

AP chief McGowan records history as it happens

When Joe McGowan, Jr., BS '52, boarded a ship bound for Cuba in 1962, he probably didn't know how historic his role would be as the only American reporter allowed in that country.

McGowan was on assignment for the Associated Press (AP) when he accompanied a \$26 million "indemnification" shipment to Havana following the Cuban missile crisis. The ship he sailed on carried medical, food and agricultural supplies in exchange for Bay of Pigs prisoners.

Upon arriving in Havana, McGowan rushed down the plank when he spotted Cuban president Fidel Castro in the crowd, firing a rapid succession of questions of the communist leader. Castro agreed to pose for a photo on the ship, then he offered to serve as McGowan's impromptu host during the reporter's island assignment.

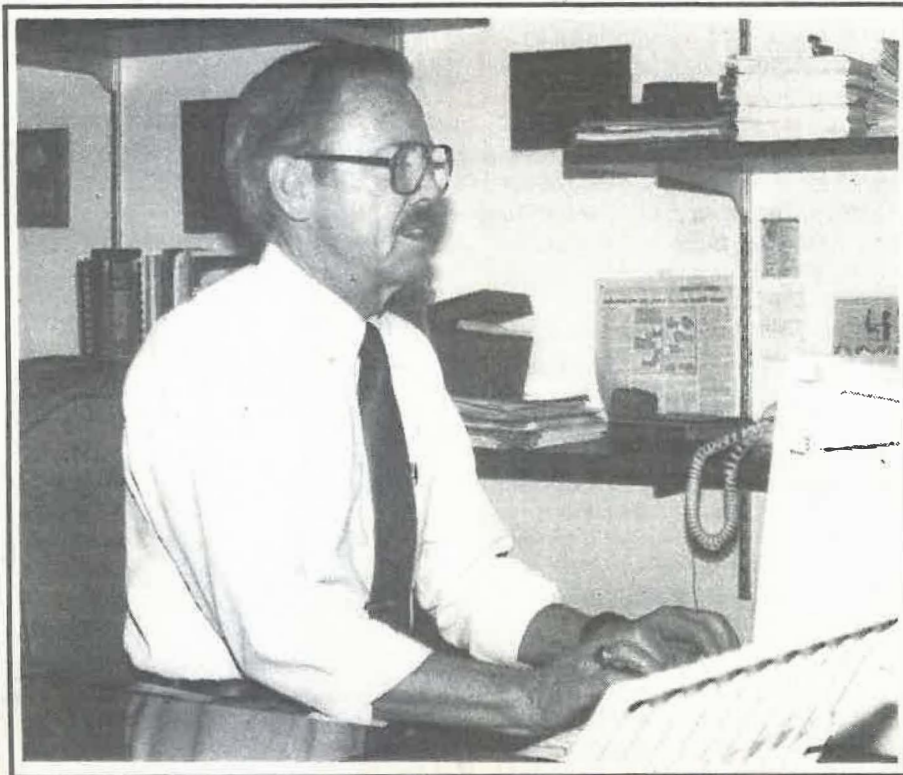
"It was the story of my life," McGowan says of the time he spent with one of the world's dominant political figures. The Cuba trip was a professional highlight, but it was hardly the only important story he would cover in coming years.

McGowan's AP assignments took him around the world to cover many historic events. He served in the Miami bureau, with assignments in Central America and the Caribbean. The Sheridan, Wyo., native ran the AP bureau in Lima, Peru, where he covered revolutions in Peru, Bolivia and Chile. McGowan was the first outside reporter in Bolivia when that country's president was killed. He also covered the May 31, 1970, earthquake in Peru that killed 75,000 people.

McGowan served in India from 1965-68 as chief of AP's bureau for that country, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon, Afghanistan and the Maldives Islands. He covered the 1965 India-Pakistan war and was present for the selection of Indira Gandhi as India's prime minister. In 1962, McGowan also travelled to the Bahamas with President John F. Kennedy to a summit meeting with British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan.

Today, McGowan heads AP's Colorado/Wyoming bureau, a position he's held since 1978. The job brings him back regularly to his home state, including visits to the University of Wyoming, where he frequently speaks to aspiring journalists about the field and his experiences in it.

McGowan never doubted he would end up in journalism. From the beginning, he drew professional inspiration from his father, newspaperman Joe McGowan, Sr. The elder McGowan was



Joe McGowan's love for the written word began early; and it has continued through a long, distinguished career with the Associated Press. Now chief of the Colorado/Wyoming AP bureau, McGowan travelled the globe in earlier assignments to witness history in the making, then report on it to the people at home. (Beck and AP photos)

a "real taskmaster" who loved the English language and demanded total objectivity. He conveyed those qualities to his son. Joe's mother, Eda, was born on the family homestead north of Sheridan.

Young Joe exhibited a "tremendous curiosity about language and words" even as a toddler, and he became an accomplished speller by the time he was 4 years old.

He also gained some notoriety as "the world's youngest typesetter." Early on, McGowan told his parents he wanted to learn how to set type. His father obliged and brought home a small press, some type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized printing apron his mother made him, 4 1/2-year-old Joe set and printed a copy for his father to edit each day. He would then make the corrections his father marked and run a clean copy.

McGowan gained national fame when his father brought home visiting colleagues late one night and roused the boy out of bed for a demonstration. The writers were so impressed they returned



home and reported that they had seen "the world's youngest typesetter."

McGowan's professional debut came at age 13, when he joined the Rock Springs (Wyo.) Daily Rocket-Miner staff as sports editor. Still too young for a typing course, McGowan coped with postgame deadlines by dictating his stories to a society reporter.

McGowan speaks of his years in Rock Springs with great fondness. Despite his young age, his Rocket-Miner coworkers accepted him without qualification. He also found great warmth in the city's people, whom he calls "some of the finest." Rock Springs was an ideal place to grow up, according to McGowan. With many nationalities calling Sweetwater County home, Rock Springs

was a true melting pot that exposed him to different cultures.

The McGowans eventually moved to Cheyenne, where 15-year-old Joe went to work for the Wyoming Eagle sports staff. He wrote for the paper for two years, until he graduated from high school and headed west to Laramie.

Making an Impact at UW

As soon as McGowan arrived at the University of Wyoming, he found a niche in campus journalistic circles. His first job was reporting on campus events for the university News Service office, under Ruth Ryan Kelly.

He also wrote a column for the Branding Iron student newspaper. That job taught him about campus politics when he questioned the positions and policies of George Duke Humphrey's administration. The president took exception to McGowan's comments, and he took away the young writer's News Service job. Humphrey also threatened to kick McGowan out of school, but a formidable friend — trustee Milward Simpson — intervened on his behalf. McGowan finished his college days unharassed.

Former UW history professor Gale McGee holds a special place in McGowan's memories. McGee helped bring history — a previously difficult subject — to life. In turn, McGowan wrote a strong BI column urging McGee to forego a run for Wyoming's lone congressional seat and try for the U.S. Senate two years later. McGee did that and credited McGowan's column as one factor in his decision. Teacher and student kept in touch over the years, meeting in India when McGowan worked for AP and Sen. McGee was on an official visit.

Education faculty member Joseph Dolan also made an impact on McGowan. Dolan led the University School (Prep) basketball team from athletic obscurity to a state championship, encouraging team members to give 125 percent.

Like most young men of this era, McGowan integrated military preparedness with college life. As a student, he participated in the Naval Reserve through college, commuting to Cheyenne weekly for training sessions. McGowan also completed the required two-year commitment to UW's Army Reserve Officers Training Corps program. After graduation, he served two years active duty from 1953-55 and

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 6)

was based in Milwaukee.

"What a place to spend the Korean War!" McGowan says, adding that he thoroughly enjoyed the hospitality shown him in Wisconsin.

He didn't have much time to rest upon discharge. When the Navy released him in 1955, McGowan hopped into his new car and drove through the night to Torrington, Wyo. The next morning, he assumed his new duties there as editor of the Torrington Telegram. Serving as

a one-man staff for the twice-weekly paper was a tough job. But McGowan found he fit into the rural community easily. (The pheasant hunting wasn't bad, either.) He worked there for 10 months, until he joined the Associated Press in its Cheyenne bureau.

McGowan's face is a familiar one to thousands of current and former journalism students. He often accepts invitations to speak about the profession to classes and student groups, sharing his experiences and philosophies about what it takes to succeed as a journalist. "If I can help them see the possibili-

ties, maybe they'll do the same — or even more," McGowan says.

UW recognized his accomplishments and dedication in 1982, when the Department of Journalism and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) presented him with the Ernest H. Linford Award of Merit. Other professional awards include: General Excellence Award from Rocky Mountain Collegiate Press Association, 1980; and Colorado University "Big Hat Award, 1983.

Professional leadership roles held by McGowan include: president, Foreign Correspondents Association, New

Delhi, India, 1965; president, Foreign Correspondents Association, Lima, Peru, 1969; vice president, Press Club of Boston, 1977-78; Press Club of Boston Board of Directors, 1976-78; and Denver Press Club Board of Directors, 1986-92. He also served as an officer for SPJ chapters in Indianapolis and Boston, as well as president of SPJ's Colorado Professional Chapter.

McGowan married his wife, Doris, a promotions manager for Coors, in 1982. He has two children, Joe Howard (28) and Colleen Diane (20), and stepdaughters Nancy, Diane and Laura Malicki.