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In 1956, in the early days of television in Australia, a new station, ATN7, employed a former journalist and war correspondent as a political commentator. His habit of leaping from his studio chair and bumping into the sound boom with a very distinctive "This I Believe" earned him the name of Eric Boom.

Eric Baume was born on 29th May 1900 in Auckland, New Zealand, the eldest of four sons of a Dunedin barrister who was also a member of Parliament, and an American born mother. His parents were both unorthodox Jews and he seems to have been raised with no particular religious affiliation, in fact he was to marry a Methodist lady in a Methodist Church in 1921 in Whangarei, they later having three children. Eric's mother at the age of 55 embraced Roman Catholicism.

His early schooling was at King's College, Auckland Grammar School and Waitaki Boys' High School before going to Auckland University College to study law whilst working as an articled clerk at the firm of Endean and Holloway who had bought his father's business on his death a few years earlier. He described law as "hell" and just wanted to get out of it.

Eric's first employment was in 1917-18 with the New Zealand Herald as a proof reader and cub reporter under the Editorship of William Lane who together with Dame Mary Gilmore had taken the failed experimental socialist expedition to Paraguay in the late 1890s. He was also having poems and cartoons published in the New Zealand Observer. These poems were strongly influenced by war, glory, gallantry and patriotism, after the style of Kipling or Rupert Brooke. Eric then moved on to be sub editor of the Waipa Post in 1919-1920, where he really learnt journalism. The journalistic staff consisted of two and Eric did all the reporting, subbing and most of the editorial writing, also taking responsibility for the material published.

At this time, in Auckland, he met a lady, Mary Jack, daughter of the Mayor of Whangarei and very quickly told her that he was going to marry her. She replied that she was engaged to be married and anyway she was shortly off to England. Eric was very persistent and in Mary's words he did not court her so much as lay siege to her. Mary then broke her engagement and agreed to marry Eric on her return from England in a year's time. During her time she had almost forgotten what Eric looked like until he met her ship by coming out on the pilot boat. They were married eleven weeks later on 17th December 1921 as mentioned above.

At this time he was working on the Dominion in Wellington before moving on to the Christchurch Sun. It was here that he showed some of his flair for journalism. When he was asked to cover the Timaru to Christchurch cycling race and was provided with a car he realised that country post offices were closed on Saturdays so that Telegraphs could not be sent. Eric quickly persuaded his driver to stop at country railway stations where they could not refuse to send telegraphs and so the Sun hit the streets with all the latest reports well before the opposition newspapers.

He was then persuaded to apply for the position of editor of the Timaru Herald. There was a field of 60 applicants and at the age of 22 years he was appointed, thus becoming the youngest newspaper editor in New Zealand or Australian history. He told his mother that he had always promised her would be an editor by the age of 25 and he had now beaten that promise by 3 years. The job was very difficult as he was by far the youngest member of the staff, every senior member being at least twice his age. The General Manager also equated youth with deference and tried to manipulate Baume for his own political ends and reasoned that as Baume was being paid 500 pounds a year, a good sum in 1922, he should be docile but docility was not a part of Baume's makeup and many clashes ensued. A breakup seemed inevitable and he was having a particularly tough time when an offer came from Sir Joynton Smith in Sydney to join the editorial staff of the Daily Guardian which was about to be launched in Sydney. Eric Baume sailed for Sydney on 23rd June 1923 on board the Ulimaroa leaving his wife, Mary, and daughter, Nancy, behind. They were to join him a year later.

The early days of the Guardian were absolute chaos and described by Baume as an "exercise in lunacy". The three men behind the Guardian were Joynton Smith, Robert Clyde Packer and Claude McKay. There were staff problems, paper shortages among other things and some 80 journalists were employed, many of whom spent too much time in the Hotel Australia. Eventually it was published and it really was a disaster, the initial circulation of 100,000 falling to under 15,000 before settling down and slowly expanding. Eric Baume covered many different fields with the Guardian including Parliament, drama and music and after a few months became chief sub-editor, being appointed by R.C. Packer whom he always described as having the finest newspaper mind of his generation.

By the time his wife joined him after an absence of a year his life was well and truly settled, work hard and play just as hard; he had become a real gambler, willing to risk the absolute last of his money on a gamble. His gambling on more than one occasion in later life was to cause him and his family a lot of difficulty. After his wife joined him the family lived in Cremorne and Roseville and later in the 1930s he lived in a very fine house in Gordon on some three acres of land. At this time he was on 1500 to 2000 pounds a year.

However, back to the 1920s and the Guardian. Packer used many gimmicks to promote circulation. On one occasion he instructed four of his reporters to stay away from the office, become unshaven and generally look derelict. They were then to go around the various churches and request charity with a view to writing on practical Christianity. The Guardian introduced the first Miss Australia Quest and was the first newspaper to offer free reader insurance. So by 1929 the circulation of the Guardian was beginning to match that of the Sydney Morning Herald and it

was then that the Daily Guardian and the Sunday Guardian were sold to Associated Newspapers, the two publications having existed for about 6 years.

The great depression was now starting to bite, rationalisation among newspapers was occurring and hard times were being felt in the industry. Eric and Mary now had two daughters and one son, also Mary was continually unwell so it was necessary to employ a lady, Mary McCormick, for live in help. She was to stay with the Baume family until the mid 1940s. During all this time Baume gambled and lost heavily.

Immediately following the sale of the Guardian Eric was appointed managing director of the Referee, another Packer publication. He was a dedicated Packer man at this time and remained so until an acrimonious breakup in 1932. During the Packer period he really honed his journalism, did a lot of travelling and writing on outback areas as well as on interstate matters. He was writing reports on racial groups in Australia. Together with Frank Packer and Professor Madigan, a geologist, he travelled to the Granites, 600 miles North East of Alice Springs, to check on a supposed gold discovery and was able to report that the whole scheme was an elaborate hoax. He felt, however, that he was now walking a tightrope of political and professional intrigue involving proprietors and politicians. R. C. Packer accused Baume of treachery and betrayal in boardroom dealings which caused bitterness and the split which finally came in 1932. When Packer and Associated Newspapers broke up Baume expected to be sacked but dame fortune again smiled and when George Warnecke resigned as editor of the Sunday Sun to found the Women's Weekly Baume was offered his job and so became at 32 editor of the largest Sunday newspaper in Australia.

Eric Baume always claimed that the three best newspapermen in Australia were Robert Clyde Packer, Ezra Norton and Rupert A. G. Henderson.

Baume returned briefly to New Zealand in 1934 for one last talk with his mother just before her death that year. He then continued on at Associated and at the age of 35 he was appointed Assistant Editor in Chief with special supervision of the Sunday Sun, the Telegraph and the Woman. Baume now had the newspaper world at his feet and was receiving lavish praise from all sides. It seemed that the editorship of the whole company was in his grasp. All he had to do was take it easy and keep quiet, something quite impossible for a person such as Eric Baume. He was arrogant, uncompromising and too loud, he tried to do too much and antagonised the two older editors in the group. He eventually lost out in internal politics and was re-named as editor of the Sunday Sun.

Sir Hugh Dennison, in July 1937, sent Baume to America on board the Monterey to buy features for a new weekly. By this time he had experienced the best and worst in journalism. He had seen bribery and corruption in Sydney in both journalism and politics during that time. He had survived the worry of Mary's persistent illnesses, three books had been written and three children been raised. He had made many friends, made even more enemies and the name "Baume the Bastard" had been bestowed upon him. He was totally intolerant of fools and unforgiving of his enemies and refused to trust anyone completely.

At the time Hitler and Mussolini were strutting the world's stage as war approached, and Eric Baume had always expressed strong antagonism to Nazism and its offshoots although a lot of other journalists in Australia did not agree with him. Baume and the Sydney Morning Herald were in agreement in completely denouncing Hitler and Baume had been broadcasting the message on Radio 2GB in 1936 when he and "The Watchman" were the only two political commentators broadcasting on radio. At the time Eric was being paid 10 pounds a week for 5 night's work. Eric Baume had been commissioned in the 4th Infantry in 1926 and was surprised to find himself being called to the reserve of officers in 1937. This action had helped to convince him that war was approaching. He travelled to Hawaii, San Francisco and California as part of the brief from Hugh Dennison. He was not impressed with Los Angeles at all and was not sorry to leave that city. He then travelled on to Mexico where, on the border, his British Passport caused him to be branded as inferior to Americans. He was frogmarched to the guardhouse and released just in time to catch his train after 125 pounds was taken from him. During his time in Mexico a few innocent remarks caused him to be labelled as a "good communist". When he was introduced on radio as the "Australian Communist" he worried what the reaction in Australia would be, being cast as a revolutionary would be taking a joke too far. While in Mexico City he met Trotsky who gave him a very accurate prediction concerning Germany in the next World War. Trotsky also mentioned the threat of Japan which Baume did not accept because of his imperialistic outlook that Britain was the centre of the world and Germany the traditional enemy.

On returning to Sydney in 1938 he resumed editorship of the Sunday Sun and also returned to broadcasting on 2GB. Associated Newspapers had a policy of appeasement to Germany and he was forced to follow that line. He was not so constrained on radio thundering about the dangers of Nazism so that the German Consul General, Dr. Asmis, complained to many influential people until the broadcasts were stopped by the intervention of the proprietors of Associated Newspapers. The Daily News of the day reported that "The German Consul General was not alone in complaining about Mr. Baume. His complaints were backed up by the Country Party who resented Baume's disparaging remarks about Sir Earle Page and Mr. Thorby." It was rumoured that pressure might be brought to bear on advertisers to cease advertising on 2GB. In disgust Baume gave up broadcasting to concentrate on his editorship. He only had his salary to live on, his living and gambling expenses were still high and his wife was constantly ill.

Once again good fortune came his way when, in 1938, Ethel Elizabeth Falkiner, the wealthy widow of a former grazier, gave Eric and Mary some jewellery and 20,000 pounds suggesting that Eric should enter politics. As Eric could see war approaching he would not make that commitment saying that he wanted to go to war if there was a job available. Ethel Falkiner replied that there was no timetable on his entering politics. In August 1939 Ezra Norton appointed him as European correspondent for Truth and Sportsman Ltd., later to include the new Daily Mirror. Later in 1941 Mrs. Falkiner was to request the return of the money and jewels but Eric Baume refused saying that they were gifts. Smith's Weekly, in 1941, suggested that Eric Baume had stolen the money from Ethel Falkiner; this was hotly denied, writs for libel were issued but the case did not proceed. Before all this Baume had left for England on 15th September 1939 on a salary of 50 pounds a week at the age of 39 years.

Baume set up office in Fleet Street convinced that a brutal war had erupted and with dislike of England and the English upper classes. He had no trouble, however, in mixing with those upper classes in England, dining at the Savoy, the Ritz, the Mayfair while retaining his ties with Australia and New Zealand his loyalty to the Crown, the British Empire and the British way of life.

Eric Baume, in 1939, was quite incensed that Australian war correspondents had to wear British uniforms with no distinctive Australian markings and in usual fashion determined to do something about it! Not being able to obtain permission from the Australian Government to wear Australian markings he had 6 distinctive digger hats made in London and after wearing one himself he instructed the other correspondents, Ronald Monson and Gavin Long to wear them as well. This was the stage of the so-called "phoney war" in 1939 and the correspondents were in Arras in France. When these hats were seen in Paris rumours spread that Australian troops had landed in France. A rumour was also spread that peace treaty terms were being negotiated between Germany and Britain. Eric Baume then gave one of his real fire and brimstone lectures to gathered troops shouting that German were all swine and any method of annihilating them was justified. He was very critical of England's unpreparedness and appeasement under Neville Chamberlain. He considered the whole world to be in peril because of Nazism, Tiring of the inaction Baume returned to London and thence back to Australia arriving here in April 1940.

When the German breakthrough came it happened very speedily and within 24 hours Eric Baume was on his way back to Europe on the last of the flying boat services. While he was flying over Java Calais fell. On his arrival back in England he had some difficulty because of his very German name and a crank letter was found accusing him of being a German spy disguised as a war corespondent. This was eventually sorted out and Baume tried to get to France but the evacuation from Dunkirk had started and there was no chance. So his first real introduction to war was the blitz. This was early 1941 and his main task was preparing for the advent of the Daily Mirror which was finally launched in May of that year. Eric Baume in typical flamboyant style set up office in the Savoy Hotel. Robert Raymond, an early identity on Australian television, went to see Baume for employment and found the office seemingly in utter confusion but with Eric Baume looking tremendously impressive dressed in war correspondent's uniform overseeing proceedings. He had a great liking for wearing uniforms at all times.

The Daily Mirror was launched on 12th May 1941, two days after the worst bombing London had ever experienced. For hours German bombers were raining bombs on London, Westminster Abbey, the House of Commons, the British Museum and many other important buildings. Two days later Rudolf Hess parachuted into England and within weeks Russia was invaded by Germany. Baume had earlier cabled back to Australia with a prediction that Russia would become involved but he was called a menace to the community for filing such reports. He considered war as a brutal and horrible business but argued that anything less than total destruction of Germany was weak and he urged total war using any means possible to destroy Germany. Baume was called to a war correspondent's meeting with Winston Churchill, who looking straight at him said, "there are some people in this country I would expel if I could, they are spreading propaganda and are disloyal and treacherous." He continued war reporting and as an outlet he wrote some more fictional novels.

In late 1943 Baume, together with Mark Gallard, Editor-in Chief of the Truth group, left England for Australia aboard the Queen Mary heading for New York. He had had no leave since 1939. They travelled to San Francisco and then to Fremantle aboard a British escort carrier. While crossing the Bass Strait an engagement with a submarine was undertaken, terminated only when it was realised that the submarine was in fact a whale. Baume travelled from Fremantle to Sydney by troop train.

After a few weeks leave in Sydney he left aboard the liberty ship Cape Henry for San Francisco, missing the opening of the Second Front while in the New York office of the paper. So he had missed two of the major fronts of the war which caused an Australian woman journalist to claim that his timing was deliberate.

He returned to England and was in Paris in time for the great liberation march. He then joined 30 corps in Belgium to see more of the war and was present at the particularly bloody battle of Arnhem. This really suited his love of war, uniforms and his jingoistic attitude. This battle lasted for nine days and at times involved hand to hand fighting with trenches at times only about ten yards apart. Baume was very close to the action. Finally the allies withdrew leaving 2000 injured behind to be taken prisoner. This was the first and only time he was so close to the front line. He felt that this satisfied his passion for war and he was always to later say, "I was there."

He was not really a front-line correspondent in the sense of Chester Wilmot and others were. There is a saying that during war it takes nine men to support one man actually shooting at the enemy. He was really always one of that nine.

He returned to London with V-2s bombarding the city and worked in the Savoy until VE day and on VJ day he was off with British troops to Norway to be in at the surrender. He was able to report on this and also on the trial of Quisling. He organised to get a photograph of the execution of Quisling using all sorts of backdoor methods but then the camera failed and he missed out on what would have been a real scoop. He travelled all over Norway, finally being made an honorary citizen.

Baume returned to England which he found to be much quieter following the end of the war. He then managed to get himself appointed as honorary ADC to the General Officer Commanding-in Chief, Royal Artillery, London Area which enabled him to indulge his passion for uniforms and he acquired a full dress uniform. The rest of his time in England was uneventful except for efforts being made in Australia to convince his wife, Mary, to divorce him because of supposed infidelity with a Lady Margaret Stewart. This was never proven. He continued to mix with top names and went to Berlin on several occasions during the days of the airlift.

Late in 1949 he was called back to Australia as Deputy Editor-in Chief of the Truth and Sportsman group which included the Daily Mirror. Apparently this was as a result of a direct order from Ezra Norton, who having seen a photograph of Baume in spats roared, "Get him back here, he's been duchessed." He later became Editor-in-Chief but a rift between Norton and Baume was inevitable. He had always regarded Norton as a "sacking boss" and late in 1952 he

received advice that he was being downgraded to Assistant Editor. Later that year he was dismissed for allegedly breaking company rules so at 52 years of age he was out of work.

Another lucky break came his way when his brother, Sidney, offered him a position with his advertising firm on a salary of 20 pounds a week. He and Mary had to adjust their living standards quite substantially and he was not really a successful advertising person. A compensation package was later received from Ezra Norton and this enabled him to leave advertising. He devoted his time to freelance writing, having articles published in The Bulletin. He was regarded as one of the three best dressed men in Sydney and had grown a large moustache and was always impeccably dressed even in the worst moments of adversity. In 1952 he auditioned for a current affairs commentator for 2UE but the programme did not eventuate and so in 1953 he commenced a programme on Radio 2GB on 40 pounds a week. He could not be "produced" and always used his own words, at first from his own script and it was only much later that he was able to use his own scripts without legal checking for any possible defamation claims. The programme was called, "I'm On Your Side", an ombudsman type show with Eric Baume pursuing caller's claims of problems and being cheated. Another programme was called "This I Believe." which enabled him to thunder on about almost anything that took his fancy. He had a firm belief that everything was either black or white with no glimmer of subtlety or compromise. He did command a great audience which gave him considerable power as a commentator although he never really supported any one political party. At this stage he was doing two sessions each day from Monday to Saturday on 2GB as well a considerable amount of freelance writing. Macquarie Radio also had an arrangement with NBC and he was being heard in America.

Such a forthright and commanding figure was tailor made for television and so late in 1956 he joined ATN7 as Australian Television's first political commentator. His impact was immediate and as commanding as it was on radio. People either hated or loved him but he had a tremendous ego and an absolute belief in his own convictions. There were no half measures, no pussyfooting around, what he said was absolutely right, take it or leave it. Eric Baume was recipient of one of the first Oscars awarded after the first year of Australian television. He was still speaking on radio and writing press articles. Then came the next bombshell. In July 1958 Eric Baume quit television to return to Ezra Norton as Editorial Director of Truth and Sportsman. The salary was reported to be in the vicinity of 15,000 pounds per year.

This position gave him the authority to direct the whole editorial activity of Truth and Mirror. As he was, at the time of accepting the new position, employed on ATN7, the Sun and 2GB, all Fairfax subsidiaries, there was a very strong reaction from that company. These programmes were terminated except for 2GB where he stayed as a commentator for the evening show only. One of first assignments was to prepare the Truth to become the Sunday Mirror. This was duly launched and was a disaster from day one. It was soon killed and Ezra Norton became disheartened and sold out very quickly. Staff were not informed and Baume and Norton did not speak after that. The Sunday Mirror tried to compete with two well established papers, the Sun-Herald and the Sunday Telegraph, and just could not. The papers were sold in December 1958. The new owners were Mr. R. A. Irish and Mr. H. Scotford. Because of contractual arrangements Baume was not directly sacked but over the next year or so all power was whittled

away from him but he hung on until negotiating another payout. Part of the arrangement was that his column continued to be published in the Daily Mirror and this continued until Rupert Murdoch bought the Mirror and Baume's name was removed.

He then returned to radio 2GB, commenced commentating on TCN9 and later added a column for the Daily Telegraph. In 1961 he collapsed with a ruptured ulcer and later that year he was sacked by Sir Frank Packer for refusing to read the news. He continued to work on 2GB with an "I'm On Your Side" type of programme for the next couple of years.

In May 1963 he was invited to West Germany as a guest of Lufthansa and the West German Government, rather ironical with his Jewish background and his thundering against Nazism and Germany during the 1930s.

Having left TCN9 Baume considered himself finished with television until late in 1963 Channel Seven approached him to do a programme called "Beauty and the Beast". The programme went to air in January 1964 with Eric Baume, Maggie Tabberer, Shiela Scotter and others and was completely panned by the critics. Baume was regarded as insufferable, a bore and totally sarcastic but again the audiences either loved him or hated him and the show continued until December 1965 and rated well with audiences. Baume's dominating personality was again successful.

In January 1966 he was awarded the OBE for services to journalism before leaving on a holiday to New Zealand. He returned to "Beauty and the Beast" until April 1966 when ill-health forced him to leave it. He suffered total renal collapse but fought back and returned to television for a short time. Baume continued to gamble heavily and lose large amounts. He died on 24th April 1967 of heart and kidney failure. He was cremated after a non-denominational service. His debts exceeded his assets by more than 4,000 pounds certainly a legacy of a lifetime as a gambler.

Eric Baume was described as very conceited, petty, foul tempered and in his own words very snobbish as well as being very jealous of Mary, his wife, causing great scenes if he found her talking to the same man on several occasions.

Eric Baume was initiated in Lodge Neutral Bay, No. 267 on 14th March 1927, passed to the Second Degree on 30th May 1927 and raised to the Third Degree on 27th August 1927. He called off from that Lodge on 14th September 1931. He affiliated with Lodge Neutral Bay on 12th February 1934 and with Lodge Literature, No. 500. on 6th February 1936 before calling off from Lodge Neutral Bay again on 24th July 1937. He then called off Lodge Literature on 6th December 1951. Between 9th September 1947 and 9th September 1952 he belonged to Lodge Australia, No. 6505, English Constitution meeting in the Freemason's Hall, London. He lastly affiliated with Lodge Purity, No. 425 and was a member at the time of his death.

Ref: Manning, A. Larger Than Life
Aust. Dict. of Biog., Vol. 13, 1940-80.
Woman's Day, 31st Oct., 1966.
Bulletin, 6th May, 1967.



After Nijmegen. The strain of one of the most intense actions of the Second World War still shows on Baume's face.

With Sir Edward Hallstrom at Taronga Park Zoo during a stunt to raise money for charity; the only time Baume was ever chained, literally or metaphorically, by anybody.



Broadcasting from home without a script and with a stopwatch as his only aid. He did not really need a watch as experience had given him an automatic sense of time.

