

Richard Valeriani, Veteran NBC News Correspondent, Dies at 85

Richard Valeriani in 1985. The son of a laborer in Camden, N.J., he went to Yale on a full scholarship and spent more than three decades as a television journalist. Credit: Al Levine/NBC News/NBCU Photo Bank, via Getty Images

Richard Valeriani, an NBC News correspondent who was a familiar presence on television for more than three decades, covering events like the civil rights movement, John F. Kennedy's assassination and Henry A. Kissinger's globe-trotting diplomatic missions, died on Monday at his home in Manhattan. He was 85.

His wife of 38 years, Kathie Berlin, said the cause was chronic heart failure.

Mr. Valeriani joined NBC in the early 1960s. He was hired away from The Associated Press while covering the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, where his proficiency in speaking Spanish with a Cuban accent proved vital.

He went on to become a correspondent for "NBC Nightly News" and, for a few years in the 1970s, a co-anchor of "Today" from Washington.

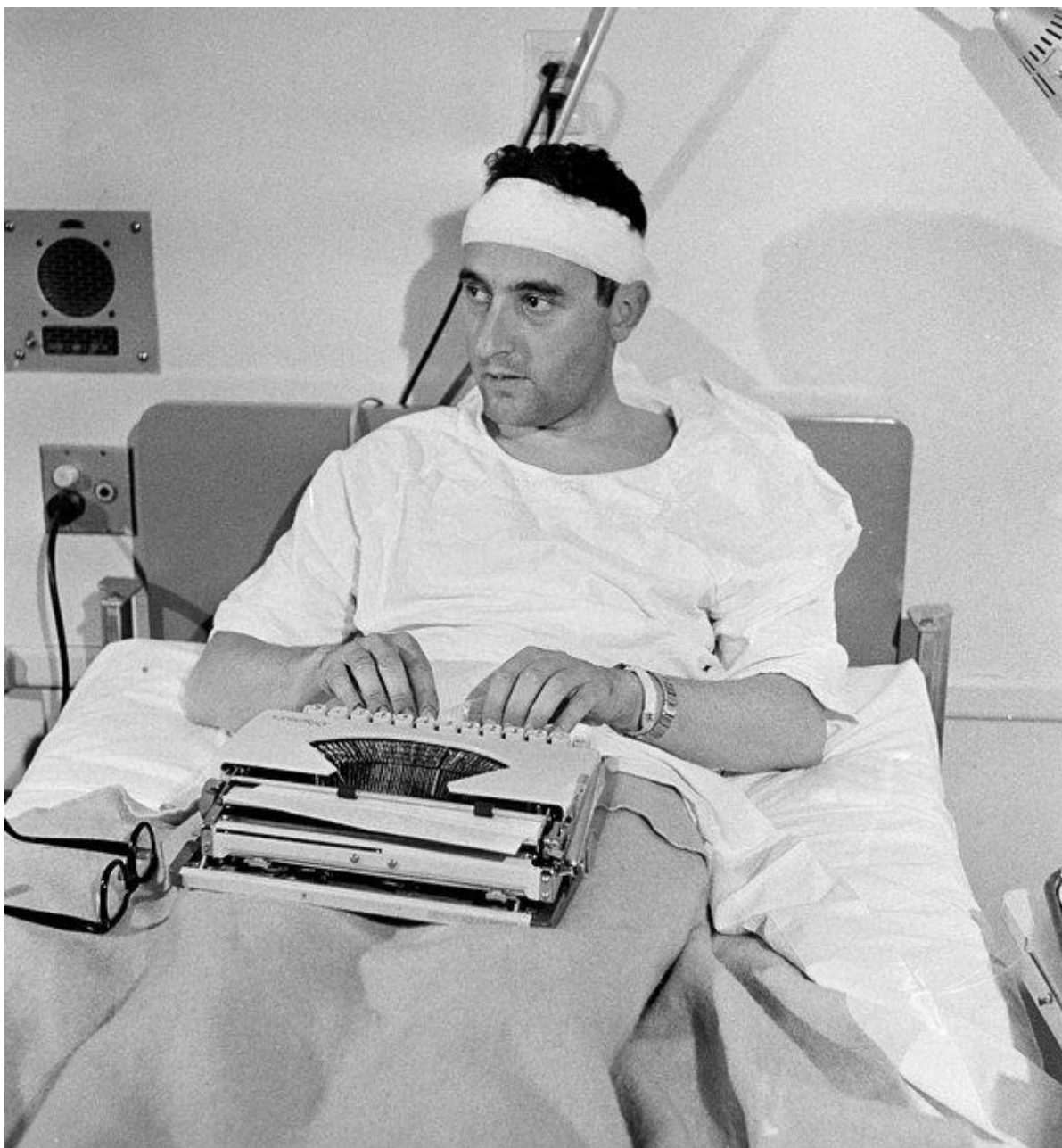
Mr. Valeriani covered the White House at some point during every administration from Kennedy's to George H. W. Bush's. He also had stints covering the State Department and the Pentagon.

"He always took great pride that he was on Nixon's enemies list," Ms. Berlin said.

On Nov. 22, 1963, after seeing a report at the National Press Club in Washington that Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, Mr. Valeriani ran to the White House and then appeared on camera for about four hours as the story developed, fed information by other reporters.

Covering the State Department, he traveled hundreds of thousands of miles around the world with Mr. Kissinger, the secretary of state, and wrote about the experience in 1979 in the book "Travels With Henry."

Image



Mr. Valeriani recovering after being struck over the head by a white townsman while covering a civil rights march in Marion, Ala., in 1965. Credit Associated Press

Mr. Valeriani considered his coverage of the civil rights movement, including protest marches in Selma and Marion, Ala., as the most rewarding work of his career, Ms. Berlin said. In an interview for the 1987 book “Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years (1954-1965),” by Juan Williams, Mr. Valeriani recalled being hospitalized after a white townsman hit him over the head with an ax handle as a police officer stood by without making an arrest.

Mr. Valeriani left NBC News in 1988 and became a media trainer, consulting heads of companies, politicians, entertainers and others on how to talk to the news media. His clients included Ted Danson, Jimmy Fallon and the filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow. In 1995 he played a CNN reporter in the film “Crimson Tide,” starring Denzel Washington and Gene Hackman.

Richard Gerard Valeriani was born on Aug. 29, 1932, in Camden, N.J., the only child of Nicholas Valeriani, an Italian immigrant who worked as a laborer in New Jersey quarries, and Christina (Camerota) Valeriani, who briefly worked knitting and crocheting Christmas ornaments and children's clothing.

Mr. Valeriani attended Yale on a full scholarship and was sports editor of The Yale Daily News. He graduated in 1953 and then received two more scholarships, to study for master's degrees at the University of Pavia in Italy and the University of Barcelona.

Becoming fluent in languages in Europe, he served as an Army translator in Germany after being drafted. He joined The Associated Press as a reporter on his return to the United States and remained with it for almost three years.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his daughter, Kimberly Oser, and two grandchildren.

Mr. Valeriani was never considered one of the "pretty boys" of television news, Ms. Berlin said, but that never bothered him.

"He was an on-the-street real reporter," she said. "He didn't have a baritone voice; he just told the story like it was. He made sure to get it right, and people respected that."

Correction: June 20, 2018

An earlier version of this obituary misstated the original surname of Mr. Valeriani's mother. She was Christina Camerota, not Camarito.

A version of this article appears in print on June 20, 2018, on Page A21 of the New York edition with the headline: Richard Valeriani, 85, NBC Newsman. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)



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