

## This Day in History... June 17, 1914

### Birth of John Hersey

Journalist and writer John Hersey was born on June 17, 1914, in Tientsin, China.

Hersey's parents were working as Protestant missionaries for the YMCA when he was born. He spent his first ten years in China, learning to speak Chinese before English.

When Hersey's family returned to the US he attended public school and became the first Eagle Scout in his Boy Scout troop. Hersey went on to attend Yale where he lettered in football. He then went to graduate school at the University of Cambridge.

After leaving Cambridge, Hersey worked briefly as a private secretary and driver for author Sinclair Lewis in 1937. During that time he wrote a letter to *Time*, criticizing the magazine's poor quality. In response, they gave him a job. After two years he was sent to their Chongqing bureau.



Stamp from the 1942: Turning the Tide sheet

During World War II, Hersey traveled with US Army forces, reporting to *Time*, *Life*, and *The New Yorker* magazines. Hersey followed the Army during their invasion of Sicily and Italy and also covered the war in the Pacific. He also wrote for the *The New Yorker* about the heroics of John F. Kennedy when the Japanese sank his boat, PT109. During his time at the front, Hersey survived four airplane crashes and was commended by the secretary of the Navy for helping to evacuate wounded soldiers from Guadalcanal.

Hersey's most important work, *Hiroshima*, was a startling account of the effects of the atomic bomb on the lives of six survivors. After reading *Hiroshima*, the editor of *The New Yorker* turned the entire issue over to Hersey's story. Just weeks later, it was republished as a book.

In 1999, a group of respected New York University journalism professors and prominent journalists chose the 20th century's Top 100 Works of Journalism. Hersey's work *Hiroshima* was selected as number one.

Also a well-known novelist, many of Hersey's works were based on his experiences during WWII. His novel, *A Bell for Adano*, which tells the story of the American occupation of an Italian town, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1945. Hersey's *The Wall* is about the creation and destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Hersey died at his winter home in Key West Florida, on March 24, 1993. He received several honors during his lifetime – a school was named after him as well as a lecture series and a prize at Yale, given to a student whose journalism work reflects “the spirit and ideals of John Hersey: engagement with moral and social issues, responsible reportage and consciousness of craftsmanship.”



Hersey stamp from the 2008 American Journalists issue



This stamp was issued for JFK's 100th birthday.

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