

Corp William Nathan Oatis v



Photo added by Richard Mullally

BIRTH 7 Jan 1914

Marion, Grant County, Indiana, USA

DEATH 16 Sep 1997 (aged 83)

Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, USA

BURIAL Calverton National Cemetery

Calverton, Suffolk County, New York, USA

PLOT 9, 0, 916

MEMORIAL ID 1044915



Added by No Guts, No Glory

William Nathan Oatis (January 4, 1914 – September 16, 1997) was an American journalist who gained international attention when he was charged with espionage by the Czechoslovak government in 1951. He was subsequently jailed until 1953.

Early life

Born in Marion, Indiana, Oatis began his journalism career with his high school newspaper, studied at DePauw University for one year and in 1933 returned to Marion, where he worked for the Leader-Tribune. In 1937, he started working for the Associated Press in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Added by Bernadette

Oatis served in the U.S Army during World War II, studying Japanese at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. In 1950, he married Laurabelle Zack, who worked in the AP's reference library in New York. The marriage took place in London.

Arrest and detention

Oatis was working as the AP bureau chief in Prague, Czechoslovakia when he was arrested on April 23, 1951. Deprived of sleep and subjected to continuous interrogation for 42 hours, Oatis signed a statement confessing to the charge of espionage. The case made international headlines, as well as leading to trade and travel embargos against Czechoslovakia. On July 4, 1951, a Czechoslovak court sentenced Oatis to ten years in prison. He was released May 16, 1953, shortly after the death of Joseph Stalin and after an

angry letter from President Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Czechoslovak government. The Czechoslovak government said it had been moved to pardon Oatis by a poignant plea from Oatis' wife, Laurabelle. A Czechoslovak court cleared him of all charges in 1959, but the decision was reversed in 1968 after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1990, after Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" the previous year, he was cleared again.

The Voice of America called Oatis "the first American martyr to press freedom behind the Iron Curtain." The United States Department of State denounced the Czechoslovak verdict as a ludicrous travesty and the U.S. press said Oatis was condemned for no more than doing his job as a reporter. The case's Orwellian overtones were highlighted by the prosecution's assertion at the show trial that Oatis, a careful reporter, was "particularly dangerous because of his discretion and insistence on obtaining only accurate, correct, verified information." Oatis contracted tuberculosis during his imprisonment and sought treatment shortly after his release.

Later career

Oatis went on to cover the United Nations for three decades and retired in 1984 after a 47-year career at the AP. He was elected president of the United Nations Correspondents Association in 1970. In 1992, Oatis was inducted into the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame.

Oatis died September 16, 1997 at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York from complications of Alzheimer's disease. He was survived by his sons Jonathan and Jeremy. His wife Laurabelle passed away of natural causes on June 19, 2012, at the age of 88.

Courtesy Wikipedia

Military Information: CPL, US ARMY

Family Members

Spouse



Laurabelle *Zack* Oatis
1924–2012 (m. 1950)

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