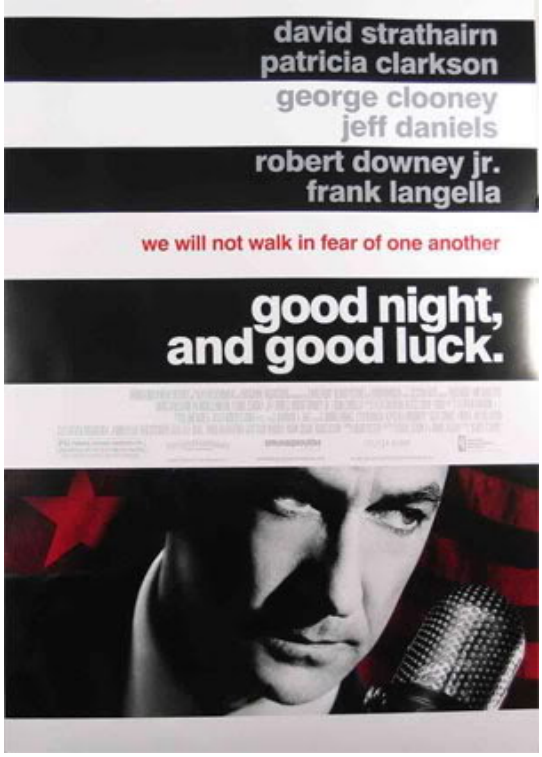

George Clooney's fascination with the news media comes naturally, as his father was a newscaster in Cincinnati. His upbringing in the business serves him well in an obvious labor of love in his writing, directing, and acting in 'Good Night, And Good Luck'.

Clooney has created an excellent re-enactment of the famous Edward R. Murrow "See It Now" broadcasts concerning Senator Joseph McCarthy's tactics during the height of his red baiting. He has also made a dead on period piece of the heady time in the 1950s when network news was actually run by journalists and not entertainers. Filmed in black and white, the movie gives one the look and feel of a world when men dressed for success every day and women were very much in the background. One can almost smell the cigarette smoke, as it seems every man smokes and smokes heavily. This fact cannot be discounted as Murrow himself died of lung cancer at age 57.

In the mid 1950s, as most people know, Sen. McCarthy and his main henchman Roy Cohn were in the midst of their congressional hearings regarding alleged communist infiltration of the defense department and state department. All feared McCarthy and were reluctant to oppose him knowing full well that to do so would put themselves at risk of being branded as communist sympathizers. This bullying and suppression of dissent was too much for Murrow (David Strathairn). Using the collateral of his reputation of integrity (first started with his famous radio reports from London during the Blitz), he makes the daring and risky decision to

expose McCarthy. His boss at CBS news, Bill Paley (an understated Frank Langella), isn't happy about the decision, but knows that Murrow has enough credibility to be given the benefit of the doubt. But Paley's decision isn't supported by all and sponsors threaten to pull their ads. Military officials try to stop Murrow and his producer, Fred Friendly (Clooney) from showing a related report regarding the Air Force. As part of the Red Scare, an officer had been dismissed due to his father and sister's alleged political leanings, despite the fact that the "evidence" of the relatives' involvements were sealed and not made available to the officer.

Murrow, Friendly, and their team of reporters press on. The genius of their attack on McCarthy is that they did not make any real conjecture regarding his motives. They simply presented news footage of McCarthy as he would contradict himself, badger and threaten witnesses, and refuse to give any credible evidence to back up his accusations. A few weeks after the first episode, McCarthy responds on "See It Now". In an inspired move, Clooney chooses not to have an actor portray the senator. Instead, he uses the actual footage from the original programming. The effect is startling, and so much more effective than an actor whom might be accused of misrepresenting the facts. An obviously upset McCarthy does not defend or argue a single point brought up by Murrow. Instead, he angrily levels numerous charges of communist involvement and sympathies against Murrow. The accusations are baseless and the attempt backfires. Calls to the network go ten-to-one in favor of Murrow. And shortly thereafter, the Army presses for a Congressional investigation of McCarthy's tactics, which lead to McCarthy's censure and disgrace.

I am normally not a huge fan of biographies, but this is not a true look at the life of a man, rather it is a glimpse at a series of events in the lives of actual people. Home life is not depicted in this film, other than a brief scene at the home of two CBS employees (Robert Downey, Jr. and Patricia Clarkson) trying to keep their marriage hidden since it violates company rules. The reporters are shown at work and at the bars where they hang out drinking, smoking, and discussing work. Both Friendly and Murrow's wives and children are mentioned, but we never see them. Nor does the film delve too deeply into the life histories and motivations of the men. The focus is on the time period and the McCarthy broadcasts.

Strathairn is brilliant in his portrayal of the pioneering journalist. While he doesn't look that much like Murrow, he has his speech pattern, his mannerisms, and his intensity down pat. I was impressed with the way he captured Murrow's habit of

sitting perfectly still, lit cigarette in hand, showing no emotion whatsoever when confronted with a slanderous charge, or simply interviewing a celebrity.

The film also does a good job of not deifying its hero. Murrow's honesty is above reproach, but he is still human, and those flaws are shown. His hackneyed interviews with celebrities such as Liberace are depicted, as well as his refusal to correct an error McCarthy made concerning Alger Hiss for fear of being painted as being sympathetic towards Hiss.

Clooney shows that he learned the directing trade very well from his mentors Steven Soderbergh and Joel Cohen. The film is a sparse 93 minutes and Clooney keeps it taut and suspenseful for the entire time, not an easy task when re-creating an event where everyone already knows how it ends. It isn't a perfect film. I thought the time spent on Downey and Clarkson was superfluous as Clooney seemed to be setting up some drama that just wasn't there, or was it just a red herring? Meanwhile, the other reporters that made up "Murrow's Boys" were completely indistinguishable from one another. I also didn't like Ray Wise's interpretation of former CBS newscaster Don Hollenbeck. He played him as an emotionally unstable, sniveling pain in the ass hanging off from Murrow like a needy puppy getting too little attention. In other words, he played him just the same way as he played wackjob Leland Palmer in "Twin Peaks"…which just didn't work for me.

Everyone knows about George Clooney's political views, but he doesn't beat anyone over the head with them, nor does he make a blatant attempt to project events from 50 years ago as applicable today. He does, however, use the film as a depiction to what he sees as the start of the decline of objective journalism in the television industry. Murrow's show is soon shut down as a weekly feature; not as a result of his muckraking, but simply as a business decision. Game shows get higher ratings and cost less to produce, so they are implemented into the schedule as reporters are let go.

In all, this is a very good movie on many different levels: As a portrait of a giant in the broadcast journalism field; as a depiction of a very difficult time in our history and a different time in the field of broadcast journalism. And finally as an expose of how different life was like in the US back in the 1950s (the inclusion of some vintage television commercials for Kent cigarettes and Alcoa aluminum are superb touches). It is quite deserving of its Oscar nomination for Best Film. It has no chance of winning; but it's a fine feather in George Clooney's cap, and a welcome

change of pace from his mediocre “Confessions of a Dangerous Mind”.

My Score: Brian Sipe (3 ½ footballs).

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie
Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent
Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good
Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good
Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK. Well worth seeing.
Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots.
Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.
Jeff Garcia: 1 Football. Horrible. All hype; no performance.
Mike Phipps: ½ Football. “We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?” level of suck
Spergon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.