

## Tony McKevlin

Eye-witnesses say Anthony John McKevlin (1902-1946) was the fastest two-fingered typist North Carolina journalism ever had.

As a sports reporter and then editor, Tony McKevlin was a marvel of other reporters when he sat in the press box at a football game, writing play-by-play description almost faster than the players could execute the plays. But McKevlin was destined to be for even greater contributions to the state's journalism than his speed at the portable.

The South Carolina native was sports editor of the Raleigh News & Observer for 14 years, beginning in 1927. And in an age when sports reporting was still a very partisan craft, with reporters often taking unabashed stands for one team or another, McKevlin insisted on evenness and accuracy in the copy. He standardized statistical coverage of sports. He set up his columns in a section that became the model for newspapers across the South. His coverage enhanced the standing of high school and collegiate sports.

In 1941, however, McKevlin's career took a new and significant turn. Upon the death of the much-respected Frank Smethurst (1891-1941), McKevlin was named managing editor of the newspaper just as the United States entered World War II.

With male reporters in short supply because of the war, McKevlin recruited women, still a rarity in Southern newsrooms, for many reportorial jobs never held by them previously.

As in his sports department, he insisted on high standards of accuracy and evenhandedness in copy, even in the political reporting of a newspaper that was a fierce editorial partisan of the Democratic Party.

Several women who trained under McKevlin and filled the wartime posts went on to major jobs in political and cultural reporting, notably Marjorie Hunter, who covered the North Carolina General Assembly and then went on to a distinguished career in the Washington bureau of the New York Times.

The war took a toll on McKevlin's health, as he worked for a time as both managing editor and city editor of a newspaper that was often shorthanded. He became blind in one eye. Mrs. McKevlin died just as he took the job.

A terminal illness was neglected until he collapsed and was taken to Rex Hospital in Raleigh, where for several weeks he continued the complex job of a newspaper publisher and editor by telephone from his bed. He died at 44, still practicing his craft.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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