# Hans von Kaltenborn

Kaltenborn was born July 9, 1878 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up in Merrill, Wisconsin. When he was 19, he left home and joined the armed forces to ﬁght in the Spanish–American War. After that he spent time in Europe. Upon his return, he would take a job with the newspaper The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. When he was 24, he went to college, enrolling as a special student at Harvard University. After college, he returned to the paper, and would do extensive traveling during summers.

According to the book The Garden of Beasts by Erik Larson, and being of German descent, in 1933 Kaltenborn decided to go to Germany. Apparently, he refused to believe reports that the S.A., the Nazi storm trooper roughnecks, routinely insulted and beat up American visitors to Germany who did not show proper respect for their street parades. His admiration for Nazi Germany came crashing down when he and his son failed to stand still and salute the parade. He was verbally insulted and his son physically assaulted. He made a complaint to the American Consulate in Berlin but nothing came of it.

In America, Kaltenborn would transition to radio when it became an important source of the news. Kaltenborn was one of the ﬁrst news readers to provide analysis and insight into current news stories. He possessed a highly precise diction, and had an ability to ad-lib well. His vast knowledge of foreign aﬀairs and international politics amply equipped him for covering the 1930s crises in Europe and the Far East. His vivid reporting of the Spanish Civil War and the Czech crisis of 1938 helped establish in the public mind the credibility of radio news, and helped to overcome the nation’s isolationist feelings.

As authors Christopher Sterling and John Kittross wrote, Kaltenborn reported on the Spanish Civil War “while hiding in a haystack between the two armies. Listeners in America could hear bullets hitting the hay above him while he spoke.”

From the connections he developed in his travels, as well as his ability to speak ﬂuent German and French, Kaltenborn seemed chosen for the role he developed at CBS. One of his most famous periods was during the Munich crisis in 1938. Much of what listeners heard was Kaltenborn speaking without script - sometimes even after having been up for most of a night covering the breaking news.

CBS president William Paley, praise Kaltenborn ability to "comment on and analyze what he had just said." It was said that he had an international reputation and could speak intelligently about events because he had interviewed many of those involved.

Kaltenborn would join NBC in 1940. On election night in 1948, he and Bob Trout, a former CBS colleague, were at the NBC news desk to broadcast the returns of the White House race between President Harry S. Truman and challenger Thomas E. Dewey. Although too close to call, during the evening Kaltenborn could see a swing in Dewey’s favor. It was enough for him to project Dewey the winner. However, overnight the votes began increasing for Truman. As evening turned to early morning, Kaltenborn retracted his original projection and announced Truman as the winner.

On his newscast, Kaltenborn described how Truman did an impersonation of the journalist describing how he (Truman) was losing the election. Kaltenborn later stated, “We can all be human with Truman. Beware of that man in power who has no sense of humor”.

Though Kaltenborn left full-time broadcasting in 1953, he provided analyses during NBC’s television coverage of the Republican and Democratic conventions in 1956. Chet Huntley and David Brinkley anchored the live broadcasts in their ﬁrst on-air pairing. Kaltenborn was 77 by this time, and some see his performance as a disappointment. Forever the radio newsman, Kaltenborn would report everything, including the movements of the subject he was describing, even though millions of people were watching it.

On television, apart from the news, Kaltenborn was also a regular panelist on the NBC television series Who Said That?, in which a panel of celebrities attempt to determine the speaker of a quotation from recent news reports. And he had movie appearances as well. He was one of four journalists who portrayed themselves in the 1951 ﬁlm The Day the Earth Stood Still. He also appears as himself in the 1939 Frank Capra ﬁlm Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, and in the 1948 film The Babe Ruth Story.

Kaltenborn would pass away in New York City on June 14, 1965. He was 86 years old.

Information for this biography was taken from The National Radio Hall of Fame, to which Kaltenborn was inducted in 2011, also from the website Old Time Radio.com, from the International Movie Database, and from Wikipedia.