

Lindsey Nelson



Lindsey Nelson was born in May of 1919 in Pulaski, TN. After high school, Nelson attended the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He got free room and board in exchange for tutoring the football players – under football coach Robert Neyland. Upon graduation from the University in 1941, Neyland was commissioned into the army for WWII as a second lieutenant with the 9th Infantry Division in Fort Bragg. During his tour in Europe, Nelson served as a public relations officer with his division. Nelson additionally served as a captain while serving in North Africa and Sicily. In 1945, Nelson was released from active duty and he returned home, marrying his wife Mickie Nelson. Over the next few years, Nelson worked as a journalist, including a stint as a sports reporter in Columbia, TN. By

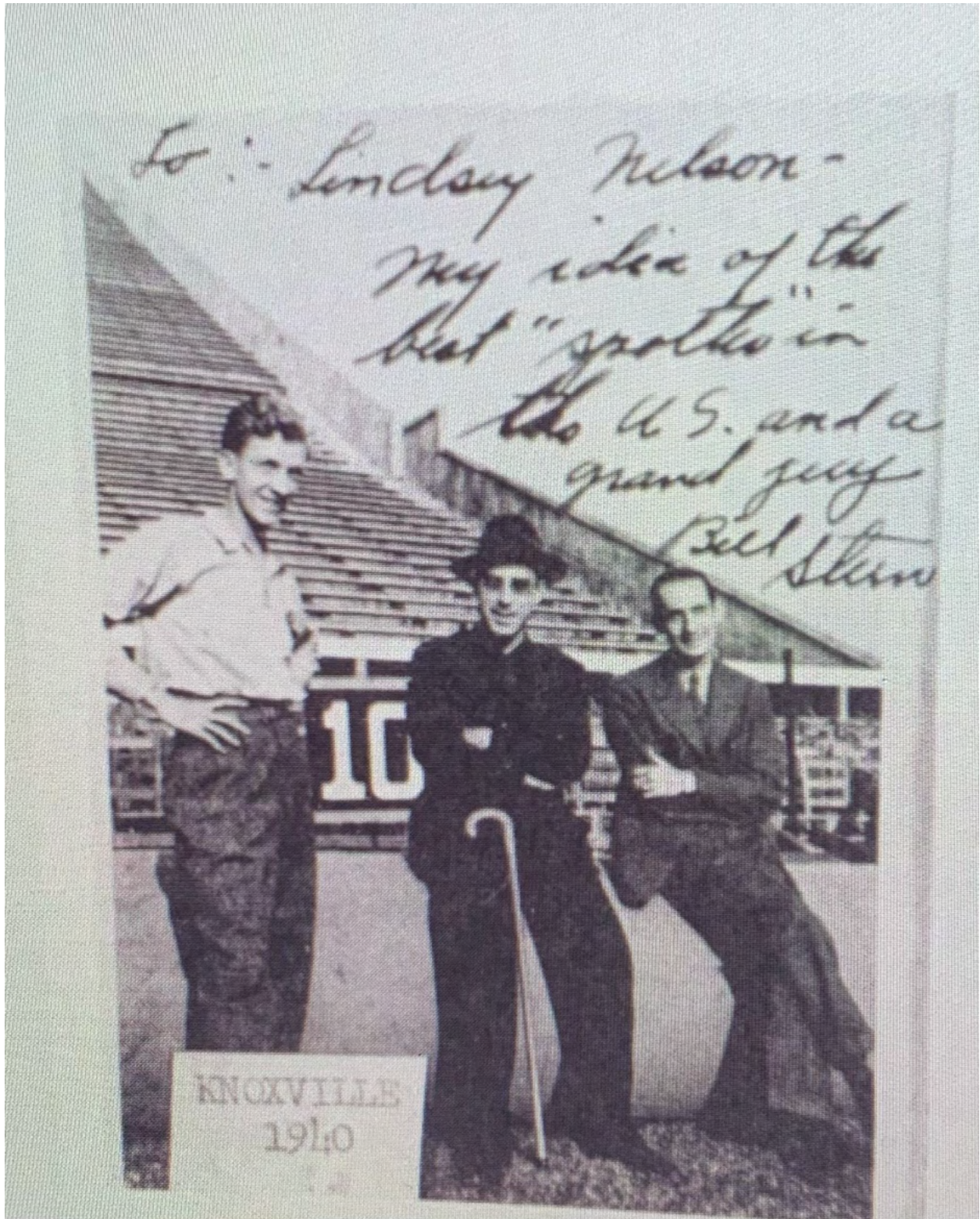
1962, Nelson was hired by the New York Mets, whom he broadcasted with for the next 17 years. Nelson also spent years commentating for the San Francisco Giants, several years' worth of NFL games, and many bowl games for College football teams. Moreover, Nelson received several honors, including being named National Sportscaster of the Year 5 times and being inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame. Nelson died on June 10, 1995 in Atlanta, Georgia; his remains are in Polk Memorial Garden in Columbia, Tennessee. To commemorate his memory, the UT baseball stadium is named after him.

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Early life and college enrollment

Lindsey Nelson grew up in Tennessee and from a very young age had a keen interest in sports. Perhaps due to his surroundings, Nelson quickly became enraptured in the sporting world. His older brother, James, was engaged in numerous sports growing up and Lindsey was always around him watching whenever possible. He would also read sports magazines and publications any chance he got, especially on long trips with his dad. As he got older, Lindsey played pickup baseball games with boys his age and would often sneak into high school football games after halftime when the ticket takers retired. These events all culminated in Nelson's passion for sports, which grew in tandem with his zeal for public speaking. After graduating from Columbia Central High School, Nelson enrolled in the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Moreover, Nelson carried his passion for sports with him to the University, as he attended all the football and basketball games that the school played. Moreover, Nelson would show up to football practices, which is where he met Robert Neyland and grew a relationship with him. After striking a deal with Robert Neyland, Nelson began tutoring football players in exchange for room and board. However, on condition of attending the University of Tennessee, Nelson also had to enroll in the ROTC. When Nelson graduated from the University in 1941, he had been instructed that he would be commissioned second lieutenant in the army.



Lindsey Nelson, far right, senior at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1940.

Military service

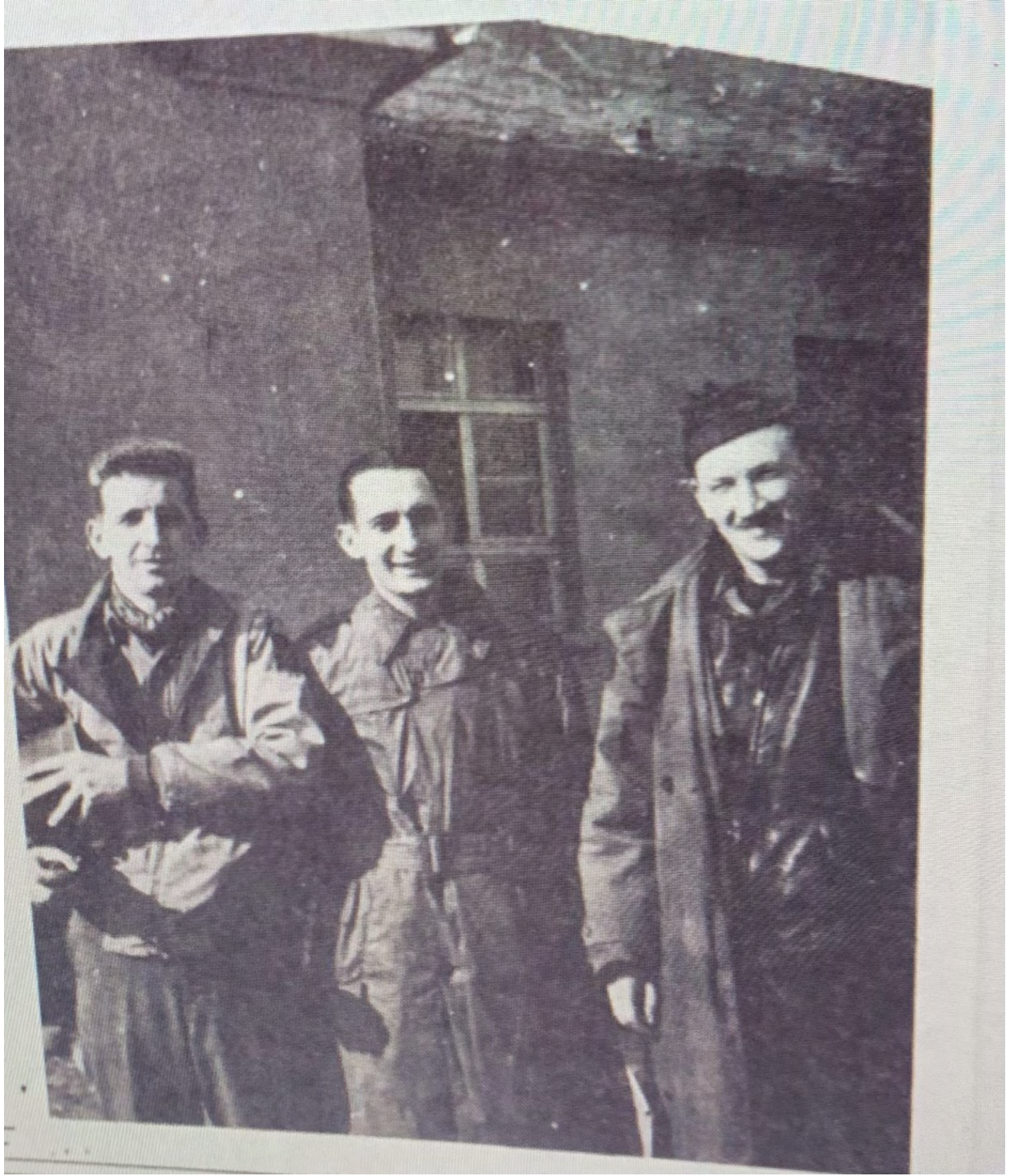
When Nelson was enlisted in the army, he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina under the 9th Infantry Division. After being assigned to Company C of the 47th Infantry Regiment, Nelson was soon summoned by his regimental commander and informed that a new First Army directive dictated that each regiment had to have a public-relations officer. Instead of being a platoon leader, Nelson was then offered the position on the spot.

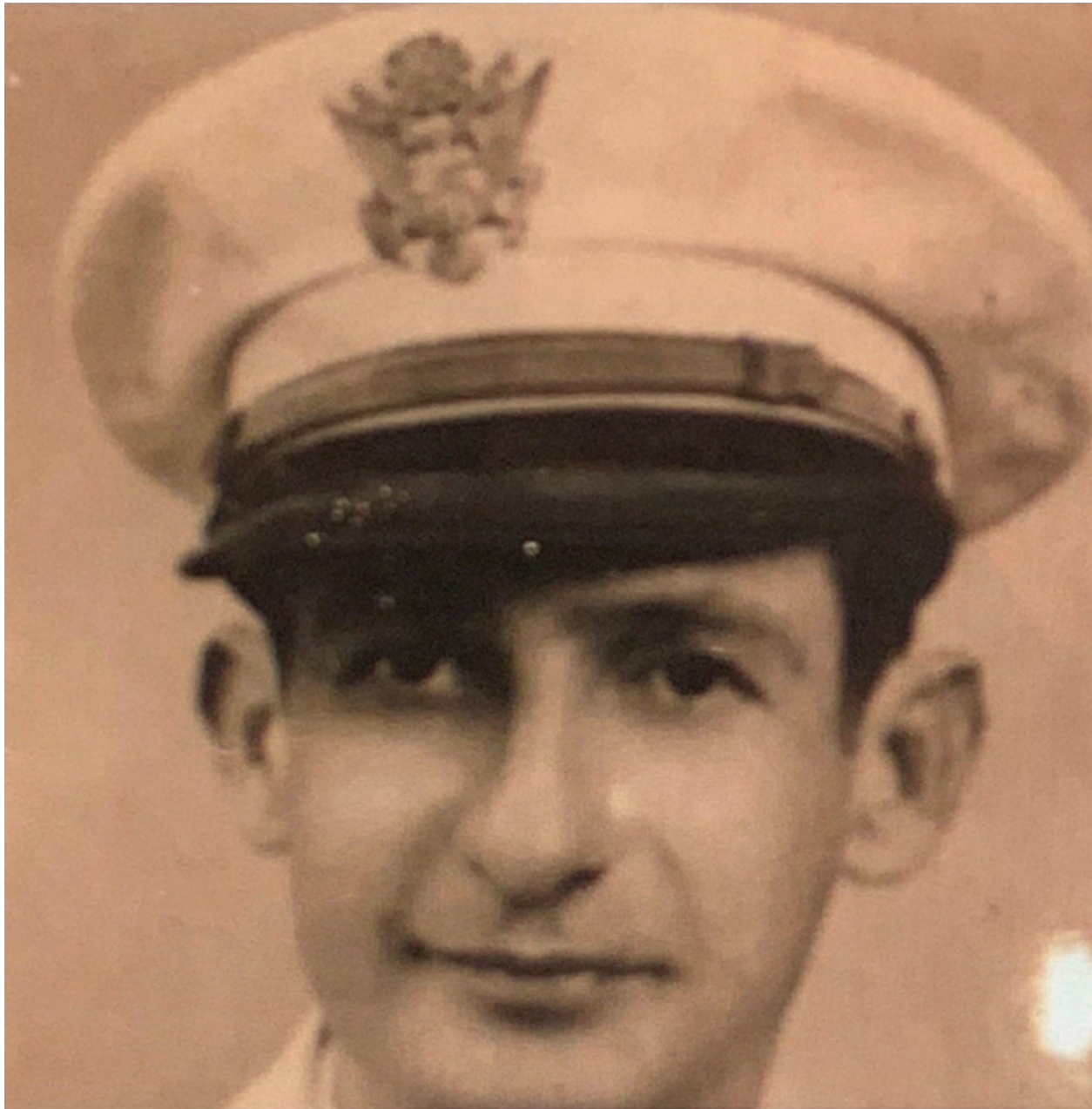
Soon after, Nelson received orders transferring him to 9th division headquarters, thus now requiring Nelson to split his time as public-relations officer between posts in the United States and overseas. In fall 1942, Nelson received a new station - in North Africa. After campaigns in North Africa and Sicily had concluded for Nelson, he was repositioned in Winchester, England to help out in Europe.

Soon after the events of D-Day in Normandy, Nelson was transferred to Austria. During his time here, which extended through the conclusion of WWII, Nelson was involved with an army baseball team, which was managed under Harry "The Hat" Walker, a Major League Baseball player who had joined the war effort.

As hostilities ceased, Nelson finished his last public-relations assignment in Austria, which was to oversee the surrender of Pierre Laval, a French Premier and conspirator with Adolf Hitler. Once his surrender was complete and Nelson's task accomplished, he began the "feaful transition" back to a civilian.

After bouncing around the United States after he returned home, Nelson settled back in his home state of Tennessee. Soon after, he married Mickie Lambert, whom he had dated in high school.







Career as a sportscaster

At his wife Mickie's request, Nelson began looking for a job. After some struggles to gain a foothold in sports reporting in Columbia, Nelson then moved further east in Tennessee to his college town, Knoxville. Here, he got picked up as the play-by-play announcer for Tennessee football games. After one season, Nelson was approached by Robert Neyland, who had also returned to the University from the war effort, and tasked him with forming a football network that could reach throughout Tennessee. Nelson set up the broadcast soon after and named it the Vol Network, which still exists today.

In the years that followed, Nelson would gain wider exposure, especially after being picked up as an announcer for the Liberty radio network and then being brought on to NBC by Tom Gallery. After impressing Gallery, Nelson was brought onto the rotation more permanently with NBC sports in New York City. Nelson also handled the NCAA college football broadcasts that occurred from 1954 to 1962 with NBC. Nelson also was doing the game of the week in numerous sports, such as baseball, football, and basketball.

1962 marked a big year for Nelson, with multiple career development opportunities arising. Not only did Nelson broadcast the Cotton Bowl, but he also signed on to become the official sportcaster for the New York Mets. This new position would serve to underline a large chunk of his career, as Nelson worked as the Mets' announcer for seventeen seasons. This was also a large transition for Nelson because it marked his move from network broadcasting into local radio and television. Sporting his unique patterned suits, Nelson became the flamboyant voice of the Mets for much of his career.

In 1967, Nelson also signed on for a thirteen year stint broadcasting the Notre Dame college football games. A particular highlight in his career as Mets' broadcaster was when they won the World Series in 1969. Five years after the passing of his wife, Mickie, Nelson left the Mets and signed on to a three year contract with the San Francisco Giants.

When that contract expired, Nelson retired from his career as a sportscaster and returned to Knoxville. Though occasionally teaching communications courses, Nelson was more strictly dedicated to making sure he supported Tennessee athletics by donating and attending their games.





Accolades, honors, and memory

In life and death, Nelson was the recipient of numerous accolades, including inductions into numerous Halls of Fame such as the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association (1979), the New York Mets (1984), and the ROTC at his alma mater, the University of Tennessee (2020).

Nelson also received many awards in his field. For instance, the Baseball Hall of Fame awarded Nelson the Ford C. Frick Award for sports broadcasting in 1988. Nelson was also granted the Tuss McLaughry Service Award for broadcasting in 1988 and won an Emmy award in 1991 for outstanding achievement in the broadcasting field.

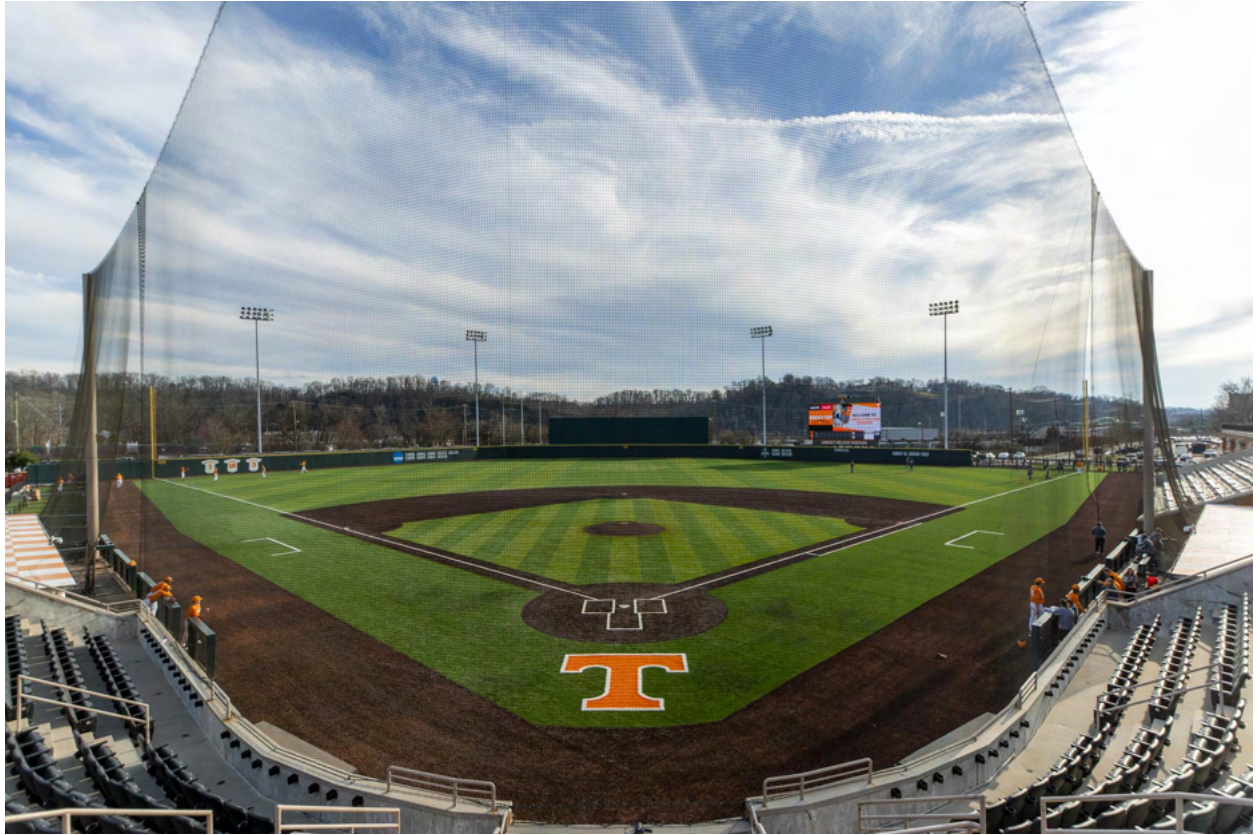
Many critics also recognized Nelson as the top sportscaster in polls, including in 1959 when he was named top sportscaster in radio and television. Two awards he regarded as “the best recognition he could get.”

The University of Tennessee’s baseball stadium, Lindsey Nelson Stadium, is named in honor of Nelson.



At the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters annual awards dinner, Salisbury, North Carolina, 1962. The Lindsey Nelsons and the Red Smiths dance the "winners waltz." For the third consecutive year, Red and I had been named the top sportswriter and sportscaster in the country by a vote of our contemporaries. When we started onto the floor, Red said, "You go first this year, and I'll go first next year."





Lindsey Nelson Stadium

Additional photos

In 1962, I visited with Willie Mays at the batting cage. When young Met outfielders would misplay fly balls and blame it on the errant winds, Manager Stengel would say: "It don't bother Mays none." Nothing bothered Mays. He was the best baseball player I ever saw. BILL MARK





With, left to right, Mickie, Sharon, and Nancy at the Polo Grounds, 1963. For us, the Mets were a "family affair." We bought a season's box of four seats, and we were all there most days. LOUIS REQUENA





MR. J. B. HILL
1943





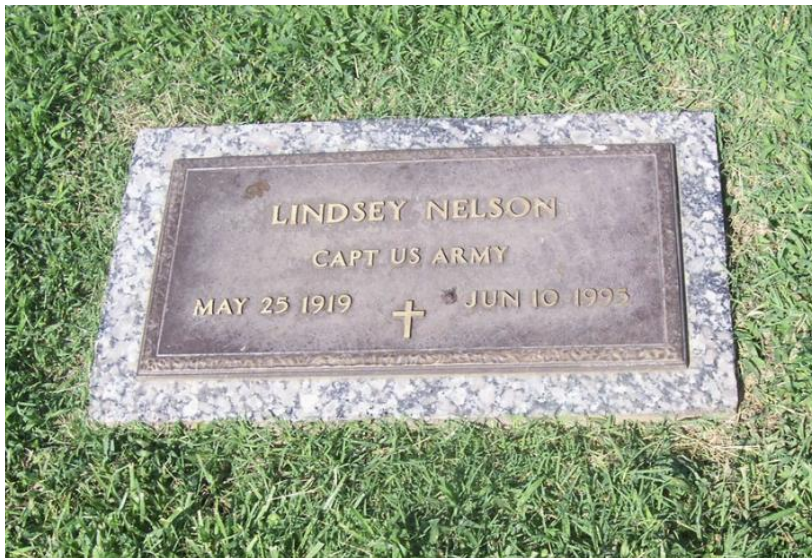
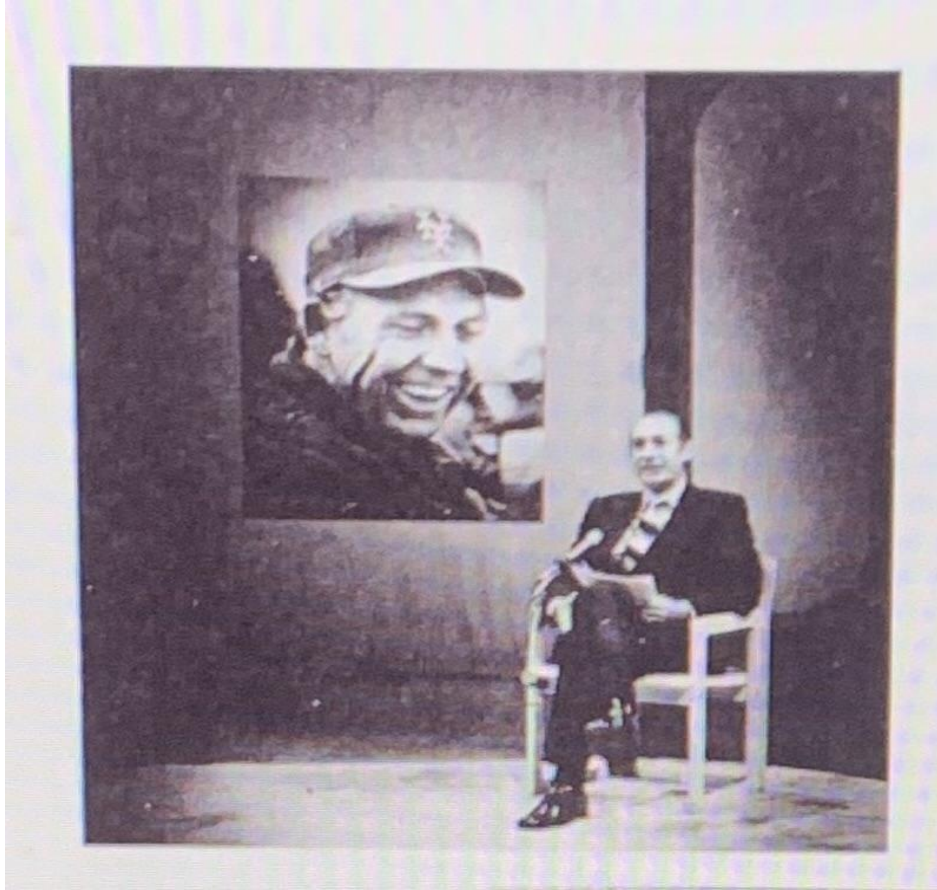
Shea Stadium, 1973. With some teams, the newspapermen and the announcers don't get along very well. We, fortunately, never had that problem. Left to right: announcer Ralph Kiner; writer Jack Lang of the *New York Daily News*, writer Joe Durso of *The New York Times*; me, I'm an announcer; announcer Bob Murphy; and writer Dick Young, then of the *Daily News*, now of the *Post*.



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Speech to East Tennessee Historical Society

Center for Tennesseans and War

Partial Transcript of a Speech from

LINDSEY NELSON

to the East Tennessee Historical Society

Captain, U.S. Army, World War II.

Full interview located at “Nelson,
Lindsey: WWII Oral History - Part 1.”
University of Tennessee Libraries *Digital
Collections*,

<https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/wwiioh%3A2260>

Speech Transcription

[16:56]

Nelson: ...my remarks from here forward will be directed to the war in North Africa and Europe since that is the war in which I was personally engaged. And one should always remember that the most important part of any war is the part that you yourself are in. [pauses] I used to listen to the nine o'clock news on the BBC in London during the war years and they would detail a bombing raid on Berlin, so many hundreds of thousands of pounds of bombs had been dropped. They'd finish up saying, "...and only one of our aircraft is missing." My thought was always, 'Well, that's alright, but if you happen to be in *that* aircraft it's the most important thing that happened in this war.'

[Nelson is interrupted by brief laughter from audience.] [17:41]

Nelson: I spent the entire war as a staff officer; I was not a combat soldier and I always like to get that disclaimer in. I was with the 9th Infantry Division, which was a regular army division. I was ordered right from school here in Knoxville (Tennessee) to the 9th Infantry Division and I stayed with it until the end of the war. [Stammers] I beg your indulgence as I seem to recall that a young fella coming over to Knoxville from his home town in Columbia, Tennessee and graduating just in time to get in the Army—getting into a big war, is gonna have some unlikely experiences and meet some very unlikely people.

[break in recording][18:14]

Nelson: —in the 9th Division in Fort Bragg, North Carolina in the summer of 1941. Commanding general was General Jacob L. Devers. "Jakie" Devers would be commanding General of the European Theater before Eisenhower, Commanding General of the Sixth Army Group, Commanding General of all Army

ground forces. The regimental commander to whom I reported at the 47th Infantry was Alexander M. “Sandy” Patch. General Patch would become Commanding General of the 7th United States Army and the assault commander on the invasion of southern France. Battalion Commander of the 34th Field Artillery was William C. Westmoreland, who would be a U.S. Field Commander in Vietnam and U.S. Army Chief of Staff as a four star General. I was in the presence of Franklin Roosevelt as he reviewed the United States troops in Morocco following the Casablanca conference in 1943. I was in charge of war correspondence as they covered the visit of General Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill in southern England shortly before D-Day in 1944. As the 9th Division trained to be a part of the United States land offensive in the war, that in North Africa, great many distinguished visitors came from Washington to Fort Bragg for tourist inspection. I was assigned as a conducting officer, which means that I was a guide for the distinguished visitors, showing them the various stages of training around the post.

[End of Transcript]

To access Lindsey Nelson’s entire speech, please visit

“Nelson, Lindsey: WWII Oral History - Part 1.” University of Tennessee Libraries *Digital Collections*, <https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/wwiioh%3A2260>

and

“Nelson, Lindsey: WWII Oral History - Part 2.” University of Tennessee Libraries Digital Collections, <https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/wwiioh%3A2261>

Credit and Acknowledgement

All information and material used in this work were courtesy of the University of Tennessee.

1. The photographs and information on Lindsey Nelson came from his autobiographical work, *Hello Everybody, I'm Lindsey Nelson*, accessed in The University of Tennessee Libraries Special Collections

Nelson, Lindsey, *Hello Everybody, I'm Lindsey Nelson* in University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Betsey B. Creekmore Special Collections and University Archives.

2. The truncated transcription of Lindsey Nelson's speech to the East Tennessee Historical Society was written based on the recording captured as part of the University of Tennessee Libraries *Digital Collections: WWII Oral Histories*.

"Nelson, Lindsey: WWII Oral History - Part 1." University of Tennessee Libraries *Digital Collections*, <https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/wwiioh%3A2260>