

He wrote about the Plains influence on his life in his early memoir, *Not So Wild A Dream* (1946). The book is still in print and covers his life in Velva, his family, the Hudson Bay trip, his hitchhiking around the U.S., mining in the Sierra Nevada, the Great Depression years, his early journalism, and (especially) his experiences in World War II.

Wartime reporting

Relationship with Edward Murrow

Sevareid's work during World War II, with Edward Murrow as one of the original Murrow's Boys, was at the forefront of broadcasting. In 1940, he was the first to report on the Fall of France. Shortly afterward, he joined Murrow to report on the Battle of Britain. Later, Sevareid would refer fondly to the early years working with Murrow: "We were like a young band of brothers in those early radio days with Murrow." In his final broadcast with CBS, in 1977, he would call Murrow the man who "invented me."^[13]

Rescue in Burma

On August 2, 1943, Sevareid was on board a Curtiss-Wright C-46 Commando that, having taken off from Assam in India, developed engine trouble over Burma while it was on a Hump airlift mission. He grabbed a bottle of Carew's gin^[14] before he parachuted out of the plane.^[13] The U.S. Army Air Forces formed a search and rescue team to bring the group out from behind enemy lines. The operatives parachuted in, located the party, and evacuated them safely to India, for which John Paton Davies Jr. later won the Medal of Freedom. Davies was a U.S. diplomat who, having been a passenger himself, initially led the group away from the crash site and out of harm's way before the rescuers arrived.^{[15][16]}

Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia, Sevareid later reported on Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslav Partisans.

Later career

After the war, Sevareid continued to work for CBS. He had begun his own program, *Eric Sevareid and the News*, on June 27, 1942, on CBS; it ran for five minutes, starting at 8:55 (ET) on Saturdays and Sundays.^[17] In 1946, he reported on the founding of the UN and then penned *Not So Wild a Dream* (https://books.google.com/books?id=tcaHDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT549&lpg=PT549&dq=Sevareid+later+reported+on+++Yugoslav+Partisans.&source=bl&ots=2do2j9r68z&sig=ACfU3U1rFfw9MBRBRopEEYupvVxBpVO6Sw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjH8bWuo_DnAhUBrp4KHVbpAMMQ6AEwCHoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=Sevareid%20later%20reporte%20on%20%20%20Yugoslav%20Partisans.&f=false) (University of Missouri Press, 1946). The book, whose title comes from part of the closing passage of Norman Corwin's radio play "On a Note of Triumph," appeared in eleven printings and became one of the primary sources on the lives of the generation of Americans who had lived through the Great Depression, only to confront the horrors of World War II. In the 1976 edition of the book, Sevareid wrote, "It was a lucky stroke of timing to have been born and lived as an American in this last generation. It was good fortune to be a journalist in Washington, now the single news headquarters in the world since ancient Rome. But we are not Rome; the world is too big, too varied."^[13]

Sevareid always considered himself a writer first and often felt uneasy behind a microphone and even less comfortable on television. Nonetheless, he worked extensively for CBS News on television for decades after the war. During the middle and the end of 1950s, Sevareid found himself on television as the host and science reporter of CBS's *Conquest*. He also served as the head of the CBS Washington bureau from 1946 to 1954 and was one of the early critics of Joseph McCarthy's anticommunism tactics.

Investigated by FBI

Internal FBI documents declassified in 1996 show that the agency took an active interest in Sevareid's reporting and activities in the 1940s and the early 1950s. A March 1953 document, "Security Information", is one of several to chronicle Sevareid's activities during the 1940s. It refers to unsubstantiated reports that Sevareid, while he was attending the University of Minnesota in 1941, was alleged to have associated with communists. The files also alleged that while working for the school newspaper at the university, Sevareid participated in an active campaign against the ROTC. The files also noted his involvement in an awards banquet held by the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, which had been designated a communist organization by Executive Order 9835. The files note a May 17, 1945 report in the *Daily People's World*, which stated Sevareid was a scheduled speaker at the Committee's banquet. The FBI called the *Daily People's World* a West Coast communist newspaper and claimed that Sevareid was identified as a radio commentator in its reports.

Other information in the FBI files noted a May 19, 1945 "newspapermen's forum," "The Free Press," was held at the California Labor School, and Sevareid participated. In two separate 1948 reports, Attorney General Tom C. Clark called the California Labor School "a subversive and Communist organization." The files included information that Sevareid's name was listed as one of those who was willing to raise funds to help support Hollywood celebrities appearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947. The information received by the FBI about Sevareid's purported Communist activity was provided by "a representative of another governmental agency" and was never confirmed by investigations.^[18]

The information contained in the bureau's files was circulated during March 1953 while Sevareid anchored a CBS news program, *A Report to the Nation*. The FBI was specifically interested in his March 8 broadcast in which he interviewed Harold Stassen, Director



U.S. President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan with a group at NBC's taping of its "Christmas in Washington" special in the Pension Building in Washington, D.C. Left to right: NBC News anchor Roger Mudd, CBS News reporter Eric Sevareid, entertainer Dinah Shore, actress Diahann Carroll, actor and musician John Schneider, President Ronald Reagan, First Lady Nancy Reagan, actor Ben Vereen, and singer Debby Boone.



Sevareid interviewing President Richard Nixon at the White House for *A Conversation With the President* (1970)

for the Mutual Security Agency. The FBI developed information that documented what they alleged was his "disloyal" activities.^[18]

By April 1953, the FBI documents show that the bureau found no reason to open a more extensive investigation into Severeid's activities.^[18]

European correspondent

Severeid wound up the 1950s as CBS's roving European correspondent from 1959 to 1961. He contributed stories to *CBS Reports* during that time and served as moderator on a number of CBS series such as *Town Meeting of the World*, *The Great Challenge*, *Where We Stand*, and *Years of Crisis*. Severeid also appeared in or on CBS coverage of every presidential election from 1948 to 1976, the year before his retirement.^[13]

Final interview with Adlai Stevenson

One of Severeid's biggest scoops from this time period was his 1965 exclusive interview with Adlai Stevenson II shortly before Stevenson's death.^[19] The interview was not broadcast over CBS but instead appeared in *Look* magazine. However, it was Severeid's familiar "think-pieces," which familiarized him with viewers worldwide.^[13]

CBS Evening News appearances

On November 22, 1963, Severeid joined Walter Cronkite on CBS television with a commentary about the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the road ahead for the new president, Lyndon Johnson. From 1964 to his 1977 retirement from the network,^[4] Severeid's two-minute segments on the *CBS Evening News* (anchored by Cronkite) inspired his admirers to dub him "The Grey Eminence."

During his long run as a commentator, his segments earned both Emmy and Peabody Awards. In 1987, he was honored as an inductee into the Academy's Fourth Hall of Fame.^[20] Those who disagreed with his views nicknamed him "Eric Severalsides." Severeid recognized his own biases, which caused some to disagree with him vehemently. He said that as he had grown older, he had tended to become more conservative in foreign policy and liberal in domestic policy.^[13]

His commentary touched on many of the day's important issues. After a 1966 trip to South Vietnam, he commented that prolonging the war would be unwise and that the US would be better off pursuing a negotiated settlement. He also helped keep alive another Murrow tradition at CBS that began with the interview show *Person to Person*. On *Conversations with Eric Severeid*, he interviewed such famous newsmakers as West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and novelist Leo Rosten. In somewhat of a spoof of that tradition, he also had a conversation with King George III, portrayed by Peter Ustinov, titled *The Last King in America*.^[13]

Severeid later narrated the American history series *Between The Wars*. In 1981, Severeid hosted a documentary series on PBS, entitled *Enterprise*, a profile on how America portrays business. The following year, he hosted the syndicated newsmagazine program *Eric Severeid's Chronicle*.

He made a guest appearance as himself in a 1980 episode of the sitcom *Taxi* and a cameo appearance in the 1983 space flight film *The Right Stuff*.^[21]

Personal life

Severeid married the former Lois Finger. They had twin sons, Peter and Michael, born in Paris the morning of April 25, 1940, while Severeid was stationed there as a war correspondent for CBS.^[22]

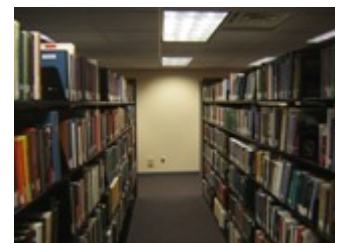
Severeid's second marriage was to Belen Marshall. They had a daughter, Cristina, born in New York on September 25, 1964, while he was working as a commentator at the New York bureau.

Death

Severeid died of stomach cancer at age 79 in Washington, D.C. on July 9, 1992.^{[23][24][25][26]}

Honors

- 1950, 1964, 1976: Peabody Award^[27]
- 1954: Alfred I. duPont Award^[28]
- 1964: State of North Dakota Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award^[29]
- 1965: New York Newspaper Guild Page One Award
- 1977: Paul White Award, Radio Television Digital News Association^[30]
- Emmy Award winner:^[31]
 - Best News Reporter or Commentator - 1955
 - Best News Commentary - 1958
- 1993: Inducted posthumously into the Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame^[32]
- On October 5, 2007, the United States Postal Service announced that it would honor five journalists of the 20th century with first-class rate postage stamps, to be issued on Tuesday, April 22, 2008: Martha Gellhorn, John Hersey, George Polk, Rubén Salazar, and Eric Severeid; Postmaster General Jack Potter announced the stamp series at the Associated Press Managing Editors Meeting in Washington, D.C.; Severeid had covered the fall of France to the Germans in World War II; he was a critic of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's anti-communism campaign^[33]



A portion of the Eric Severeid Library at the University of Minnesota

See also

- [Alfred and Clara Severeid House](#)

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External links

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