

H. V. Kaltenborn, 86, Commentator, Dead

H. V. Kaltenborn, whose precise, clipped delivery of radio news was familiar to millions of Americans for 30 years, died here yesterday after a heart attack. He was 86 years old.

Mr. Kaltenborn arrived in the city on Friday from his Palm Beach, Fla., winter home, to visit his son, Rolf. He became ill at his son's home at 167 East 64th Street, Sunday night, and died in Roosevelt Hospital yesterday at 5 P.M.

From the moment he delivered his first radio news analysis in April, 1922, to his retirement from radio and television in September, 1955, Mr. Kaltenborn confidently gave the public his views on the meaning of the news.

His opinions were sprinkled through his commentaries and frequently aroused controversy.

Continued on Page 41, Column 2

The New York Times

Published: June 15, 1965

Copyright © The New York Times

H. V. Kaltenborn, Commentator On Air for 30 Years, Dies at 86

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

He never said he had inside sources, and he had no disposition to use qualifying phrases. He once noted that the wife of the Mayor of Fairbanks, Alaska, tapped him on the shoulder as they danced and exclaimed:

"Boy, you're some spieler."

One of his colleagues in Washington, after hearing Mr. Kaltenborn detail in January, 1933, the policies, domestic and foreign, that Franklin D. Roosevelt would pursue, put it another way:

"I wish I could be as sure of a few things as that guy is about everything."

A typical broadcast in June, 1943, included such flat statements that Mussolini, though slipping, was still Italy's chief; that the food situation in the United States was bad because it had been run by a White House clique, and that the United States coal miners were 50 per cent better off than when the war began.

A confirmed internationalist, Mr. Kaltenborn was sharply attacked beginning in 1938 by the America First Committee. Later he was attacked by those on the political left as a reactionary.

He, himself, acknowledged that he was often wrong in his views, but contended that his long-range batting average was good. One factor that perhaps contributed to his bobbles was his refusal to use notes or prepared material.

"I would say whatever came into my head," he explained, "however, I had my head trained so that I didn't get into too much trouble."

His Audience Listened

Mr. Kaltenborn, a tall, athletically trim man, insisted on speaking his mind despite the occasional shudders in radio's executive offices. The millions in his audience either forgave or ignored his mistakes and went on listening.

One man who forgave, but did not ignore, one of Mr. Kaltenborn's celebrated broadcasts was President Harry S. Truman.

At a public dinner in Washington on Jan. 19, 1949, a few months after his surprise election victory over Gov. Thomas E. Dewey, Mr. Truman told the audience, in mimicking tones, of a Kaltenborn broadcast he had heard on election night.

The President said he had taken a nap early in the evening, then awakened at midnight, turned on the radio and there were Mr. Kaltenborn and Richard Harkness giving election returns for the National Broadcasting Company.

In a Kaltenborn-miming voice, Mr. Truman said, "The President is one million popular votes ahead, but when the country vote comes in Mr. Truman will be defeated by an overwhelming vote."

The President's political audience interrupted him with applause and laughter.

Mr. Truman said he awoke at 5 A.M. and again listened to the radio. Resuming his parody of Mr. Kaltenborn's voice, the President said:

"Although President Truman is leading by two million votes it will be necessary to take the election into the House of Representatives."

Source of Amusement

The two men later exchanged friendly quips over the broadcast and the President's mimicry and Mr. Kaltenborn noted recently in an interview that they had been good friends ever since.

Mr. Kaltenborn once said that he considered his reporting and commentary on the Munich crisis in 1938 as his most notable achievement. It was a great personal triumph for him.

For 18 days during the crisis he scarcely left the studios of the Columbia Broadcasting System. He slept on a cot often and subsisted almost entirely on sandwiches and coffee.

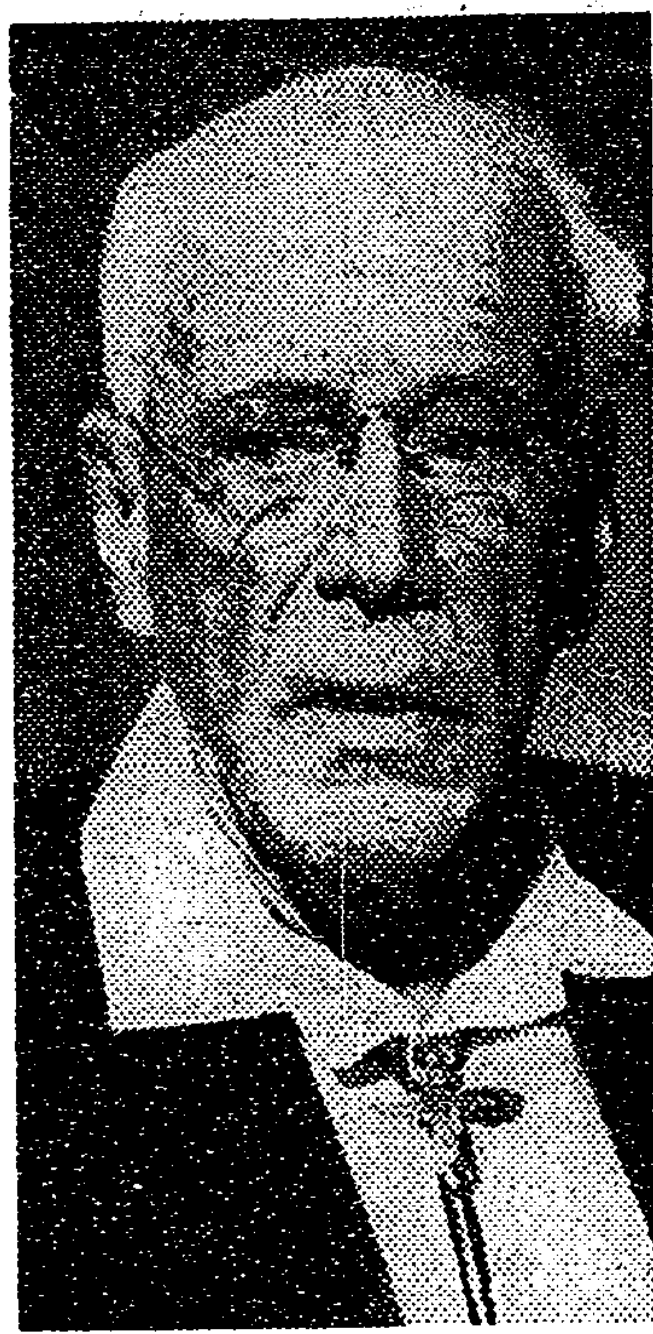
He made 102 broadcasts of two minutes to two hours in length.

Mr. Kaltenborn, who was able to translate Hitler, Daladier and Mussolini as they were heard on the short wave, gave the American public an instant summary of their talks and its meaning.

At the end of his stint, Mr. Kaltenborn was so groggy that when the Archbishop of Canterbury's prayer for peace came in over short wave, he analyzed that too.

A year and a half later he was hired away from C.B.S. by N.B.C.

Hans von Kaltenborn entered broadcasting in 1922 while a member of the staff of The Brooklyn Eagle. His first radio



Associated Press
H. V. Kaltenborn

assignment was a broadcast from the Statue of Liberty in which he summarized news for radio station WYCB.

In his early years on the air, since he used no notes, a pianist always stood by in case he ran out of words. The pianist never struck a chord.

Two years later he became a weekly commentator on the news for Station WEA. Because of increasing broadcasting activities he resigned from The Brooklyn Eagle in 1930.

He had joined the newspaper in 1902 and left in 1905 to work his way through Harvard College, from which he was graduated cum laude.

After that he served as tutor for the family of John Jacob Astor. In this capacity he cruised the Caribbean with young Vincent Astor on the Astor yacht, Nourmahal.

Once, during a storm, the yacht put into an obscure port and lay there for several days. In New York the craft was reported lost. The Eagle printed a glowing obituary of the young reporter and Harvard graduate who was believed to be dead. Partly on the strength of this premature obituary The Eagle hired Mr. Kaltenborn again.

He reported to the newspaper after a trip to Germany, where he married Baroness Olga von Nordenflycht in Berlin on Sept. 14, 1910.

As a correspondent for The Eagle and other newspapers he visited the Soviet Union and the Far East in 1926 and 1927.

He never stopped traveling and once noted that he had been to "practically every country, except those favored by Lowell Thomas—such as Tibet."

Three years later he joined the Columbia Broadcasting System as news editor. In 1932 he covered the Presidential campaigns and the national elections, assignments that he was to repeat every four years through 1956.

After he relinquished his regular broadcasting in 1955, he devoted more time to writing. He continued to be available, however, for special programs.

His achievements as a broadcaster included a description of a battle in the Spanish Civil War in 1937; a trip to the North Pole to "interview" Santa Claus and a visit with a Zulu tribe in Africa. He also interviewed many of the world's heads of state.

Mr. Kaltenborn's books included his autobiography, "Fifty Fabulous Years," published in 1950. He was a member of many organizations, including the Association of Radio News Analysts and the Radio Pioneers, both of which he helped found.

Mr. Kaltenborn was the son of Rudolph von Kaltenborn, a Wisconsin merchant, and Betty Wessels von Kaltenborn. He was born in Milwaukee on July 9, 1878.

During the Spanish-American War, he was a first sergeant with the Fourth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, serving in the United States.

His first newspaper job was as city editor of The Merrill (Wis.) Advocate. After leaving this position, he worked his way to Europe, visiting London, Paris and Berlin before obtaining his first post with The Eagle.

Mr. Kaltenborn's death comes within two months of the death of Edward R. Murrow, another noted World War II broadcaster.

In addition to his son, Mr. Kaltenborn is survived by his widow, Olga; a daughter, Mrs. Attmore Robinson, and seven grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held at noon on Friday at All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Avenue and 80th Street.