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An Encounter With Murrow

It was the summer of 1945, Germany had surrendered in May and I was stationed at a Ninth Air Force base not far from Nuremberg which was in ruins. Not yet 21 and into my third year of military service I had only touched European soil in Scotland by VE Day. I found I was among the latest arrivals in my new outfit.

Almost everyone else had been in France during combat. We lived in muddy tents. It was dreary and boring. My job was to do weather observations.

Suddenly to everyone's astonishment orders came through for me, the newcomer, to attend a

liberal arts college for two months a couple of hours West of London. Called Shrivenham American University it had been pulled together by the Army for qualified soldiers to occupy the time until troop ships were available for the return trip to the U. S.

Since I had no combat time and only a short time overseas I would be among the last to be eligible for the trip home. And the Japanese War was still on. Admission to Shrivenham and the sister college at Biarritz in Southern France was on college aptitude grounds for those enterprising enough to discover this unusual opportunity.

The war-weary vets in my unit were furious that simply by reading a bulletin board and applying I was to leave dismal Germany for the British countryside

when most of them had not received even a 10 day furlough. The C. O. did his best to pacify them until I was on a plane for London.

The College that had been assembled at a former British army barracks near Swindon was all I could possibly have hoped for: good courses, good professors, good student body, trips to Oxford and Stratford, weekends in London and all the while in the military.

Two months later as the term drew to a close I naturally wanted to stay on, not to have to return to my base in Germany as my orders directed. Voila!! After a pitch to the Colonel he had me transferred to the regular administrative contingent at Shrivenham. My job was to do such things as work weeknight

events and be tour leader on weekend sightseeing while still taking classes. This arrangement lasted for another two months but at year's end Shrivenham was due to close.

The war's end had clearly opened some interesting doors. Another program had been initiated with the same idea of giving GI's something useful to do while waiting transport. If you could find an English sponsor in the same field or occupation that you had followed stateside to take you on, like an apprentice the military would approve, while you were still in uniform. If you had been in the hardware business at home, look for someone comparable.

The idea bulb flicked on. Broadcasting had been a high school hobby. I had even been in a teen age

radio quiz pilot show in Cleveland (never produced) whose host was a young announcer named Jack Paar. After graduation in the summer of 1942 I had worked as a staff announcer at an Akron radio station (\$110.00 a month). My audacious idea was to drop in on CBS in London and to pitch to them to let me run errands, help out while I observed the overseas broadcasting business. Seemed far fetched but who knows.

At the first opportunity I headed straight for CBS. The building was called Broadcasting House, the headquarters of the BBC. At the CBS offices I explained my mission to a pleasant friendly gentleman, Charles Collingwood. He said I'd have to see Ed Murrow, who was not around just then but that

I should return. Meanwhile would I like to join him at the booth as he was about to do that day's broadcast. Would I ever. We went to a different floor to a space that seemed more like a counter with a microphone where Collingwood opened a cabinet, removed a bottle of Scotch, poured himself a drink and asked me to join him.

"No, thanks". (The situation was intimidating.)

"Go ahead"

"Well, o.k."

Then he did his live broadcast with me a few feet away. Wow.

Edward R. Murrow was the premiere news broadcaster of his era. His "This is London" during

WW II was the main link between Britain and most of America. I was back to see him on a gray November day. There was an electric heater going in his office. Murrow was not in a rush. He commented on how strange it seemed for this to be Thanksgiving Day. He paid attention to what I was suggesting but without tipping pro or con told me to telephone him the following week.

Back at the college I confronted the English telephone. It “rang through”. I was nervous. Talking to Murrow on the phone was harrowing. There was static. What was he saying? I lost confidence. It must be no. That’s it, no go. That was that.

There were student openings at the college in Biarritz which was still in business. Living in one of

the hotels which the Army had commandeered and taking more classes, that's where I spent January and February, 1946.

After the War instead of broadcasting I pursued a legal career. A few years ago while in Big Sur I was joined by a fellow with a familiar face I couldn't quite place. He introduced himself, Brit Hume, the Washington TV reporter. I told him my Murrow anecdote. As I finished he said, "Just think you came close to maybe leading a whole different life."