

ASMSG Journalist Eric Sevareid's career nearly ended in the Burmese jungle of the China-Burma-India Theater during World War II.

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Eric Sevareid was one of the most prominent journalists of the 20th century. He was born Arnold Eric Sevareid in Velda, North Dakota on November 26, 1912. He began working as a reporter for the Minnesota Star while a student at The University of Minnesota in 1931 and ended his career with CBS in 1977. He received many honors during his career including 3 Peabody Awards and 2 Emmy Awards. In 2008, he was one of five journalists honored by the U.S. Postal Service with a first class postage stamp.



After graduating from college, Mr. Sevareid continued his studies in Europe and became a reporter for the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune in 1938. In 1939 he was recruited by Edward R. Murrow to join CBS radio. He was the last correspondent to broadcast from Paris before the city fell to the Nazis. He returned to the CBS Washington Bureau in 1940 where he remained until 1943. Mr. Sevareid wanted to cover the war up close and this desire led him to the CBI Theater where his career nearly ended.

In August of 1943, Mr. Sevareid and 19 other passengers departed from India aboard an army C-46 for a flight over the Hump to China. Among the passengers were high-ranking Chinese army officers and John Paton Davies, an American diplomat with intimate knowledge of Allied plans for war in northern Burma. Somewhere over Burma the C-46 developed engine troubles and the pilot ordered everyone aboard to bail out before it crashed. None of the passengers had ever used a parachute before, and there was a great deal of hesitation about jumping out of the airplane. As the senior official aboard, Mr. Davies jumped first with his attaché case stuffed inside his shirt. The crew and passengers soon found themselves in the jungle behind Japanese lines. It was common knowledge that many downed fliers died in the Burmese jungle. Bodies were often found covered by crawling ants. Those that were lucky enough to survive were sometimes captured by the enemy.

Sevareid and the other men found themselves in a very hostile environment and it wasn't long before they were discovered by a tribe of Naga headhunters. The Naga tribesmen were not always friendly toward downed Allied airmen, and often turned them over to the Japanese in exchange for a bounty. Because of his diplomatic training, Mr. Davies was chosen to negotiate with the Nagas. With the help of the tribesmen, the group began a long and torturous hike that lasted nearly a month. During their ordeal, they suffered from the heat and rain and were never sure they would get out of the jungle mountains. They were plagued by thirst and hunger as they climbed the steep mountain slopes and trudged through thick jungle. Fear of Japanese patrols was their constant companion, and at one point, they were informed by the Nagas that an enemy patrol was not far away. They prepared to fight, but to their great relief, went undetected by the patrol.

Search aircraft eventually located the struggling group, and a mission was mounted to rescue them. Medical supplies, food equipment were assembled and a group of volunteers were recruited to parachute into the jungle to aid the downed men. The rescue mission was a great success and the men were led safely out of the jungle. The Air Force Air Rescue Service was later founded and modeled after this mission.

On a later flight to China, Eric Sevareid encountered trouble again. The C-87 he was riding in encountered dense fog over their intended airport in China and circled for an hour and a half. During this time, another aircraft circling with them ran out of gas and the crew had to bail out. A Lt. Colonel sitting next to Sevareid joked that if he had to bail out again, Eric's reputation would be ruined because CBS would think he was in a rut.

Eric Sevareid survived his experiences in World War II and went on to a successful career. He died on July 9, 1992 of stomach cancer. He was 79 years old.