



Fernand Auberjonois, in the newsroom at The Blade in 1960, reviews the visas he acquired during his many travels.

Fernand Auberjonois, 1910-2004

Tribute to a world-renowned correspondent

By JACK LESSENBERRY
SPECIAL TO THE BLADE

Fernand Auberjonois was more than a witness to some of the greatest events of the century; in the tradition of the nation's greatest foreign correspondents, he brought them home to generations of Toledo readers.

The Blade's longtime European correspondent, who died Friday near his retirement home in Ireland, lived a life which itself was the stuff of legend. The son of a famous impressionist painter and, later, the father of a distinguished actor (both named Rene), he emigrated to the United States in 1933, during the worst depths of the Great Depression.

Later, he would distinguish himself by volunteering for service in World War II, in which he won medals from the United States, France, and Poland for extraordinary heroics and intelligence work. He took part in the D-Day invasion and the liberation of Paris, and returned to play a key role in establishing the Voice of America's French-language service in the early years of the Cold War.

Mr. Auberjonois began his career as a foreign correspondent with The Blade, covering the internationally riveting Suez crisis immediately after joining the paper in 1956, and going on to report world events from his London base full time until his retirement in 1983, and as a contributor for many years more.

"What few today realize is that getting the story back to Toledo was often more difficult in his day than reporting the news itself," noted John Robinson Block, publisher and editor-in-chief of The Blade. "There was often nothing but a primitive Telex, and in many places not even that."

International phone calls were extremely expensive, and in many of the globe's trouble spots, hard or impossible to place. Mr. Auberjonois had to battle censors in Communist countries and elsewhere, and often endured primitive living conditions and food that was dubious — or nonexistent.

He trekked through Afghanistan and across poverty-stricken India and Pakistan, and dodged snipers and bullets in northern Ireland. Yet he always got the story — and delivered it in understated and elegantly written prose. Fernand Auberjonois brought Blade readers exclusive interviews, insights, and a depth of knowledge. He reported in an era when few papers had foreign correspondents. He received offers to report for larger news organizations for higher salaries — but always turned them down.

"I like Toledo and the Toledoans very much, and the only man I really wanted to work for was the man who became my good friend, Paul Block, a man who was serious about newspapers and understood the complexity of the world in a way very few Americans ever do," he said two years ago.

His own story finally ended a few weeks before his 94th birthday. But for hundreds of thousands of readers, it won't be soon forgotten.

Mr. Lessenberry, a columnist, writing coach, and ombudsman for The Blade, knew Mr. Auberjonois well since the early 1980s.



Mr. Auberjonois working at his desk in The Blade's London office in 1962.



Above: Mr. Auberjonois outside his exclusive club on the Strand, in London, 1966. Right: Mr. Auberjonois photographed East German soldiers constructing the first barricades of what would become the Berlin Wall on Sunday, Aug. 13, 1961.



Above: Mr. Auberjonois attained the rank of major in the U.S. Army by the end of World War II. Left: Mr. Auberjonois at The Blade building in 1978.

