Ralph Barnes (1899-1940)

By Barbara Mahoney

A leading foreign correspondent in Europe during the 1930s, Ralph Barnes was born in Salem, Oregon, on June 14, 1899. He graduated from Willamette University and received a master's degree in economics from Harvard University. After working briefly for the *Herald Tribune* in New York, he secured a job with the Paris *Herald.* While at the paper, Barnes interviewed Gertrude Ederle when she completed her swim of the English Channel in 1926 and Charles Lindbergh when he landed in Paris after his trans-Atlantic flight the next year.

In 1930, the New York *Herald Tribune* hired Barnes as its correspondent in Rome, where he reported on the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. While his hard work and careful research did not endear him to the Italian government, Barnes's success led to his assignment the following year to the coveted position of correspondent in Moscow.

Reporting on the Soviet regime of Joseph Stalin proved to be both an opportunity and a challenge. Barnes had a knack for pursuing stories that the Soviet government did not want to come to light. His output contrasted sharply with that of his rival, Walter Duranty of the *New York Times,* who was notoriously sympathetic with the regime. When Barnes toured rural Russia and bypassed the censors to submit perceptive articles on the Famine and the Great Terror, the government confined him to Moscow. Nevertheless, he managed to provide the *Herald Tribune* with substantial coverage of key events and issues.

In 1935, Barnes was transferred to Berlin. Under his byline, *Herald Tribune* readers found insight into the nature of the Nazi regime and its plans. He was one of the first to recognize the centrality of antisemitism in Hitler's thinking. He covered the Anschluss and the Czech crisis of 1938, detailing the appeasement policy that European leaders pursued in response to German aggression. Just as he had in Russia, he found ways to evade censorship and get his stories out.

Briefly assigned to London in 1939, Barnes reported on the British reaction to Germany's invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II. By March 1940, he was back in Germany and followed the German troops as they invaded France and the Low Countries. Hitler's successes led Barnes to the conclusion that Germany would attack the Soviet Union, despite the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact that split Poland between the two powers. When the *Herald Tribune* published his story, the Nazi government expelled him from Germany.

After his expulsion, Barnes traveled through Hungary and Rumania to the Balkans and the Middle East. From Egypt, he reported on the war in the Mediterranean. When Mussolini invaded Greece, Barnes relocated to cover the story. On November 17, 1940, he boarded a British bomber to report on its mission. The airplane crashed in Yugoslavia, killing Barnes and three Royal Air Force crewmen. At his death and for the rest of their careers, his fellow journalists—including Leland Stowe of the *Herald Tribune*, William Shirer of Columbia Broadcasting, and William Stoneman of the *Chicago Daily News*—saluted the man and his achievements.

Sources

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