

TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

HEY! LOOK AT THE KNOCKERS ON THE PIETA!

The Bush administration's nominee for ambassador to Italy, Pete Secchia, interrupted an interview he was giving to a female reporter from *The Detroit News* to tell her, "Look, I'm gonna tell you something, hon. You've crossed and uncrossed your legs twice and one time you showed me something I shouldn't see. Now am I going to complain that you're loosey-goosey or you got no class?" When publication of Secchia's remark sparked outrage, he explained himself this way: "I was just trying to make a point and she took it wrong."

THE FREQUENT FLIER MILEAGE WAS AWARDED TO THE NEXT OF KIN

Qantas Airlines admitted it lost track of a dead body bound for burial in Fiji and instead flew it around the South Pacific for three days with a cargo of vegetables.

HOW WE KEPT THE VIETCONG OUT OF MUNCIE



WHY BUREAUCRATS DON'T DO HIGH FIVES

The Chicago and Illinois governments were each in charge of building half of a \$1.9 million, 210-foot, underground pedestrian walkway between City Hall and a state office building that they now confess does not meet in the middle.

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Two former members of the Dukakis staff are selling a 35-minute video retrospective of the 1988 Democratic presidential campaign.

ON POLITICAL BOOKS

Edgar Snow Told You So

Why China's
Great Leap Backward should
come as no surprise

by Jay Mathews

My friend Xu Wenli, a gentle, thoughtful electrician and former editor of an independent Chinese magazine, has been in prison in Beijing since 1981. His hair has turned white. His nerves are shot. He is unable to do much more than weep on those rare occasions he is allowed to see his wife and daughter, who is about the same age as my 16-year-old son.

I have thought about Xu often since I said goodbye to him outside his dank apartment in southwest Beijing. Yet in the nine years since, I have also celebrated, in print and conversation, the growing prosperity and democratic aspirations of China in the 1980s. I assumed that the reformist government of Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang would eventually, after a few bureaucratic bumps along the way, produce a much more flexible and responsive economic and political system, and that China would become, if not another Hungary or Yugoslavia, at least a country where reasonable men could catch the government's attention and change things for the better.

Now that I have returned from three weeks in China, where I saw the bodies and blood on Tiananmen Square and felt the terror that has closed minds all over the

country, I wonder how I could have balanced such contradictory thoughts for so long. What is there about China that creates so much hope, among both Chinese and Westerners, in the face of so much readily acknowledged evidence to the contrary?

Edgar Snow, the premier China correspondent, perhaps the premier foreign correspondent, of this century, often found himself caught between two emotional Chinas, one dark, one light. That may explain the often schizophrenic nature of his dispatches, ably recounted by John Maxwell Hamilton in his thoughtful new biography* of the first man to report on Mao Zedong and the Chinese revolution that would change much of the world. This tension between hope and despair, pessimism and optimism, has perhaps been the defining characteristic of China reporting ever since.

Assorted warlords

Snow was the son of a Kansas City, Missouri, commercial printer. He studied journalism at the University of Missouri and then at age 22 succumbed to a feverish wanderlust. He worked his way by ship to Asia, traveling as a stowaway during one part of his

Jay Mathews, a reporter for The Washington Post, served as the paper's Beijing bureau chief in 1979 and 1980.

** Edgar Snow: A Biography. John Maxwell Hamilton. Indiana University Press, \$25.00.*