

CHARLES GUGGENHEIM

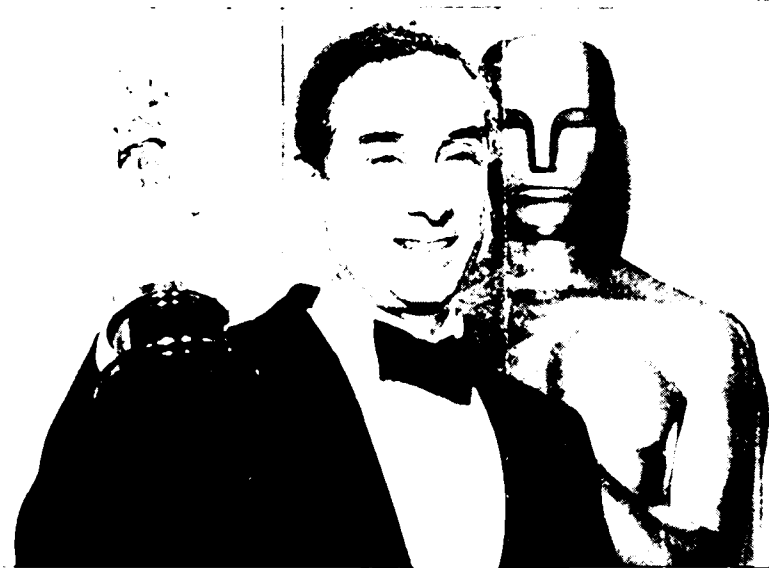
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Award-winning creator of motion picture documentaries and presidential spin, with a passion for stories of human fortitude

CHARLES GUGGENHEIM, in a film career of almost six decades, received 12 Academy Award nominations and four Oscars for his documentaries — a feat matched only by Walt Disney. At the same time he was the founding father of made-for-television political commercials, which became an essential element in American electioneering, doing pioneer work in presidential campaigns for Adlai Stevenson, George McGovern, the Kennedys and other Democratic candidates.

But he was best known for his motion picture documentaries. He made more than a hundred, and perhaps his most memorable was about the life and death of Senator Robert Kennedy, *RFK Remembered*, made shortly after Kennedy's assassination in 1968. It won an Academy Award and was shown at that year's notorious Democratic National Convention in Chicago, when emotional Democrats marched around the hall and sang *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

Guggenheim won his first Academy Award in 1964, producing and directing *Nine from Little Rock*, about the violent 1957 school desegregation crisis in Arkansas. *The Johnstown Flood* (1989) was about the flood that devastated the Penn-



Guggenheim receives his Oscar for *The Johnstown Flood* in 1990

sylvania town 100 years earlier, and in 1994 he made *A Time for Justice* about America's civil rights movement.

He also made documentary film biog-

raphies of Presidents Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson which are now part of the permanent collection in their respective presidential

libraries. Guggenheim also made a documentary on the Ku Klux Klan, the restoration of the Statue of Liberty, the experience of immigrants entering the United States through New York's Ellis Island and a feature on the D-Day landings.

Saturday Review's film critic Hollis Alpert described Guggenheim as "probably the most accomplished maker of documentary films in the country".

He won top awards in every major international film competition. Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, said Guggenheim was "at the very summit, not just here but around the world", adding: "He was a man's man, but there was a sweet gentleness about him."

Charles Eli Guggenheim was born in 1924 in Cincinnati, Ohio, where his father and grandfather were successful German Jewish furniture merchants. The second of three sons, he was dyslexic and did not learn to read until the age of nine. He attended the Colorado State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and then joined the US Army in the Second World War.

In September 1944 he was sent to hospital with an infection while the rest of his 106 Division sailed for Europe. Three

months later the division suffered heavy casualties in the Battle of the Bulge and thousands were captured.

Guggenheim was long haunted by the fact he had been spared while his comrades faced death or imprisonment. POWs with Jewish-sounding names had been separated from the others and sent to a slave labour camp at Berga, eastern Germany, where hundreds died of starvation, overwork and beatings.

Guggenheim made it his final task before he died to pay homage to his comrades with a documentary: *Berga, Soldiers of Another War*. He made the documentary as witnessed by some of the soldiers who survived the camp. For his last seven months while making the film, Guggenheim was fighting for his own life against pancreatic cancer. The film was finished just a few weeks before he died, with a final message from one of the survivors who declared: "Ah, it's no good to remember. But you have to remember because people, people forget what went on."

Charles Guggenheim, film maker, was born on March 31, 1924, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He died in Washington on October 9, 2002, aged 78.