

Profile of a Brokaw Generation Survivor

(With an intriguing FCC insider's view of the
greatest advanced telecommunications explosion in recent history)

Brokaw preamble:

FCC Commissioner-chairman Jim Quello survived the great depression, a desperate job search, five infantry amphibious landings in World War II rising in rank from lieutenant to Lt. Colonel and 23½ embattled but productive years at the FCC that actively generated the greatest advanced communications explosion in history. He served as a commissioner under six presidents, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton and as a one year interim chairman under Clinton.

In the process he survived the longest confirmation hearing in history for all regulatory agencies, a record-breaking eight days on and off the stand in 1974. Seventeen years later at his fourth confirmation hearing, he was lauded for his distinguished service and blessed with a 12½ minute hearing that was heralded as the shortest on record.

During his FCC service, he witnessed intriguing and often contentious behind the scenes interaction of the FCC, congress, the administration and the communications industries. As a member of the greatest generation, he was equipped to serve rather well. In his own words, "The FCC press release indicated I was the most honored SOB that ever graduated from the FCC with over 40 lifetime achievements or distinguished service awards, including both the Broadcasting-Cable and Radio Hall of Fame. I appreciated my "pre-posthumous" awards and ascribe them to advanced seniority (socially correct for old age). With age you become venerable and with venerability you are credited with exaggerated virtues you never had and I'm grateful."

Not bad for an 85 year old, born and raised in Laurium, Michigan at the peak of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

FORWARD

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Tom Brokaw's best selling book "The Greatest Generation" was so enthralling and personally ingratiating that I couldn't stop reading it. It was my first recent 20 hour non-stop reading experience.

As a not-so-great member, but nevertheless authentic survivor, of that greatest generation, I applauded the book's premise and was pleased that it made the best seller list.

I'll quote Mr. Brokaw's premise: "A generation of American citizen heroes and heroines who came of age during The Great Depression and the Second World War went on to build America. United not only by a common purpose but also by common values – duty, honor, economy, courage, service, love of family and country, above all, responsibility. A generation trained by the war, they went on to create interesting and useful lives and the America we live in today. It is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced."

I didn't make the book, but I like to believe my lifetime experiences in some unique way illustrate Tom Brokaw's premise.

The development of the durability, responsibility and mental resilience characteristic of the "greatest generation" started early for me.

I had to endure combative grade school experiences fighting against early nationality and religious prejudices – our family moved temporarily from the upper peninsula copper country with a thriving northern Italian community to a middle class Anglo-Saxon sector of Detroit.

Unfamiliar to many, Detroit in the early 1920s was a KKK infested stronghold. Blacks had not yet migrated to Detroit and the Klan venom was concentrated against Catholics, Jews and particularly against names ending in vowels. I was shocked when as a third grader three

bigger kids greeted me with “Are you the new dago shit on the block?” The kids also threatened to tar and feather my father and me.

With no Italians in sight, no Rocky Mariciano’s or Jake La Motla’s at that time, I formed an alliance with two Jewish kids, Benny and Hymie. Benny was a ferocious fighter, the best in grade school. Myself, I got beat-up 40% of the time but developed into a better than average fighter, motivated by fear, resentment and hatred. I never wanted to give the enemy the satisfaction of seeing me cry so I just sulked a lot. Unfortunately, Hymie the honor student, would stand by and cry whenever fighting erupted. We really needed additional physical inputs. (He probably grew up to be a brilliant lawyer defending guys like Benny and me.)

A book forward is not an appropriate place for biographical details. The more provocative and exciting ones will be treated in one of the chapters. However, I am impelled now, upfront, to add that I vividly remember two college fraternities that bluntly informed me “We don’t pledge Catholics” (pronounce “cat-ass-licks” circa 1932).

My hectic grade school and college experience followed by a desperate post college job search and then the shock of World War II infantry combat provided a hardy, 24 hour work oriented background for confronting contentious FCC issues and withstanding searching congressional oversights. It provided the grit to enable me to play an active role in telecommunications controversies and advancements of the past 24 years.

Overall, I had the privilege of serving 23-½ years as an FCC commissioner including one year as chairman and the last ten years as the unofficial “Dean” of the FCC.

As a member of the greatest generation, I was privileged in playing an active role in the most explosive communications advancement in recent history – and in the process privy to an

insider's view of the intriguing behind the scenes inter-action of the FCC, Congress and the administration.

Just look what happened to communications in America since April 1974, the date I started as a Federal Communications Commissioner.

In 1974 there was only one long distance company, AT&T, and now there are over 500! At that time there were only three commercial networks, ABC, CBS and NBC providing 96% of the nation's prime time programming.

They are now part of very competitive eight commercial networks – Fox; Warner Brothers-Time Warner; UPN-United Paramount, PAX, Paxson Communications, plus fast growing Hispanic networks. The networks compete with the quality programming of the PBS network and, even more significant, with dozens of attractive popular channels from cable and satellite.

Also, the Internet is the most significant and most explosive recent telecommunications development. It is a fast growing important program and advertising carrier. The former TV network domination of 95% prime time has shrunk to approximately 44%. With digitalization and compression even more competition is coming on stream.

Back in 1974 cable provided only a supplementary service with the primary mission of extending TV signals to unserved or under served markets. No one dreamed it would become the highly prized multi-faceted broad band wonder of today.

HDTV (high definition TV) and digital broadcasting had not been introduced and direct broadcast from satellite not yet developed. Digital TV is destined to be the superior TV and audio service of the future. However, it is presently in a typical Catch 22 – not enough attractive digital programming to create a demand for expensive sets and, conversely, not enough sets to

provide inducement for programming. At this writing, it seems it will be up to TV and cable programmers to lead the way and generate sales of digital set top boxes or other types of receivers.

Personal computers were just introduced and no one even predicted they would become the super all purpose communications device of today. Fax and Email didn't exist. Email and computers today are dramatically changing and expediting the way people communicate, live and work. U.S. News and World Report back in May 1999, mentioned that people were sending 2.2 billion Email messages a day compared with just 293 million pieces of first class mail. Now a third of the nation is sending messages over the Internet and "Email" is growing in popularity with a wide range of age groups. Regular mail cannot compare to the immediacy of Email, fax and Federal Express.

The Internet was unheard of in 1974 and it has become the most important communications development of this decade. It follows that the much sought after broad band high speed access was also unknown. The vital importance of Internet has been highlighted by its description as the ultimate microcosm of humanity. With more school kids and teenagers becoming computer and Internet literate, it possesses the potential of becoming a huge marketing and sales device of the future.

Back in 1974. There were no superstations, no CNN, ESPN, CNBC, Fox news, Nickelodeon, HBO, Showtime, A&E, Discovery, History or weather channel. Satellite had not developed as a competitor to cable. VCRs were virtually non-existent.

Mobile phones along with cable were in their infancy in 1974. Cellular lotteries had not started and cellular phones not developed.

At that time, Congress had no idea of granting the FCC Auction authority. Auction authority was granted during my chairmanship. It followed my repeatedly telling congressional leaders that cellular lotteries were a huge multi-million dollar government give-away and should be replaced with government auctions.

The auction process initiative and spectrum allocation were developed under the initial distinguished leadership of my FCC Chief of Staff, Dr. Brian Fontes, my chief FCC Counsel, Bob Corn-Revere, Bureau Chiefs Ralph Haller, Tom Stanley, Bob Pepper, Dave Siddal, and later Rudy Baca, my valued senior adviser on telecommunications advancements and others.

The auction process was already in place when Reed Hundt followed me as chairman. To his credit, he fully appreciated the huge potential of this exciting new services. He allotted it prime priority, fine tuned and expedited the process to bring it to a successful fruition.

In private, Reed did give me and my administration pioneering credit for establishing the PC5 auction process. Also Senator Fritz Hollings, ranking Democrat on the Communications Committee, at the annual PCIA dinner graciously acknowledged that I was the father of auction and PCS spectrum allocation at the FCC.

Auctions have again been established for awarding additional TV licenses. Also, the FCC approved draft rules for wireless communications licenses that will be auctioned after January 1, 2001. The rules will deal with location and number of licenses and also panel interference problems.

The explosive communications advancements during my 23½ years at the FCC served as a catalyst for even more dazzling developments – the important future world of computers and the Internet converging with phones, cable, television in a digital world.

Industries like Microsoft are described in the telecommunications trade press and emphasizing that digital set-top cable boxes will generate added interest for the personal computer by blending the P.C., the Internet and the television set into a huge living-room information and entertainment machine.

Basically, the digital set boxes being developed will deliver television telephone service and high-speed Internet access. Stated another more detailed way, the boxes will have high speed modems inside that enable subscribers to surf the Internet, receive Email, order video on demand, play games and initiate phone calls. In fact, set top boxes will serve as the gateway to the home.

At this writing it seems that advanced communications technology may be outstripping most consumers' affordability, needs or understanding.

The telecommunications industries and the FCC face the formidable challenge of making the oncoming convergence of services understandable and affordable to the general public.

In the process congress and the FCC must assure that TV the most influential and pervasive news and information medium, remains universally available to everyone regardless of affordability. Again, free over the air TV and radio service are essential to a democracy that relies on a well informed electorate for its form of government.

If all this new technology isn't enough there is a dynamic new development that has the potential of being the most explosive communications development of the year. It is almost too good to be true, but in this age of technological wonders nothing should be considered impossible.

I was impressed with the sincere presentation of the inventor and Rear Admiral Jim Carey who made an informal presentation in my office. They claimed that their company, "Media

Fusion” can turn today’s electronic networks already in every home into broadband conduits! They claim they can deliver virtually unlimited bandwidths to homes and businesses by transmitting premium quality voice, video and Internet data over the electrical power grid now in every building in the nation.

If this is proven true, it would have a cataclysmic effect on the communications marketplace and stock market. For example, AT&T and other carriers may discover they overpaid and overplanned for that network broad band connection directly to consumer. Media Fusion has a patented technology and claims confidential agreements with five electric utilities.

Everyone stay tuned.

Now back to the more mundane FCC foibles, trials and tribulations with broadcasting, cable, phone and wireless currently in general use.

In retrospect, my last three years at the FCC were the most hectic of my 23½ years surpassing even the year I was chairman and principal FCC spokesman at congressional oversight hearings.

Two factors were primarily responsible for the hectic activity of my last three years. First, the unprecedented advancements in telecommunications and the landmark communications legislation.

Second, and challenging and provocative to me, the over-regulatory, TV content intrusive policies of Chairman Reed Hundt.

The influential FCC still has its share of inner turmoil and I think the highly publicized arguments between Reed and I set the stage.

Our infighting was particularly intriguing because Reed, the brilliant technical lawyer and avant-garde computerization advocate, enjoyed the staunch support of a very influential friend,

Vice President Al Gore. I personally respected the VP's stalwart character but was troubled by his support and possible advocacy of the chairman's over regulatory thrusts and First Amendment intrusions, particularly in the TV, cable and Bell Company fields. It even led me to make an ungracious statement in one of my speeches that broadcasting, cable and Bell companies are being "Gored" to distraction by the Gore-Hundt over-regulatory thrusts. However, I understand that formidable presidential candidate Al Gore is now making amends. But the Gore-Hundt axis was formidable in that never in my 23½ years at the FCC did I experience the extent to which the executive branch tried to exert its influence on an independent agency created as an arm of congress. To mention a few – additional quantifiable public interest requirements for digital broadcasting; inflexible, government mandated children's programming; free time for political candidates; FCC broad proposals for regulating liquor advertising, counter advertising proposals; claiming that obtuse public interest "values" are inherently supported by the First Amendment, license renewal threatens against Fox News Corps; the forced FCC move to the portals, an undesirable location opposed by overwhelming majority of the FCC, lawyers, lobbyists and the press; assuming unilateral power of FCC Chairman as Chief Executive Officer regardless of majority vote of other commissioners; etc.

There were times when I thought implementing the obtuse public interest standard was merely a subterfuge for controlling TV, the most influential and pervasive news and information medium in the nation, or to gain public credit and favorable publicity for selective social engineering.

Specific issues of contention and heated arguments will be detailed in later chapters. Stay tuned for the intriguing facts and the accompanying turmoil..

I needed the durability and mental resilience characteristic of the depression resistant and battle hardened veterans of the Brokaw generation to cope with the aggressive approach and brilliantly creative assaults of “Attila the Hundt” as I and my staff humorously and sometimes in disbelieving awe labeled the chairman. However, in retrospect I owe Reed a vote of thanks for forcing me to stay young and mentally on guard. Also, his technological expertise assures him an important place in the advanced communication world of today and tomorrow.

Toward the end of our term we realized that legal regulatory arguments are really not a “blood” sport. We exchanged compliments. Reed graciously said “Jim, I was a very successful litigation attorney. I fought the best litigation attorneys in the nation and you were my most formidable opponent. I replied, “Reed, I marveled at your creative and forceful legalistics. If I’m ever in trouble I want you defending me rather than opposing me. Thanks for the experience and the valuable legal education.”

We all came to realize that government regulatory arguments can result in a clash of philosophy and ideas, but they are not a blood sport. The “blood” aspect can be readily neutralized by openness, humor and eventual civility.

In fact, I was practically over-prepped for FCC struggles or any type of government conflict by the real blood struggles of WWII.

FCC conflicts in no way compare with the intensity, hazards and shock of wartime combat. Assault landings I experienced would be grossly mischaracterized as “blood sports.”

The survivorship instinct attained in my early combat experience came in handy when I endured an all-time record breaking 8 day initial confirmation hearing in 1974 and also later for dealing with intensely argued controversial issues.

My army experience, aided later by my FCC records was also a handy factor in all four of my confirmation hearings. I was fortunate in having empathetic presidents and bi-partisan Senate communications committee leaders. Presidents: Jerry Ford, Ron Reagan, George Bush and even Bill Clinton. On the senate side, Senators John Pastore, Bob Griffin, Phil Hart, Dan Inoye, Fritz Hollings, Ted Stevens, Barry Goldwater, Conrad Burns, John Breaux, Jay Rockefeller, Chuck Robb, Don Riegle, Byron Dorgan, Jeff Bingaman, Lloyd Benson, Larry Pressler and Trent Lott.

The army experience will be chronicled in individual chapters replete with the actualities of violence, horror, pathos, humor and sex of war that may at times appear more fitting for gross melodramatic fiction than reality. An incidental note upfront: I didn't see my second son until he was 33 months old. He was born when I was on a ship getting ready to land in Casablanca in November, 1942. I returned home in June, 1945 after landing in Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and survived infantry assault crossings of the Rhine and Danube.

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