

Nearing 90, Walter Cronkite is still telling it like it is



BARB GUY

The voice and familiar speech cadence of Walter Cronkite tether me to my childhood. The sound of him speaking - friendly, melodious, anchored in worldly gravitas - instantly evokes the wise authority figure who gave America the news every night for three decades.

Cronkite is of what Tom Brokaw calls our greatest generation, folks born in the early part of the 20th century, people who came of age during the Great Depression and were by chance young adults at the time of World War II.

Cronkite has been present at the making of more history than most others living today. As a war correspondent during World War II, he was on the beach at Normandy and later he covered the Nuremberg trials.

After the war, he established press bureaus all over Europe and then came home and settled down to deliver "The CBS Evening News," serving as our daily companion through some of this country's most joyous and heartbreaking moments, imparting the news to the soldiers who came home from World War II and soon to the children they produced. Then he reported on the next war, Korea, and the children's war, Vietnam.

Walter Cronkite is still vibrant a few weeks shy of his 90th birthday. He was born during World War I but his voice marches out of my computer's speakers confident and strong. He says, "This nation of ours is embroiled in what threatens to be an interminable war on terrorism. It is clear that military force and our policy of pre-emption are alone insufficient to make us safe."

I ran into Uncle Walter in cyberspace when researching a growing groundswell, the idea (200 years old and slowly building) to create a Cabinet-level department in the United States executive branch, the Department of Peace.

The idea, to borrow from Einstein, is to prepare for peace rather than preparing for war. The thinking is that maybe in addition to military academies (or instead) there should be peace

academies. Maybe there should be at least one voice in the president's ear advocating for peace and restraint. Maybe we would look better to the world community (and indeed be better) if we concentrated on learning how to be at peace with our neighbors.

Perhaps a U.S. Department of Peace could cure some Americans' peculiar dyslexia that reads peace as appeasement and pacifism as passive-ism. Possibly then people could notice that those who stand for peace are courageous, strong, patriotic and principled.

Surely that's how we see Walter Cronkite. He's no wimp, no dreamy hippie. He trod the bloody sand at Normandy, after all, and he's on the Department of Peace bandwagon. The voice of Walter Cronkite inside my computer dares to articulate his vision for the Department of Peace. He says, "I can even see all of our consulates [and] embassies abroad, flying next to Old Glory the peace flag, reminding all that we have a powerful branch of government dedicated solely to achieving and perpetuating peace for all people."

I can see it, too. It's hard to imagine the Department of Peace failing any more spectacularly than the Bush administration's war in Iraq and so-called war on

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terror have, and at least we'd be perceived as having our hearts in the right place for a change.

We have another chance to put our hearts in the right place this week when the United States, along with all the world's other countries, is invited to participate in a global cease-fire on the International Day of Peace, Thursday.

This is the 24th annual International Day of Peace, a day created by United Nations resolution, and each year there's a call for a 24-hour worldwide cease-fire. Sure, the cease-fire part hasn't happened yet, but I don't want to live in a world where no one bothers to try.

Maybe I'm like a Cubs fan when it comes to peace. This could be our year. I have to believe it's possible. I want to walk the halls of the U.S. Department of Peace, I want my tax dollars to go there and I want wise elders like Walter Cronkite to run the place.

That's the way it is.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.