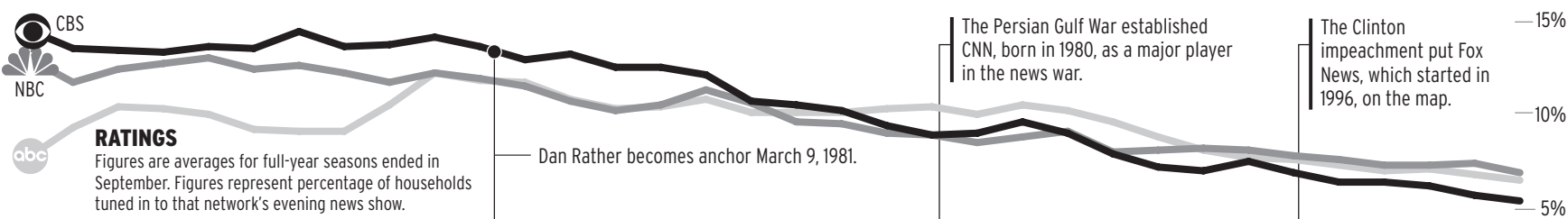


Focus | IN DEPTH

Dan Rather and the news war

Dan Rather will leave CBS News on March 9 – almost a quarter of a century after succeeding Walter Cronkite in 1981. CBS Evening News ranks third in ratings behind NBC and ABC. Here is a look at the main networks' evening news ratings, their main anchors over time and a look at Rather's career at a glance.



MAIN ANCHORS

CBS WALTER CRONKITE 1962-1981	DAN RATHER 1981-2005
NBC DAVID BRINKLEY	JOHN CHANCELLOR
ABC VARIOUS, FRANK REYNOLDS	HARRY REASONER
	VARIOUS
	PETER JENNINGS
	TOM BROKAW

November 1963 | During his reporting of the shooting of President Kennedy, Rather becomes the first correspondent (accidentally, according to his autobiography) to report that Kennedy had been killed.

March 1974 | After standing to ask a question of President Nixon at a National Association of Broadcasters convention in Houston, Nixon asks, "Are you running for something?" In what many saw as an insulting move toward the president, Rather responds with "No, sir, Mr. President. Are you?"

March 1981 | Rather takes over hosting of the CBS Evening News from Walter Cronkite, who had anchored the program since 1961.

October 1986 | William Tager, who believed the news media were beaming signals into his head, mugs Rather in Manhattan and repeatedly asks, "Kenneth, what is the frequency?" The event inspires an R.E.M. song in 1993.

September 1987 | When a tennis match threatened to cut into his newscast, Rather walks off the set, leaving the network with 6 minutes of dead air before he could be located. Walter Cronkite later tells a reporter, "I would have fired him. There's no excuse for it."

September 2000 | Greg Sheffield and Matthew W. Sheffield create RatherBiased.com, a Web site alleging a "partisan, ideological bent" in Rather's reporting.

September 2004 | CBS News and Rather report on a series of documents regarding the Air National Guard records of President George W. Bush. The authenticity of the documents is questioned, and Rather apologizes for not being able to prove their source was legitimate.

Sources: The Associated Press, The New York Times, CBS, ABC, NBC

Michael Doss and Larry Nista / The Register

End of an era in broadcast

Dan Rather's coming retirement under a cloud is a sign of the demise of larger than life news anchors.

By DAVID BAUDER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK
Dan Rather's last broadcast as anchor of "CBS Evening News" will be March 9, the 24th anniversary of when he assumed the position from Walter Cronkite. It signals an end to an era of titan TV news anchors and a tenure by Rather that will be clouded by a recent questionable report on President George W. Bush's National Guard service.

After some bumps that included walking off a broadcast, an eyebrow-raising mugging and attracting ridicule by briefly signing off his newscast with the word "courage," it was a September "60 Minutes Wednesday" story about Bush's service – based on allegedly forged documents – that forced Rather to fight for his professional life.

Independent investigators are looking into what went wrong with the story, and their report is considered imminent.

John Roberts and Scott Pelley are frequently mentioned as in-house candidates to succeed him, but CBS News – a distant third in evening ratings behind NBC and ABC – also will look elsewhere.

Rather replaced broadcast legend Cronkite in 1981 and lasted even longer than his predecessor's 19 years. Rather, Tom Brokaw of NBC and Peter Jennings of ABC competed at the top ranks of network news for more than two decades as the world – and the world of news – changed around them. Brokaw leaves NBC's "Nightly News" next week.

Rather, 73, whose Texas roots were evident in his



FRED CONRAD, THE NEW YORK TIMES

DEPARTING: Dan Rather sits in his office during an interview in New York in July. He took over for Walter Cronkite in 1981.

folksy aphorisms, joined CBS News in 1962 and covered President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas a year later. He became a White House reporter in the Nixon administration.

His career was dogged by incidents that attested to a tightly wound persona. In 1987, he walked off the evening news set in anger after CBS delayed the broadcast for a tennis match; his disappearance left the network with dead air for six minutes. Four months later, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, angered by a line of questioning

from Rather, asked if he'd like to have his career judged by the walk-off.

Brokaw said he was "pleased for Dan that he's come to a conclusion about his own life, as I have in my case."

"Dan and I have known each other competitively and personally for a long, long time," Brokaw said. "Occasionally on the competitive side, it would be tiny bumps in the road, but when you think of all that we've been through, we have a pretty strong relationship. So I wish him well."

About his successor, Rather said, "I hope it'll be somebody

from the inside. But whoever it is will have my complete, unadulterated support and encouragement. Probably the best way I can help is to stay out of the way."

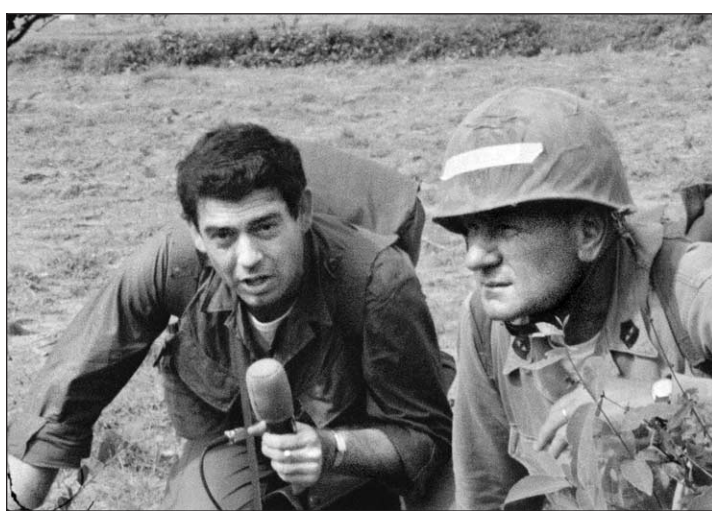
The transition is likely to raise renewed questions about the long-term viability of evening news broadcasts, which have been suffering from declining ratings for years in a world of instant Internet and cable news.

Rather has long been a target of critics who accused him of bias, and there's even a Web site devoted to that issue. The National Guard story sent

those critics into overdrive. Rather's announcement Tuesday led one Republican congressman from Pennsylvania to issue a statement saying, in effect, good riddance.

"Dan Rather has been a legend in media for more than a quarter-century to many people around the world, but not to me," Rep. Bill Shuster said. "For the entirety of his career, Rather has allowed his liberal bias to shape the news rather than report it."

CBS thought it had an important scoop with the National Guard story, reporting that Bush had received prefer-



CBS BROADCASTING

WAR COVERAGE: Dan Rather reported from Vietnam in 1965 and 1966.

"It'll be harder for there to be titans of the industry. There are so many more choices. People like Jon Stewart have emerged, doing a cynical take on the news. The days of the 20-25 (audience) share are gone."

PETE WEITZNER
PROFESSOR OF BROADCAST JOURNALISM, CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY, REACTING TO RATHER'S DEPARTURE



CBS

ANCHOR: Dan Rather announces on air Tuesday that he will step down as anchor in March.

ential treatment to get into the Guard and stay in the United States during the Vietnam War and had failed to satisfy the requirements of his service.

But critics immediately questioned the story, saying a document purportedly written by Bush's late squadron leader appeared to be a fake. Rather apologized before CBS appointed the investigative panel.

"We made a mistake in judgment," he said at the time, "and for that I am sorry."

While the National Guard incident clearly hurt Rather in his final months on the job, CBS News President Andrew Heyward said he hoped viewers would understand Rather's place in broadcast history.

"He's covered every story on a national basis since the Kennedy assassination, and anybody who's looked at his legacy in a fair manner is going to see the larger context," Heyward said.

Yet ratings "are always going to be the dominant thing on TV," said Pete Weitzner, professor of broadcast journalism at Chapman University, who noted that Rather's ratings declined after the National Guard story.

"My bet would be, it accelerated his departure," Weitzner said. "His reaction to it has hardly been a mea culpa."

Register staff writer Richard Chang contributed to this story.

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