# THE STORY OF AP REPORTER ED KENNEDY

## THE TRUE STORY OF A JOURNALIST WHO COVERED WW2 AND WHO BUCKED THE RULES TO FILE A REPORT THAT THE FIGHTING HAD ENDED – AND PAID A DEAR PRICE FOR DOING SO.

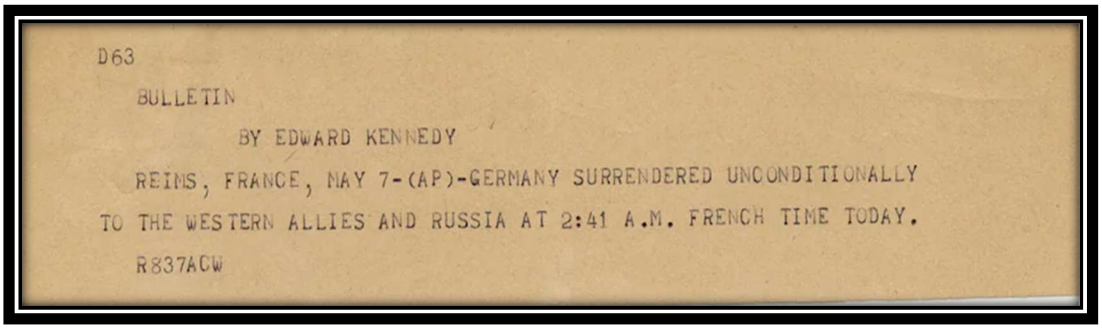
**382**

RealClear

**MAY 8, 2020**

***"This is Ed Kennedy in Paris. The war is over and I am going to dictate. Germany has surrendered unconditionally,"*** the war correspondent said, according to an account of the call by Tom Curley, AP's former president. "That's official. Make the date[line] Reims and get it out."

***With that wire, Associated Press war correspondent Edward Kennedy landed the biggest scoop of his career — while simultaneously ruining it.***



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BULLETIN
BY EDWARD KENNEDY
REIMS, FRANCE, MAY 7-(AP)-GERMANY SURRENDERED UNCONDITIONALLY
TO THE WESTERN ALLIES AND RUSSIA AT 2:41 A.M. FRENCH TIME TODAY.
R837ACW

*Copy of the message sent from Ed Kennedy to the London Office of the Associated Press. AP*

It's Friday, May 8, 2020, the day of the week when I reprise a quotation intended to be educational or evocative. Today there was no shortage of candidates, as this is the 75th anniversary of V-E Day -- the date of the 1945 Nazi surrender to Western allies in Europe. The planned celebration will be muted. Among the many May events postponed or canceled because of the coronavirus -- a litany that includes high school proms, graduations, the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, the Indy 500, the Cannes Film Festival, the French Open tennis tournament -- is the dedication of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial.

Today's quote does not come from Ike, however. Nor does it come from any of the 5 million American men who were under his command when World War II ended.

The line of the day concerns a journalist who covered that war, and who bucked the rules to report that the fighting had ended -- and paid a dear price for doing so. His name was Ed Kennedy, and I'll relate his story in a moment.

Ed Kennedy, no relation to the Boston Kennedys, was a seasoned war correspondent even before the United States entered World War II. He spoke fluent French, exhibited bravery under fire, and chafed at government censorship. This last instinct was admired by his fellow print correspondents right up until the day it wasn't. That day derailed his career.

It happened in France on May 7, 1945. As the Paris bureau chief for the Associated Press, Ed Kennedy was one of 17 American correspondents allowed to witness the German surrender at a little red schoolhouse in Reims, a city 80 miles northeast of Paris. *It happened at 2:41 a.m., French time, but the news didn't get out for 12 hours -- and it wasn't supposed to go out then*.

On the way to Reims, the reporters were told that there would be a news embargo. This was nothing new to these seasoned correspondents: World War II military censors always cited the same rationale -- the troops' safety -- which the journalists abided by, even in cases when that explanation was an obvious stretch.

*Ed Kennedy and his 16 colleagues figured the embargo would last a few hours. But in the light of morning, they were told that it would last 36 hours -- until 3 p.m. the next day.* To Kennedy, this was an "absurdity," the word he would use in a memoir not published until nearly 50 years after his death.

**The German Surrender at Reims, France on May 7, 1945**

He appealed to the Army officers on the scene, to no avail. *Then, just after 2 p.m., German officials announced the surrender over the radio to citizens in Flensburg, a German city occupied by the Allies.* Kennedy knew this could only have happened if the U.S. Army had authorized it, and he complained again. The censors waved him off: He'd have to wait, along with everybody else, for another 25 hours.

Can you imagine sitting on a story like that? Ed Kennedy couldn't, and the way he figured it the military officials had broken the embargo themselves. So, he slipped off to a phone not monitored by censors and dictated a story to his office. He didn't tell his bosses in New York that he was breaking an embargo, and they didn't ask. So, the AP "flash," as it was called, went out to the world:

**ALLIES OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED GERMANS SURRENDERED UNCONDITIONALLY.**

Under that headline was Ed Kennedy's scoop, which generated wild and impromptu celebrations around the globe. *As you can imagine, his 16 colleagues who had abided by the news blackout* were furious.

So were the censors and the U.S. generals, all the way up the chain of command to Supreme Commander Eisenhower. Kennedy's instinct turned out to be right: There was no valid military justification for withholding the news.

The reason was political. Harry Truman and Winston Churchill had acceded to Joseph Stalin's request to delay the announcement until the Red Army officials could get to Berlin. The announcement was supposed to be a joint one.

Ed Kennedy suspected something like this, but to him, political considerations were not legitimate reasons for censorship. He thought the question was this basic: Why did the German people have a right to know the war was over before the people in France, Britain, and the United States?

This wasn't a universal view. *Kennedy's bosses at AP apologized for their actions, apparently as a condition for being allowed access to covering the war's aftermath*, ***and then fired Ed Kennedy.***

*And most of the other correspondents in Reims never forgave him.* Boyd DeWolf Lewis, the top UPI man in Europe, was still fuming about it into his 90s, telling an interviewer that Kennedy should have been "boiled in oil."

Eisenhower, who essentially considered embedded reporters to be adjutant junior officers in his army, was also incensed. *Ike had to be talked out of court-martialing Kennedy, which was impractical as the journalist was, in fact, a civilian*. But by the time he wrote his popular postwar memoir, Eisenhower had mellowed. "One American reporter published the story before the release hour, which infuriated other newsmen who kept the faith," he wrote. "The incident created considerable furor, but in the outcome, no real harm was done, except to other publications."

Over time, Kennedy's actions came under some reconsideration. The first to do so was the New Yorker's A.J. Liebling. Writing that same month, Liebling said the question of whether a promise "extorted" from a journalist by military men in a military plane several thousand feet above a war zone "has any moral force" was a question for theologians. *Three years later, the Atlantic Monthly published a defiant piece by Kennedy in which he said he'd do it again.*

Yet despite his experience, knowledge, and language skills, *Ed Kennedy was never given another assignment as a foreign correspondent*. The ambivalence he engendered was epitomized by the New York Times, which ran his V-E Day story under a banner headline, sending joyous New Yorkers streaming into the streets, then published an editorial the next day excoriating the correspondent who had furnished the story.

Bob Considine, who worked for a rival news service during the war, and later helped Babe Ruth write his autobiography, was struck by the irony. He blamed Kennedy's bosses for not sticking by their guy. "If AP had not chickened out on him," Considine said, "Ed would be remembered as the intrepid reporter who saw his duty and answered the call."

**"A GRAVE DISSERVICE"**

The Times wrote in an editorial two days later that Kennedy had committed a "grave disservice to the newspaper profession."

Time magazine said the incident gave the press a black eye.

The disdain for Edward Kennedy was so great that 15 years later, the CBS Evening News anchor *Walter Cronkite, a United Press correspondent in Europe in World War II, refused to stand when Kennedy offered his hand.*

When The Associated Press returned Kennedy to New York, it kept him on the payroll but gave him no work to do. *In November, he was fired. "Kennedy tried for years to repair his damaged reputation," said*

*a 2013 article in* The Atlantic Monthly. It described the personal essay he'd written in 1948, "I'd Do It Again," as "a lengthy self-defense.

Kennedy drifted out to California, divorced and without his only child, a daughter he'd been close to. He took a job as managing editor of the Santa Barbara News-Press and then went farther north to the central California coastal town of Monterey in 1949.

As editor and associate publisher, Kennedy turned the local paper around, supplementing its coverage of garden clubs and the like with front-page news analysis of world events that he wrote himself.

The Monterey Herald had become one of the best little papers in the country in late 1963 ***when 58-year-old Ed Kennedy stepped out of a saloon and into the street where he was hit by a car and killed.***

"For the gaunt, intense Kennedy," Christopher Hanson noted in The Atlantic, "it became the scoop from hell." *He wrote a memoir but could not find a publisher. After he died in 1963, the manuscript lay in a box in his daughter's attic, gathering dust, figuratively if not literally, for almost 50 years. His daughter finally got it published by The Louisiana State University Press in 2012*

***In 2012, 67 years after Kennedy broke the news of the century, the AP issued a formal apology for its actions.***

AP CEO Tom Curley said that was "a terrible day for the AP. It was handled in the worst possible way." Of the news that Kennedy broke, Curley says that *"once the war is over, you can't hold back information like that. The world needed to know."*

The apology was accompanied by a push from journalists to award a posthumous Pulitzer Prize to Kennedy. Although nominated for the prize in 2013, the WWII reporter failed to win the award.

The letters of support, recommendations, etc. nominating him for this award known as "The Ed Kennedy Pulitzer Project" can be seen by *copying and pasting the below link into your browser:*

***https://www.norcalmediamuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/93114-RB9-Pulitzer.pdf***

However, as USA Today notes, "Pulitzer rules don't prohibit resubmissions," and there have been several pushes in recent years for Kennedy's recognition.

That didn't happen, but there *is a fitting tribute to Ed Kennedy in the California town of Seaside. It's on a small plaque in Laguna Grande Park and it reads: "He gave the world an extra day of happiness."*

## ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS/ COMMENTS FROM VARIOUS WEBSITES

**1. Kennedy broke his word when he broke the embargo.**

It was Eisenhower's command that broke the embargo. As Ike's Chief of Staff, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith acknowledged after the war, the Allies ordered German radio to broadcast news of the surrender repeatedly to ensure that German forces stood down. The Germans complied, and Kennedy filed his story only after learning of the German broadcasts. He told the senior censor that these broadcasts had nullified the embargo, and he was no longer pledged to honor it.

**2. Kennedy failed to inform his bosses that his dispatch broke the embargo.**

This is true, but he faced Hobson's choice. Kennedy had dictated his story to the AP London bureau by phone. The London bureau then had to relay the story to New York headquarters for editing, using a trans-Atlantic cable minded by a military censor. Kennedy thus had two options. He could dictate the story without a warning to editors that it was unauthorized and get it into print. Or he could include a note telling editors that he was breaking the embargo, ensuring that the censor could stop the dispatch. Kennedy made a difficult choice, but not a deceitful one.

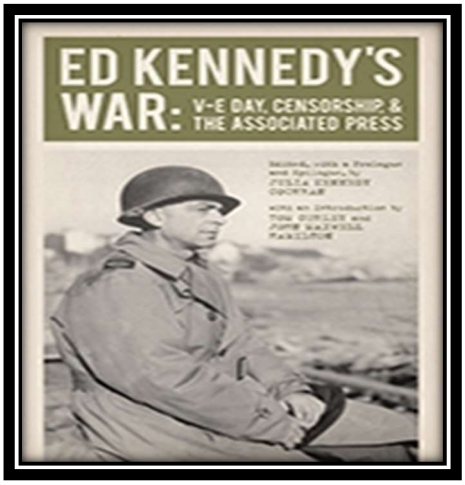
**3. Kennedy betrayed his fellow correspondents by failing to inform them of his intentions in advance.**
Come on. Wire reporters are paid to be first. If he had stopped to confer with his nearly 60 rivals, not only would he have lost the scoop, but also might inadvertently have alerted the authorities, making it impossible for anyone to file the story.

**4. The Ed Kennedy controversy became a huge story in the United States following Germany's surrender.**
Editorial writers and members of the public came to his defense, incensed that their government would bottle up the best news of the war. *In the face of this bad publicity, Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall ordered Eisenhower to go after Kennedy, according to documents in the National Archives*. Ike's public relations chief held a press conference castigating the reporter for violating security. Meanwhile, government and other pressure led Associated Press President Robert McLean to apologize publicly for Kennedy's conduct before all the facts were in. *Kennedy's AP career was over.*

**5. In September 1944, Kennedy took a jeep and broke away from headquarters**, driving from southern France toward Paris, eluding retreating German units, mapping areas that had fallen under the control of the Resistance, and documenting a Nazi massacre of men, women, and children. He arrived in Paris only to have his credentials suspended for traveling without permission. Eric Sevareid, who covered the war for CBS, described Kennedy in his 1953 memoir as "one of the most rigidly honest, most unflaggingly objective journalists, who never ceased in his efforts to free the news . . . He did more to hold the military to the letter of the censorship rules . . . than any other journalist I know."

**6. *Dealing with Army PR was a Kafkaesque experience then, as it can be today.*** Eisenhower said in his farewell press conference for war correspondents in Europe that there had been no serious censorship of their copy. In that same press conference, he reminded them to clear any statement they wanted to quote with a PR officer. He also said he regarded journalists accredited to his command as "auxiliary staff officers" whose job was to support the war effort through "objective" reporting. In reality, of course, one can't be both a quasi-soldier and an independent reporter. Ed Kennedy chose to be the latter, and it very nearly destroyed him. Even 50 years after his death, awarding a prize to Kennedy might convey a useful message following the recent decade of war: We need more Ed Kennedys and fewer "auxiliary staff officers" in the press.

**Until his death, Kennedy always stated that he never regretted the actions he took on May 6, 1945.**

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