Square Bar and Grill," Burgin recalls in an e-mail, "the big media hangout where Frank was interviewing me for the magazine piece he was writing. By the time the interview was over, [McCulloch] had been hired [as the Examiner's managing editor] and I had blown the magazine piece."

McCulloch turned out to be a godsend, says Burgin. "But at the time, publisher Will Hearst chewed me out for hiring

someone 'so old.'.. How quickly young Hearst changed his tune. Frank was there virtually running things in the newsroom for another six years."

Hearst has a different recollection: "The minute it was a plausible idea, it didn't take any deliberation at all to hire him," he says. "It's a little like someone telling you that Pelé is willing to play a little more soccer and are you interested."

When McCulloch was hired, Hearst had been publisher just one year and was in the process of trying to revive the Examiner. As he had at so many publications before, McCulloch brought sound news judgment and an eye for pieces that were longer, more analytical and better written. "I didn't give Frank enough credit for having brought that to the paper," Hearst admits. "But as I look out now at the American newspaper scene, I realize how unique Frank was in bringing that to the papers he worked on..... I can't give you three names who would be the McCullochs of my generation."

Charles Cooper, who worked with McCulloch at the Examiner and is now managing editor for production at the Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey, says: "Whether directing a project, or a single story, his first thought was about running down the truth of an issue--never worrying about marketing, demographics or newsroom politics. It was about what's right, what's the right thing to do. Don't fudge, don't stop short, don't bend the truth."

McCulloch retired for a second and final time in 1991, though you'd still find him occasionally in the Examiner newsroom or at the Center for Investigative Reporting, where he was an adviser on a Polk Award-winning investigation of savings and loans. He still has "newsroom dreams almost every night," he says.

When war began in Iraq, McCulloch jokes that he had a bag packed and was waiting by the phone. This time, neither the Marines nor a paper called. But those who know him still seek out McCulloch's advice. "We had unconditional faith in his judgment," says Cooper. "Still do. One of my most valuable journalism tools is Frank's phone number."

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McCulloch, 94, still a journalist's journalist

Guy Clifton Published 12:12 a.m. PT Oct. 4, 2014 | Updated 2:06 p.m. PT Oct. 4, 2014



(Photo: Amy Beck/Special to the RGJ)

The late Reno Gazette-Journal columnist Rolan Melton once wrote, "I'd walk a hundred miles to listen to Frank McCulloch speak about newspaper journalism."

At the time, McCulloch was the managing editor of the San Francisco Examiner, the final stop on a storied career of more than 50 years that saw this son of a Fernley cattle rancher rise to highest levels of American journalism, including stints at Time and Life magazines and the Los Angeles Times. He covered the Vietnam War from the front lines, cultivated eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes as a source, helped lift the Los Angeles Times to an elite national newspaper and helped publish an edition of the Examiner in the hours after the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

Longtime UNR journalism professor Jake Highton said while Mark Twain was the most famous writer to come out of Nevada journalism, McCulloch was the best journalist the state ever produced.

Earlier this week, the 94-year-old McCulloch's career came full circle as he was honored by the publication that launched his career — the University of Nevada, Reno's student newspaper. The Nevada Sagebrush Alumni Association honored McCulloch with its lifetime achievement award.

"Frank McCulloch has been an inspiration for University of Nevada Journalism students for decades, for generations actually, showing us the way to rise to national and international leadership through pursuing the story wherever it led — or hid — to get the news to the public," said Warren Lerude, a past Sagebrush editor (1959-60) who went on to become publisher of Reno Newspapers before a long career teaching at the UNR Reynolds School of Journalism. "In a profession filled with skepticism, he is a leading light and a genuine hero."

McCulloch, who was the Sagebrush editor in 1940-41, was unable to attend Wednesday night's alumni chapter Homecoming dinner in Reno, but did welcome alumni chapter members Amy Beck (a past Sagebrush photo editor) and Dan Hinxman (Sagebrush editor in 1990-91) into his home in Santa Rosa, Calif., a few days ahead of the event.

"My memory of the Sagebrush is all good," McCulloch said. "It was fun. We had plenty of students willing to work at it, so we could share the work on it and get it out pretty much on schedule. For me, it was a vast learning experience. It confirmed everything I'd heard about the Journalism department."

McCulloch's 1941 staff included future Sagebrush editors Bryn Armstrong (1941-42), Bill "Wink" Friel (1942-43) Jack Fleming (1942-43), and Lloyd Rogers (1946-47) along with other career newsmen including Bob Bennyhoff, who went on to a long career with United Press International, and George Ross.

McCulloch was also a campus leader in late 1930s and early 1940s and recalled during his visit with Hinxman and Beck about the time football coach Jim Aiken introduced him to running back Marion Motley — the only University of Nevada player ever inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"The athletic dept. didn't have money for out-of-state tuition at the time, so Aiken told Motley to tell admissions officials he was from Ely (he was actually from Leesburg, Georgia)," Hinxman said. "Aiken wrote 'Ely' on a piece of paper and had Motley put it in his pocket. He asked McCulloch to take Motley to admissions and help him get admitted. McCulloch said he took Motley to Jeanette Rhodes, the registrar, and Mrs. Rhodes looked at Motley and said, 'Where are you from?' Motley paused for a second, reached into his pocket, looked at the paper and proudly proclaimed 'ELI!' Mrs. Rhoads said, 'Frank, why don't you take him for a walk and come back later.'"

McCulloch also recalled a photo of him published in the 1941 student yearbook, Artemisia, showing him sound asleep at his desk, with a caption reading, "Dreaming up an editorial."

A day after graduation from the university, McCulloch began work at the San Francisco bureau of United Press International, earning \$15 a week. He arrived in mismatched clothes and carrying an old green suitcase. It was the first adventure away from Nevada for McCulloch, who was born on his family's cattle ranch in Fernley in 1920.

He told the American Journalism Review in a 2004 profile, "I thought that the folks in San Francisco were the friendliest I'd ever seen because they were all smiling and laughing."

He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942, but a heart murmur forced him to stay stateside. He wrote articles for the Marines' public information office in San Francisco.

When the war ended, McCulloch returned to Reno and spent six years at the old Reno Evening Gazette (one of the parent papers of the Reno Gazette-Journal), working as a general-assignment reporter, sports editor and legislative correspondent.

Lou Cannon, a Reno High School graduate who went on to become a national political writer and biographer of Ronald Reagan, told the American Journalism Review that McCulloch set a standard. "All of us who were journalists in Nevada in those days aspired to be like Frank. He seemed to me to have all the journalistic virtues: He was skeptical. He was fair. He was kind to those less fortunate. He met the test of 'afflicting the comforted and comforting the afflicted.' "

In 1952, McCulloch started the first of two stints at Time, Inc., that totaled 17 years. He was there from 1952 to 1960 and again from 1964 to 1972. He wrote, reported and edited for Time, Life, Sports Illustrated and Fortune magazines. He was directly involved in about 200 Time cover stories.

Between those stints, he was managing editor of the Los Angeles Times, directing investigative reports on the John Birch Society and the mob influence on the Teamsters Union Pension Fund.

In 1964, Henry Luce lured him back to Time, Inc., and assigned him to cover the war breaking out in Vietnam as chief of the Southeast Asia Bureau. Using sources he cultivated during his service in the Marines during World War II and Korea, McCulloch was often breaking stories months ahead of his competitors.

In 1967, he made a return trip to Reno from Southeast Asia to receive an honorary doctorate degree from the university and to deliver the commencement speech to university graduates, who he encouraged to take a world view of events rather than one of isolationism. He also offered the graduates a heartfelt vote of confidence.

"I have, as a matter of fact, a rather exorbitant faith in your entire generation," he said. "I know how infinitely much better prepared you are for the tasks ahead that we were for ours. You are, for which we should all give thanks, far more mature, better educated and, above all, more honest."

In 1968, McCulloch directed a Life magazine feature that included photos of every American service member killed in Vietnam in a one-week period — more than 300 in all. It shocked the nation.

"Lyndon Johnson said later that it was that photo spread that had made remaining in Vietnam impossible," McCulloch said in the American Journalism Review interview.

After leaving Time, Inc., for the second time in 1972, McCulloch spent three years at a Palo Alto-based education magazine, but soon complained to his wife, Jackie, that he was going to die of boredom if he couldn't get back into a newsroom. That led him to the editorship of the Sacramento Bee in 1975 and its parent company, McClatchy Newspapers, where he served on the board of directors.

He retired there at 65, but soon found a home at the San Francisco Examiner, where he remained until his retirement at age 71.

Today, he still lives on his own in a Santa Rosa retirement community, his walls decorated with memorabilia of an incredible career in journalism. Asked if he had any advice for students launching their own careers today, he said, "Yes, but I don't they're not going to like it."

McCulloch urged them to take a job in a mid-sized to small town, learn the issues, and, more importantly, meet the people.

"After two years, you'll have a far better picture of why human beings do what they do and how to cover them," McCulloch said.

At 94, McCulloch is still setting a standard for others to follow.

Editor's note: Reporter Guy Clifton was the Sagebrush editor in 1985-86.