



KNICKERBOCKER, HUBERT RENFRO

KNICKERBOCKER, HUBERT RENFRO (1898–1949). Hubert Renfro Knickerbocker, writer, was born in Yoakum, Texas, on January 31, 1898, the son of Rev. Hubert Delancey and Julia Catherine (Opdenweyer) Knickerbocker. After graduation from Southwestern University in 1917 he served briefly with the United States Army on the Mexican border and then delivered milk in Austin. In 1919 he went to Columbia University to study psychiatry. His career in journalism began in 1920, when he became a reporter for the Newark, New Jersey, *Morning Ledger*; in 1922 he reported for the New York *Evening Post* and the New York *Sun*, then returned to Texas as journalism department chairman at Southern Methodist University for the 1922–23 term. He went to Munich, Germany, with the intention of studying psychiatry, but historic events and his reporter's instinct intervened. He was a witness to the Beer Hall Putsch of Adolph Hitler on November 8–9, 1923. Shortly afterward he became assistant Berlin correspondent for the New York *Evening Post* and the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*. He became chief Berlin correspondent for these two newspapers in 1928 and continued in that capacity until 1941. His friends told the story that he secured his promotion by introducing his predecessor, Dorothy Thompson, to Sinclair Lewis and by promoting their subsequent romance and marriage. From 1925 to 1941 Knickerbocker was also a European correspondent for International News Service.

From 1923 to 1933 he based his activities in Berlin. Only from 1925 to 1927 did he divide his time between Berlin and Moscow, where he reported for INS. In Germany he published six books in German and wrote columns in two major German newspapers, the *Vossische Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*. He circulated in highest German political, social, and cultural circles. His critical views on Soviet economy and foreign affairs were generally well received in Germany, especially his *Der rote Handel lockt* (1931), which was published in English as *The Red Trade Menace* (1931). In 1931 Knickerbocker won the Pulitzer Prize for his articles describing and analyzing the Soviet Five-Year Plan. His strong opposition to Hitler and the Nazi movement, however, made his position difficult when Hitler became a major political figure in 1932. With the Nazi takeover in 1933, Knickerbocker was deported and forced to report on Germany from beyond the frontiers of the Third Reich.

In 1933 he made an extensive research tour of Europe, on which he interviewed hundreds of public figures and many heads of state, asking the question beginning to trouble most Europeans and some Americans: "Will war come to Europe?" In his book *Will War Come to Europe?* (1934) he forecast a general European war. He spent the rest of his life witnessing, reporting, and interpreting the events foreshadowing the [World War II](#). He covered the Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935–36, the Spanish Civil War in 1936–37, the early phases of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the *Anschluss* and the Czech crisis in 1938, the defeat of France in 1940, and the battle of Britain in 1940.

In March and April 1940 Knickerbocker devoted himself to the American lecture circuit, strongly urging American support of the war against the Axis powers. Repeatedly in late 1940 and in 1941 he toured the United States declaring that "we should go into war today." On April 24, 1941, he spoke

on the University of Texas campus, and on November 20, 1941, after a speech at Southern Methodist University, he exchanged heated remarks with students who opposed United States entry into the war. Knickerbocker summed up his views in the book *Is Tomorrow Hitler's?* (1941).

In 1941 he went to work for the Chicago *Sun* as its chief foreign correspondent in the Far East and South Pacific. In 1942 he followed Allied troops into North Africa, reporting for the *Sun* and acting as the official correspondent for the First Division of the United States Army. During the remainder of the war he reported from the European theater of military operations.

After the war Knickerbocker went to work for radio station WOR, Newark, New Jersey. He was on assignment with a team of journalists touring Southeast Asia when they were all killed in a plane crash near Bombay, India, on July 12, 1949. Knickerbocker was married first to Laura Patrick in 1918, and they had one son; his second marriage was to Agnes Schjoldager, and they had three daughters.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Dallas *Morning News*, July 13, 1949. New York *Times*, May 5, 1931, July 13, 1949. Vertical Files, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. *Who's Who in America*, 1948–49.

Citation

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The following, adapted from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, is the preferred citation for this article.

Edgar P. Sneed, "KNICKERBOCKER, HUBERT RENFRO," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fkn03>), accessed October 05, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.