

I LIKE ON AIR



A.A. SCHECHTER WITH EDWARD ANTHONY

DAY AND NIGHT YOUR RADIO BRINGS YOU NEWS—ALL THE VITAL NEWS OF THE WORLD *WHILE IT IS HAPPENING*. THE DIRECTOR OF NEWS AND SPECIAL EVENTS FOR NBC TELLS HERE THE HEADQUARTERS STORY OF JUST HOW IT'S DONE, PLUS THE LIVELY CHRONICLE OF HIS OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

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Chapter headings of

I LIVE ON AIR

TELEPHONITIS
EGYPTIAN HEADACHE
COME IN, CAIRO
ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN
ANYTHING CONTINUES
TO HAPPEN
TWO ADVENTURERS
MY DAY
KILOCYCLE KAMPUS
SCOOPS
SCOOPED
THE FLOODS CAME
SINGING MICE
PARROTS, NEWSBOYS,
SODA JERKERS
FOURTEEN POUNDS OF PAPER
WAR OF WORDS
BLOW BY BLOW
THE FOURTH CHIME
CONVENTION BLUES
OF MIKES AND MEN
BATTLE OF PITCAIRN ISLAND
OFFSHOOTS AND ODDMENTS
UBIQUITOUS MAX
VOX POP ENLIVENS THINGS
THE BLUNTEST BROADCAST
YOUTH HAS ITS FLING
SECRET SIDELIGHTS
CHASE THE PREMIER

\$3.75

I LIVE ON AIR

by A. A. SCHECHTER,

Director of News and Special Events for NBC,

with EDWARD ANTHONY,

co-author of "Bring 'Em Back Alive," etc.

This is a book about radio news broadcasts and about the split-second science that works and cusses and laughs behind the scenes.

For example, here comes a voice from the tomb. That'll be Schechter and his minions broadcasting around the globe from the center of the Great Pyramid. . . . Or take the breathless, blow-by-blow description of the sinking of the *Graf Spee*, a broadcast made possible by an incredible combination of human foresight and the War God's luck. . . . Or perhaps you prefer that faint, reedy trilling that sounds like the plaint of a soul lost in the void between the worlds. Well, that'll be the triumphant voice of Mikey, winner of the International Singing Mouse Contest. . . . The fourteen broadcasts in a single day from Munich while the Big Four were meeting in the triple-guarded "Brown House". . . . What Wrong-Way Corrigan really said in a broadcast that never went over the network. . . . Yussel Jacobs uttering his immortal "We wuz robbed!" . . . Lonely Pitcairn Island speaking at last. . . . The electrifying "exclusive" on the *Hindenburg* disaster. . . . Scores of other broadcasts — instantaneous echoes of history in the making or daffy capering of funsters aiming only at a laugh.

I LIVE ON AIR is the story, direct from headquarters, of just how it all is done; the vastly entertaining account of the chances and mischances that mark the every-day and every-night operation of the most modern news-spreading machine in the world. A book at once lusty and important.

PICTURE SECTION CONTAINING 64 FULL-PAGE REPRODUCTIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

(See back flap)



A. A. SCHECHTER

When the President's son married the Governor's daughter—that was the Trumbull-Coolidge wedding back in the late 20's—the old *New York World* sent A. A. Schechter up to Connecticut to cover the story. He found that the press was barred from the festivities and scores of reporters were waiting forlornly around the entrance, contenting themselves with the idea of picking up details later from departing guests.

But Schechter seldom waits. He sought out the caterer assigned to handling the refreshments, persuaded him to encase the ample Schechter frame in a waiter's black and white, and was soon mingling with the distinguished guests, a tray balanced elegantly above his head. It is practically impossible for him to take no for an answer, although those who say him nay often don't realize until later that their no didn't take.

Shortly after the *World* folded, Schechter joined the NBC press department. Shortly after *that*, the newspapers of the United States decided that radio could not use their news any more; it would have to provide its own. With the aid of a battery of telephones and a tremendous store of ingenuity, Schechter began to cover the events of the world as a one-man news service. He was remarkably successful, and though since that time there has been a *rapprochement* between radio and the press, Schechter as Director of News and Special Events for NBC is still scoring beats. He can't get out of the habit.

He also can't get out of the habit of taking a good, hearty belly-laugh at himself when the other fellow scores the beat. In this praiseworthy attitude he is stoutly supported by his co-author, Edward Anthony, co-author of *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, and other successful books.

I LIVE
ON AIR



By
A. A. SCHECHTER
with
EDWARD ANTHONY



**I LIVE
ON AIR**



WITH SIXTY-FOUR REPRODUCTIONS
OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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I LIVE ON AIR

To
my associates from coast to coast and overseas
in “News and Special Events”—because this
is really *their* book.

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I

Telephonitis

IN THE early 1930's radio was the prize exhibit in American journalism's doghouse.

The feeling was bitter on both sides. It was the McCoy's and the Hatfields all over again, except that there was no shooting.

There was loose talk on both sides and for a while things got worse instead of better. In fact, the situation in those days was such that in answer to inquiries about the press-radio situation I frequently confined myself to quoting a line out of an old barroom gag: "They don't speak to us and we don't answer."

Before the *rapprochement* which led to the formation of the Press Radio Bureau things were so tough that Lowell Thomas, the star of our principal news program, was without any sources of news.

Under the guidance of Frank Mason, former President of International News Service, who was my boss in those days, I struggled with the problem. (Mason is now NBC vice-president in charge of press relations.)

Lowell had a million-dollar voice but not a nickel's worth of news. The press associations would not sell to us, and we were not allowed to lift anything out of the newspapers.

In fact, the press associations and leading newspapers were making a practice of keeping a stenographic record of our news broadcasts; in some cases they even recorded our newscasts on discs so they could check back and see whether we had swiped anything.

Mason recalled that when he was a foreign correspondent in addition to the stories he cabled in there were a great many

that were mailed in and dressed up sufficiently in the office to sound like hot news. He pointed out that we could get a great many good foreign stories out of the London newspapers. Arrangements were made to have the London and other foreign papers sent to us by the fastest available means.

It's remarkable how many good stories you can pick up by taking out a membership in the Scissors-and-Paste-Pot Press Association. Of course, considerable cutting and rewriting are necessary, but that's no trouble. Some of these products of the S.-and-P.-P. P.A. later wound up in leading American newspapers.

I recall, for instance, the story I clipped from the *London Telegraph* about the orders the Cawnpoor police had to arrest—a monkey! This news item, which had a Calcutta date-line, told how the simian criminal was on the run with 10,000 rupees (750 pounds sterling) in currency notes, the life savings of an Indian resident in the suburbs of the city. The notes had been hidden for safety in a crevice in the ceiling of the house. The monkey dug out the bundle, and was last seen heading for the jungle with its haul.

One of the NBC scrapbooks of that period reveals that the Associated Press released this story to its papers two days after our rewrite of the *London Telegraph* item was used on Lowell Thomas' program.

One day a story put out by my worldwide Spot-'Em-and-Shear-'Em Service almost got me into trouble; but it wasn't anything inherently wrong with the basic idea of my foreign coverage so much as ignorance on the subject of cheese. That's correct; it's not a typesetting error.

The *London Express* carried an interesting story to the effect that France and Germany were at odds over cheese imports and that what started out as a minor tariff war was assuming real economic proportions. So I wrote a radio news story to the effect that France and Germany were at war again,—this time it was a cheese war.

I had France saying to Germany, "If you won't buy my Camembert I won't buy your Liederkrantz."

I thought nothing more about the story until the next day when a group of lawyers carrying bulging brief cases called on me. They represented a well-known New York dairy products company. They solemnly explained that Leiderkrantz was not a German cheese. It had been originated by the firm they represented,—and what was I going to do about it?

What *could* I do, I asked. What damage had been done? Weren't they trying to make too much of l'affaire Leiderkrantz?

The lawyers returned the next day with more lawyers. The spokesman produced a telegram from a Jewish grocer in the Bronx who had heard the broadcast. Hitler's vicious anti-Semitic policies had already been introduced and the grocer's wire hinted broadly what the dairy products company could do with its German products thereafter.

Then the possibility of a libel suit was mentioned. Later that day we made it clear over a nationwide hookup that Leiderkrantz was an American, not a German cheese.

The correction satisfied the lawyers and I breathed easy again. Naturally enough a libel suit that early in my radio career might have had serious consequences.

The newspapers from abroad yielded up a fair amount of foreign copy,—not exactly spot news, but it helped. Then I developed telephonitis, which proved to be a real contribution to the solution of our problem.

I made the discovery that by saying I was talking for Lowell Thomas or the News Department of the National Broadcasting Company, or both—(and no one around NBC seemed to mind my referring to myself as a "department")—I could get practically anyone on the telephone.

When Peggy McMath, six-year-old daughter of a Harwichport, Mass., shipbuilder, was snatched from her home during the wave of kidnappings that followed the Lindbergh case, Lowell Thomas each night had a newsy development on the case,—so newsy, in fact, that reporters on the assignment were constantly embarrassed by telephone calls from their city desks

asking them why Lowell Thomas had beaten them on this or that new slant on the story.

After the child had been returned to her parents and a speedy trial of the defendant arranged, Lowell Thomas announced one night that the kidnaper would plead guilty the next day. An hour or so after the broadcast the District Attorney confirmed the report to newsmen. One reporter, anxious to find out how the radio commentator got the news so early, questioned Judge Edward F. Hanify who was presiding over the case.

"Oh," said the Judge, "I can explain that. Lowell Thomas' office has been calling me up in chambers every day and I've been telling 'em what developed."

The Judge was head man in the courtroom, presiding over a drama that was being front-paged all over the country. In addition he was acting as an unofficial reporter for NBC.

In those days when news was not the factor in radio that it is today we were thought of almost exclusively as an entertainment medium. Somehow the people I telephoned about news stories—on behalf of Lowell Thomas or the National Broadcasting Company—did not think of us as news gatherers. For some reason that a psychologist can explain better than I, the brakes that were so frequently applied when as a reporter on the *New York World* I telephoned people involved in news stories were seldom applied when I telephoned as a radio representative.

My telephone log of that period tells the story better than these few paragraphs can. That record—and it was meticulously kept because newspapers and press associations were constantly accusing us of stealing news—was my way of showing the boss how I was operating. His instruction had been brief and to the point: "Get all the news you can but don't swipe anything." (Stuff swiped from foreign newspapers didn't count. It was larceny only if the material was mooched from an American newspaper or press association.)

The success of the telephone technique was less puzzling where a long-distance call to a far-distant point was involved,

--not a mere long-distance call to Harwichport, Mass., but a call, let us say, to Shreveport, La. People get a thrill out of telephone calls from a really distant point and turn themselves inside out to be helpful.

Shreveport, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, is an actual example. When our Washington office notified us of the tornado that did so much damage in Louisiana in 1933, I telephoned the police chief at New Orleans. He wanted to be helpful but couldn't give me any news. "Shreveport seems to be hit the hardest," he said. "Call the police chief there and get the story from him. Tell him I was sure he'd be glad to help you out. Sure, mention my name."

So I called the Shreveport police chief and got the story from him. He was mighty glad we were interested in little Shreveport away up in New York. "And call back if there's anything further Mr. Thomas wants to know," was the chief's sign-off.

That night Lowell Thomas broadcast a story of the tornado that had several exclusive angles.

A look at the telephone log of that period would convince even the most skeptical that the NBC "news department" had the most remarkable reportorial staff in the history of newspaper or radio journalism. On it were governors, generals, district attorneys, prominent industrialists, well-known educators, police chiefs and others.

One winter day in 1932 the City Auditor in New Bedford, Mass., discovered that there wasn't enough money in the city treasury to pay the schoolteachers for another week's work. It was reported that the city's schools would be forced to close. In those days municipal bankruptcy was still a novelty and the story rated an "out front" play by newspapers everywhere.

The press was making a strenuous effort to get Charles S. Ashley, New Bedford's perpetual mayor, to make an official statement. The evening after the rumors of the town's alleged bankruptcy broke into print the city officials were huddled in the mayor's office for a conference with Ashley to see if, by transferring city funds from some other branch of the local

government, the schools couldn't be kept open. Local newsmen and reporters from the Boston papers and the wire services waited in the mayor's anteroom for the official statement. They got the statement at eight—the same one Lowell Thomas had announced over the air at 6:45.

The poor mayor! He had not consciously run out on the press. But Lowell Thomas had shown enough interest to telephone from New York and he thought the least he could do was to tell him what New Bedford planned to do. No, he hadn't given Thomas the *actual* statement, just the *gist* of it. Why, the statement had not yet been written when Thomas—or some chap from his office—telephoned.

It developed, however, that "gist" and "actual statement" were practically synonymous,—just a few differences in phraseology.

Early in May there was rioting and general disorder in Iowa in connection with a proposed strike of farmers, and Governor Herring, in an effort to restore order, had called out a unit of the National Guard. I put in a call for the Governor at Des Moines ("This is Lowell Thomas' office in New York calling Governor Herring") and in a few minutes I was in conversation with His Excellency.

The Governor was unable to give me the information I principally wanted,—i.e., how much need was there for the National Guard; would they be in charge indefinitely, etc.—in other words, how serious was the situation? But His Excellency did the next best thing to giving me the story. "Wait a minute," he said as he got the switchboard operator. Then I heard him say, "Please put this party through to General Tinley at Denison and tell the General it is O.K. to speak to him."

Pretty soon I was in conversation with the General, who gave me the whole story. One of his most important statements was that he expected to get his troops out of Denison (where the situation had been serious) on the following Monday and leave everything to the local authorities.

That evening Lowell Thomas was able to say:

"Iowa is still in a state of feverish excitement. Thousands

of the state's farmers flocked into Des Moines today and filled the pavilion at the State Fair Grounds. They were holding, and still are, a meeting to discuss whether they shall issue a call for a national farm strike.

"A telephone message from the office of Governor Clyde Herring to NBC brought the information that the proceedings were orderly. No vote on the strike is expected until tomorrow.

"Meanwhile at Denison, Iowa, a military court of inquiry under Major General Tinley of the National Guard is busy preparing evidence for the civil courts in the case of the outrage committed on Judge Bradley. General Tinley told us over the long-distance telephone that a hundred and twenty-six farmers are now under arrest and eighteen more are wanted. He said that all his troops, consisting of three hundred men, would be removed as soon as the civil authorities were in a position to take over. He expected this would be by the end of the week."

Certain groups in different parts of the country were trying to make an issue of the Governor's having called out the National Guard. We were the first to release the information that General Tinley, in whose hands the matter rested, thought the situation was well enough in hand to justify the removal of the troops by the end of the week.

Even after we carried the gist of what proved to be the official announcement, no one would touch it. In the prevailing excitement, considerable time elapsed before the formalities attendant upon making an official statement could be observed. The Governor's office checked with the General, the General checked back; everyone was concerned with the precise language to be used in a statement involving so serious a situation; and the immutable laws that make time fly were still operating.

God knows we were lucky—lucky in our discovery that key people considered us so important that we could crash through almost anywhere by telephone.

We didn't think we were as important as Governors seemed

to think we were—(that's a big secret and you mustn't tell a soul!)—but who were we to question anything or to tamper with our luck? Having made the discovery that we could get through by telephone in almost any given situation, we kept developing this method of gathering the news. We became bolder and bolder and only drew the line at telephoning the President of the United States. His staff, of course, were on our routine list.

In the summer of 1933 a big steamer that made the run from the mainland to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Islands grounded on a shoal off Naushon Island on a Sunday night shortly before nine o'clock. More than a thousand vacationists and excursionists were aboard. Newspaper and press service correspondents in southeastern Massachusetts were pressed for the story by their offices. None of them knew anything about it. Neither did the offices of the steamship company.

When Walter Winchell* carried the story on his newscast that night a lot of newspapermen were jumped on by their chiefs.

"Winchell gave the ship's position, name, number of passengers and what not ten minutes ago," was the common city-desk complaint. "Who the hell is covering that area down there for us, you or Winchell?"

The correct answer would have been neither,—just Schechter and that damned telephone again. He'd picked up a tip on the story from Radiomarine, grabbed the phone and checked full details with the radio operator at the RCA station in Chatham, Massachusetts, who was in direct wireless communication with the steamboat captain.

The personal-appearance device was another aid in those days of restricted news sources. Sometimes a story became news

* Winchell had been on the air for about a year, but he was not a news commentator in the sense that he is today. In those days he concentrated more on Broadway and Hollywood gossip than on news of the world, which was lucky for us during that trying period when the news situation was so tough. However, whenever we picked up a good straight news story on Sunday, which has been Winchell's radio day since 1932, we passed it on to him.

all over again if I could arrange to put the principals on the air so that they could tell their own stories.

There was, for instance, the story of the six boys from the Passaic Orphan Asylum who flagged an Erie Railroad express and saved it from certain disaster:

The boys were sitting in the recreation room of the institution listening to the radio. The ones who happened to be looking out of a window were greeted by a strange sight. They saw a section of wall that stretched along the track give way and collapse. They all got permission to go out and inspect what the ones at the window had seen and made the astonishing discovery that a hole ten feet deep had undermined the roadbed on which the tracks were laid.

The boys agreed that the next train—whenever it crossed that section of track—would almost certainly be wrecked. As they excitedly discussed the matter they heard the whistle of a train that would be passing over this track—or trying to—in a minute or two.

Quickly the boys worked out a plan. Each of them took off his raincoat—(it was drizzling and they had been required to put on these garments before leaving the institution)—and they dashed forward to meet the onrushing train. At first the engineer thought it was all a boyish prank, but then he decided to stop. Railroad officials later said the youngsters by their presence of mind had prevented what might have been a serious wreck.

Overnight the children were heroes. I telephoned an official of the orphanage and arranged to have the suddenly famous sextet tell their story in a radio interview with Lowell Thomas. In 1933, when interviews of this kind still had novelty, this stunt made a sensation and the story of the six orphans became news all over again.

An hour before the children arrived for the interview the studio was filled with newspaper photographers and newsreel men. Paradoxically enough, newspapers which would not let us use their news and kidded us as journalistic amateurs were perfectly willing to publish photographs showing NBC mikes

in connection with stories that showed how newsy we could be on our own! This was one reason why I felt there would eventually be a breakdown in the press-radio feud.

Much of the feeling against us was a whipped-up fury that represented the attitude of a few extremists. When newspapers that had given serious consideration to the campaign of the extremists to shut radio-program listings out of their columns were perfectly willing to give us a break when we had a story, I realized that the press was more interested in getting the news than in keeping vendettas alive.

With the thought in the back of my head that some day I would head a movement to have Alexander Graham Bell enshrined as an NBC saint, I continued to use his invention day and night until I had more "telephone friendships" than any ten people I knew.

I strove to cultivate a telephone friendship in practically every field that had a possible news tie-up. Earthquakes, for instance, had a way of happening and taking over the headlines every now and then; so I made a point of knowing Father Lynch, the eminent seismologist at Fordham University. Whenever his instruments showed a disturbance anywhere he would graciously telephone me. I would be guided by his advice as to whether enough seemed to be happening to warrant an NBC follow-up. I got several good stories through the courtesy of Father Lynch.

One of my New York Police Department tipsters telephoned one evening to tell me he had just heard that John Greer Hibben, President of Princeton University, had been killed in an automobile accident in New Jersey. I immediately telephoned the headquarters of the New Jersey State Police in Trenton and got a confirmation. That evening, about 40 minutes after the accident, Lowell Thomas was on the air with the story, which made a stir in educational circles all over the country.

There was no doubt that my Telephone News Service was working. It had developed to the point where some of my un-

official string men in different fields no longer waited for me to telephone them. They telephoned me!

I paid off in tickets to broadcasts. Radio was still pretty new to most people and the chance to witness a broadcast was a novelty that few could resist. The demand for Rudy Vallee tickets was the greatest.

Broadcast tickets had regular ratings, and one of my jobs was to know enough not to pay off a cop who had given me a good tip with tickets to a chamber-music recital when it was obvious he would want to take the wife and kids to see something "popular." Vallee was the most popular and I never went anywhere without at least a dozen tickets to his next broadcast on my person.

Obviously, NBC was not claiming that I was covering the world by telephone, but the records show that it was possible to turn up a good deal of news. I was still being accused of stealing news, although I kept a careful record of the source of each story. This Frank Mason insisted upon, because of the ever-present threat of litigation.

To refresh my memory, I consulted the records and can cite many examples of the effectiveness of the news-gathering technique Mason and I had evolved. For instance, I had rounded up fifteen acceptable stories over the telephone for Lowell Thomas' broadcast at 6:45 on July 4, 1933. This is a good day to cite, as no afternoon papers were published,—and I was supposed to be helping myself to what I found in the P.M.'s. Of those fifteen stories which I had gathered by telephone, six appeared *the following morning* on the front page of the *New York Times*.

I repeated this check-up to see what the situation was on Labor Day of the same year when, again, there were no afternoon papers. Labor Day fell on September 4th that year. A check-up of the *New York Times* files (the only ones readily available) reveals that seven of the stories I had rounded up for Lowell Thomas' broadcast early that evening were good enough to be in the *Times* the following morning. Those stories were: the Florida hurricane; the Cuban revolt; the escape

and capture of the notorious outlaw Bailey, kidnaped of Ur-schel; the capture of the first man to break out of the Tombs in years; the Labor Day speeches of William Green, A. F. of L. president, and General Hugh Johnson, then NRA administrator; the story of President Roosevelt's fishing trip; and the Texas hurricane.

The same year the Italian Air Armada, headed by General Balbo, made its historic flight from Italy to the Chicago Exposition. The first stop was to be at Shediac, New Brunswick. When radiograms to ships at sea failed to elicit any vital information I telephoned Canadian Marconi, the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, the Canadian National Railways (whose publicity director is a good news source), and Canadian officials with whom I had established telephone friendships, and I was able to get enough information to keep ahead of the newspapers on this leg of the flight.

I also got a lucky break on the Cuban revolt of November, 1933, that resulted in the unseating of Machado, who subsequently fled to the United States. Jack O'Brine, then city editor of the *Havana Post*, the only paper in the city printed in English, acted as my correspondent. I kept in constant touch with him by telephone.

One day as I got Jack on the telephone, I heard a loud report. "What's that noise?" I asked.

"They're shooting right outside my window," he replied. "Hang on and I will stick the phone out the window so you can hear better." Jack added that if a man can't see a revolution he at least ought to be able to hear one.

A description of this telephone conversation with O'Brine made a swell item for Lowell Thomas' broadcast that night.

The recurrence of Lowell's name is due to the fact that he was practically our entire commentator "staff" in those days. With no established news sources open to us, we were not encouraging people to become commentators. Today the problem is getting the right people to broadcast the news.

During the summer of 1933 I telephoned a friend of mine in Washington who sometimes gave me tips on State Depart-

ment developments. He informed me that Claude Dawson, American consul in Barcelona, had been ordered to the Spanish island of Majorca to investigate some trouble there in which Americans were involved.

This information we announced briefly on Lowell Thomas' program. On August 18th we received a letter from Dawson saying that he had been listening to Thomas' program by short-wave in Barcelona when he heard the reference to himself. It left him puzzled and he thought there was some mistake. Then the next day his orders from the State Department arrived!

The state by state repeal of prohibition was one of the biggest stories of 1934. When we broadcast the news the day it appeared in the P.M.'s we were again accused of stealing it. I had some sources in Washington that were getting the news for me but unless I scored a scoop no one would believe that I had come by the information honestly. This made it necessary for me to redouble my efforts to scoop the press.

I telephoned an appeal to the best of my sources—an old colleague of mine on the *New York World* who now was publicity director for a group who were working to bring about repeal—and told him he would have to do better for me.

My friend's office in Washington was a clearing house for repeal information. I told him—for the tenth time but probably more tearfully than before—that the newspapers and press associations were trying to keep radio from getting *any* news. "Listen," I pleaded—and how my friend's telephone ear must have ached as I went on and on!—"I've got to get the news faster. When I trail the papers they say I'm lifting the stuff from their columns. Are you going to save the fair name of Schechter from dishonor or aren't you? There is only one way to do it. I've got to scoop 'em regularly. If I don't I'm a crook."

My friend thought it would be bad if I got too much advance information, so he put me on a diet of an occasional scoop. By beating the field every now and then on a few salient features of the repeal situation in this or that state, I estab-

lished that I had sources of my own and kept the newspaper bloodhounds off my trail.

Early in 1934 the notorious John Dillinger escaped from the jail at Crown Point, Ind., where he was being held. The story was improved by the fact that the sheriff was a woman—Lillian Holley.

I immediately telephoned Miss Holley. The old standby—("this is the office of Lowell Thomas in the National Broadcasting Company")—still worked and I had no trouble reaching the lady Sheriff. She answered questions freely and gave me her whole story. She was thrilled when I told her that a few hours later she would be able to hear Lowell Thomas tell the story she had just told me.

This NBC exclusive made quite an impression at the time.

One of my best telephone sources was the late Governor Ritchie of Maryland. He didn't wait for my calls. He telephoned me frequently to tell me about happenings in his state that he considered of general interest. Always he emphasized the fact that he wanted no personal publicity,—and he meant it.

Once Ritchie telephoned at length about a Maryland lynching. Without trying to whitewash his state he gave me information designed to show how quickly the authorities had stepped in. He was frankly striving to keep Maryland from becoming known as "a lynching state." This was his candid aim, but he did not ask me to spill any local-booster stuff. "Just make it plain," he said, "that we got on the job fast. When we found it necessary to send troops to quell riots we did so. And we made an honest effort to round up the guilty."

My principal reliance was on the telephone, but the radiogram stood me in good stead, too.

This means of communication was ideal for reaching ships' captains. In fact, after a while I was known to scores of them and got valuable assistance from them in covering transatlantic and other over-ocean flights. My coverage of flights of this type by Wiley Post, Codos and Rossi, Jimmy Mattern, Darius and Girenas (the Lithuanian flyers), the Mollisons, and others, was helped tremendously by helpful replies to radiograms

asking for information about the sighting of airplanes. We got several important breaks through such contacts.

When on January 17, 1934, Lowell Thomas carried a detailed story about the great Peruvian floods, many people in the newspaper world were mystified. It was known that there was a disastrous flood in Peru—one of the worst in South American history—but details were lacking because it was impossible to contact Lima.

When I heard about the disaster I tried unsuccessfully to telephone Lima. So I made a local call for a change. I telephoned Bill Van Dusen, publicity director for Pan American Airways. I kept a complete file of airline data, and the record showed that Peru was a Pan-American stop.

Van Dusen knew about the floods, but like everyone else had no additional information. I asked him to see if he could get in communication with the airport at Lima by short-wave radio and find out what was happening.

Van Dusen said, "We ought to be able to get in touch with them unless something has happened to the airport. We can effect a relay to Brownsville, Texas, and they can complete the relay to Lima."

Luck was with me. Within a few hours the airport manager radioed back a complete story of the Peruvian disaster.

When the accused Negroes were on trial in the famous Scottsboro case, I kept in constant touch with the situation by telephone. While the jury was out I even telephoned Judge W. W. Callahan and had several conversations with him. He told me only such things as he properly could, and while nothing unusual resulted from these talks, the Judge succeeded in quickening me to the thought on some possibilities that improved our coverage.

Sometimes I used the telephone to get additional slants on some minor news story that could be developed into amusing radio copy if enough personal touches could be added by telephoning the principals.

Such a story was the one that involved a minor tiff in

December, 1933, between Comptroller-General McCarl and Henry Morgenthau over the fact that Morgenthau when he was Governor of the Farm Credit Administration found the Washington summers unbearable without a showerbath and had one installed in his office. McCarl questioned the item. A showerbath for Morgenthau, he contended, was Morgenthau relief, not farm relief.

I spoke to both McCarl and Morgenthau over the telephone about this Gilbertian situation and built up a little radio piece for Lowell Thomas—and it attracted a lot of attention—around the idea that the burning question in Washington was: “Who pays for Henry’s bath?”

In those strange days of the press-radio war I considered the telephone the greatest invention the world had ever known.

II

Egyptian Headache

A BROADCAST of the coronation of King Farouk of Egypt sounded like a great idea.

I said to myself, here is colorful pageantry, picturesque ceremonies and a quality of keen interest in hearing a king tell America how it feels to become No. 1 Man in the historic land of the Pharaohs.

The King-to-be spoke enough English to make himself understood to an American audience.

The interest in royalty is eternal and the coronation of Farouk had all the earmarks of a hit show.

I hope the reader will pardon my referring to a coronation as a "show." This is the right approach to a broadcast of this kind. If it's a good show it's bound to be good radio. The fact that a program is history is not sufficient justification. Dull history makes poor listening and does not deserve anything more than a brief bulletin.

When you decide to make a major radio feature of an event you do so because you believe you have a good show. So early in January of 1938 I wound up in Egypt, expecting that I was going to plan and direct the broadcast of the age.

The coronation of Farouk fooled me completely. From the radio standpoint it proved to be anything but a good show. In fact, it was a complete flop.

I had had no guarantee that the King would broadcast but there had been sufficient assurance to justify my belief it could be arranged. In radio you get out of the habit of operating on the strength of absolute guarantees. You'd miss a lot of good bets if you always played it safe.

While I hadn't counted on Farouk for a Demosthenes ora-

tion or a Gettysburg Address, I was reasonably sure that the new king would utter a Few Well-chosen Words.

A king does not have to say a great deal to command attention. To an American radio audience the novelty of an Egyptian king speaking English is enough to command attention.

But the King ran out on me. First I thought mike-fright was responsible, then I wondered whether his cabinet hadn't decided that it was a bit too early for him to deliver a "Hello, America." Maybe the King had some smart advisers.

Anyhow, out of one of their confidential huddles came the final decision to turn down "the American gentleman." And candor compels me to admit that the huddlers would not have been far wrong in advising Farouk that perhaps his first duty as King of Egypt was not to provide a radio holiday for America.

The trouble is that a fellow usually thinks of those things when it's too late.

I did my best to get one of the King's titled somebodies to pinch-hit, but all that resulted was a series of new huddles which resulted in the same answer. They would like to accommodate "the American gentleman" but for a number of reasons—and these kept multiplying until I wondered what I was doing in Egypt—the answer was No.

My big coronation story finally simmered down to a descriptive broadcast by Joe Levy of the *New York Times*. Joe did a swell job but even so I was forced to admit I could have arranged something like that from my office in New York.

What, I kept asking myself, was Schechter doing in Egypt? How would he justify his expense account? In radio, as in every other field, you expect to lay an egg once in a while, but I did feel that I had come a long way to do it.

I got busy trying to figure out a second broadcast from Egypt that would atone for the anticlimactic coronation,—if possible, a "first" of some kind. And then I hit upon a really good idea,—a broadcast from the pyramids. No such broadcast had ever taken place. As far as the authorities knew, there had been no previous attempt to arrange such a broadcast. If any-

one had attempted it, I was assured, he was probably somewhere in a padded cell.

Why didn't I get out of Egypt and tackle something easy, like persuading Mussolini to sing a few snatches of opera for the Great Unseen Audience; or why not tackle Hitler for an impassioned defense of democracy, with a few heils for President Roosevelt?

A little playful exaggeration didn't discourage me. I was still licking my wounds after the coronation fiasco and was determined to make my Egyptian trip mean something. After all, the idea of a broadcast from the pyramids gave me a real objective. (In referring to "the pyramids" I mean of course the group at Gizeh near Cairo, which takes in the Great Pyramid of Cheops, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. There are as many pyramids in Egypt as there are Indian mounds in America. But naturally it was the biggest and most impressive of these—the one which King Cheops started about 3700 B.C. as a suitable monument to mark his mortal remains—that I wanted to use as the base for my broadcast.)

I would have to get some good advice, for my knowledge of Egypt was limited. I had arrived with a mental picture of an exciting land in which a lot of picturesquely clad people named Amenhatek, Rameses, Amenemhet, Fuad, Pharaoh and Tut-an-so-forth paraded up and down palm-fringed paths beside the River Nile. I also seemed to recall vaguely that once a year the river rose and flooded its valley, and that the capital of this strange exotic land was Cairo. This practically exhausted my knowledge of Egypt.

What I needed was some practical assistance from a man who could understand my technical problems and at the same time advise me on how a guy might try to unwind those python coils of red tape that had already squeezed the life out of my coronation idea and might do the same thing to the "first" on which I had now thoroughly sold myself. My idea was growing in my mind and I was now thinking of a comprehensive radio program from the base of the Great Pyramid, with a few trimmings tossed in, such as a supplementary broadcast staged in-

side the great stone pile from the tomb which held the sarcophagus and mortal remains of King Cheops.

It was at this point that I discovered Ed Chorlian, an enterprising American not many years out of Princeton, who was employed by the Egyptian Radio Marconi Station.

Chorlian startled me by beginning with a tribute to a Harvard man, Dr. George A. Reisner, who had been delving in the tombs of the Pharaohs for Harvard University for forty years. Reisner, he said, was the man who, when I got a green light from the authorities, could do more to insure the success of my program than anyone else in the land. He was one of the great figures of Egyptology, a scholar who was not academic, a man who would co-operate, and a favorite with the natives. Here was something real. When a Princeton man lavishly praises a Harvard man, that's news,—the kind of news you can't ignore.

But obviously Dr. Reisner represented the Second Phase. Phase One was what interested me at the moment, and that involved the business of getting permission to stage the broadcast. The Reisner tip was important, but the Egyptologist would not click into place until one of those Cairo officials who automatically say No to anything that puzzles them or involves thinking about something new, decided to say yes for a change.

Chorlian thought the matter over and suggested that perhaps the best move I could make next would be to call on Sidik Bey, the head of the Egyptian Tourist Bureau. After much explaining I managed to arrange an appointment with the important gentleman.

It would be inaccurate to say that Sidik Bey was not co-operative; but you can't co-operate with what you don't understand, and Sidik Bey had only the vaguest ideas about radio. For radio in Egypt consists solely of addresses, propaganda and phonograph records.

I was so determined to get what I was after that I probably gave him the impression I thought there was some important need for the broadcast—some international political situation

that it would remedy. He seemed a little puzzled as to why the Egyptian Government should go to the trouble of telling America all about the pyramids by radio, when all the school-books told about it, as did also any number of newsreels and travel films.

The more I talked to this gentleman the more I seemed to puzzle him. Motion pictures had a definite place in his scheme of things, but radio did not seem to mean anything to him at all. He was afraid the broadcast from the pyramids could not be arranged. He was very polite and hoped I would understand.

I did not understand—because his only reason for thinking it could not be done was that it had never been done. He mentioned this several times. I could see that I was in the presence of a precedent-lover and that I would get precisely nowhere with Sidik Bey.

It was not until I was leaving that he casually mentioned what seemed to him a minor detail—that even if he had favored this radio business he couldn't have done much about it, since the pyramids were within the province of the Director of Antiquities, Dr. Drioton.

It was quickly apparent when I called on Dr. Drioton that he would be glad to talk the matter over with me—but only in French. My advisers had neglected to tell me that the Director of Antiquities was a Frenchman who spoke practically no English. When I spoke English, even very slowly and distinctly, Dr. Drioton merely wore a bewildered look. But when I resorted to my own particular brand of French, based largely on an exhaustive reading of menus, he seemed completely baffled.

The Director apparently operated on the theory that if you don't know what a man is saying the safest answer is No. After the first No, I laboriously put together my idea of a French sentence that would convey my suspicion that the Director of Antiquities didn't know what I was requesting. To my consternation and horror his reply was that he did understand and that he wanted no part of it,—or that was what I gathered from his phrasing.

Perspiringly, I put together some more alleged French sentences calculated to make the Director of Antiquities see what a splendid proposal I was making. The Director wasted no further sentences on me. He confined himself to a succession of monosyllabic negatives. I finally got the idea and left.

For want of a better idea I decided to tackle Sidik Bey again. As I walked across to his office, I tried to put together a powerful argument that would persuade him to do something with Dr. Drioton. It was a little difficult to concentrate on the persuasive harangue I was about to deliver because of the ragamuffins that followed me, with palms extended, crying "Backsheesh."

Having succumbed to a similar plea on the way over, and having exhausted my supply of native coins, I had no more backsheesh to offer. Unable to shake off my pursuers I stopped and got some change, and by the time I had accomplished the pay-off I had lost the thread of my weighty meditations and was not quite sure what I was going to say to Sidik Bey.

I had plenty of difficulty in arranging another session with this gentleman who obviously was not eager to see me again. Finally, impatient with the subordinates who tried to put me off, I fairly burst into Sidik Bey's office, and before he could get his bearings I bellowed a lot of questions at him.

I am afraid I was a bit rough. He seemed almost frightened as I roared my questionnaire: Did he want people to visit Egypt or didn't he? Did he have the sense to know that a broadcast dramatizing the wonders of the pyramids was the sort of thing that would make people want to visit Egypt? Did he want a superb piece of publicity for the country whose Tourist Bureau he headed, or didn't he?

As I hammered out my set of questions, with my fist accenting each phrase, I kept approaching closer and closer to Sidik Bey, and it may be that he got the impression I was going to sock him.

Sidik Bey, seeking to placate me, suggested that I see Dr. Drioton again, but with an interpreter. He had gathered that my French was none too good, and perhaps an interpreter

would help greatly on my next visit to the Director of Antiquities. Joe Levy of the *New York Times*, who speaks French like a member of the French Academy, agreed to act in this capacity.

All my confidence returned as I advanced on Dr. Drioton again, this time with a man who would make it perfectly plain that my proposal was Egypt's opportunity of a lifetime. Striding across the plaza, the cries of Backsheesh no longer disturbed me; in fact, I felt large and expansive and noble and beneficent as I handed out the rest of my change.

Everyone knows that comfortable feeling one has in the presence of a person who is expected to sign on the dotted line. It was with this comfortable feeling that I sat down as Joe Levy took over in his flawless French.

This time the Director of Antiquities improved upon his first turndown, which was largely a series of No's. Joe Levy's linguistic talents now made it possible for me to know that the reason why Dr. Drioton was opposed to the idea was that he considered it "a lot of foolishness."

Joe and I entered a lengthy appeal, but His Honor refused to be budged from his position that a broadcast from the Great Pyramid was foolishness. Maybe the Doctor was right, but it seemed to me that only a stubborn ass would refuse to let Schechter make the pyramids famous.

Then I remembered how efficacious yelling had proved in the case of Sidik Bey, so I let out my vocal cords a few notches. However, the Director of Antiquities did not scare easily; in fact, he seemed a bit bored. However, being anxious to get rid of us, he suggested that we call on Dr. Sellim Hassan Bey.

I was suspicious of getting the run-around. Who was this new Bey who was now being introduced into the picture?

Dr. Drioton explained that Dr. Sellim Hassan Bey was the Assistant Director of Antiquities. The whole business now even made less sense than before: if we couldn't get anywhere with the Director of Antiquities, what was the sense of appealing to the Assistant Director of Antiquities?

It developed that Dr. Drioton was merely being philo-

sophic about the whole matter. His assistant, Sellim Hassan Bey, spoke English, and the Director of Antiquities had evidently decided that one way of ducking the Great Pyramid Broadcast Crisis was to let me talk the matter over, in English, with his aide and make a sale if I could.

I had plenty of time to think over what I was going to tell Dr. Drioton's right bower, because it developed that Sellim Hassan Bey was "in another part of the desert with his diggings." As the desert is a pretty big place and as "another part" might mean anywhere at all, there was nothing to do but to await the return of Bey No. 2.

Another whole day passed, in the course of which I did plenty of mental nail-biting. But Sellim Hassan Bey was my only resource, and I was willing to wait twenty-four hours for him. Fortunately he turned up the next day.

While it was a bit of an overstatement to say that the Assistant Director of Antiquities spoke English, I was forced to admit that I found his English more understandable than Dr. Drioton had found my French, and we got along famously,—in fact, almost too famously. Egypt, I began to feel, was wholly populated by extremists. There were the Sidik Beys whom you couldn't impress at all, and then there were the Sellim Hassan Beys who were too receptive. The Assistant Director not only thought the broadcast was a swell idea but was firmly convinced that he himself should make a speech of not less than thirty minutes.

It was now my turn to use the word No. But I did it discreetly, for after all, Sellim Hassan Bey was in my camp, and I dealt with him as gently as possible. My method of turning down his suggestion that he regale the American listening public with a half-hour of his bad English was to suggest a compromise, so I told him he would not be allowed to speak for thirty minutes but he would be permitted to say two hundred words. This was much better strategy than telling him that he could speak for only two minutes. Two hundred is a pretty big number and he seemed pleased with the idea that he was going to deliver that many words.

To put it mildly, he was greatly pleased. He said a lot of wonderful things about me, America, himself and radio—they were all great institutions, especially himself. He started to grow autobiographical but I broke that up fast.

Sellim's enthusiasm reached new heights when he learned that I hoped to get Dr. Reisner to expert the program and that he would be on the same broadcast as the famous Egyptologist.

I was about to break up this new burst of enthusiasm when it occurred to me that the Assistant Director was acting as if everything was now settled, whereas I did not actually have the O.K. of his boss.

Needless to say I did not tamper with my luck. I, too, acted as though I considered everything settled. After all, maybe that is how things are done in Egypt: the boss turns you down, his assistant says Yes and everything is hunky-dory.

In fact, that is how things worked out, for Sellim Hassan Bey's endorsement of the idea proved sufficient.

By the next day, the Assistant Director of Antiquities had become very businesslike. He asked some questions that actually had something to do with the proposed broadcast. He knew, of course, that I planned to have the broadcast originate at the Great Pyramid. He saw nothing wrong in my plan to place a mike at the base of the Great Pyramid, but he seemed disturbed—in fact, I might more accurately say that he blanched—when I added that I also planned to place a microphone in the tomb of Cheops inside the pyramid, where the sarcophagus of the ancient king had reposed for centuries.

This sounded like sacrilege to Sellim Hassan Bey. My answer, which I delivered with a great show of conviction, was that we had broadcast on several occasions from Arlington Cemetery in Washington, where some of the greatest American Presidents are buried. If the Assistant Director had asked me what the Presidents of the United States had to do with the Kings of Egypt he would have floored me. But he didn't ask me, and once again surface reasoning won the day.

One of the favorite stories of almost any dragoman who

takes you on an impersonally conducted tour of the pyramids—and nothing could be more impersonal than the memorized jargon of these desert parrots—has to do with the villainy of King Cheops, who built his colossal pyramid by the forced labor of the people. Only that morning, while I was waiting for Sellim Hassan Bey to show up, a dragoman had told me, in a dull monotone, how this heartless ruler, in order to provide money and labor for building the pyramid to end pyramids, had shut the temples, suspended sacrifices and ruined the harvest by keeping a hundred thousand men at work in three-month relays.

I checked myself just as I was about to point out that perhaps it would not be sacrilege to broadcast from the tomb of the earliest known Simon Legree. This observation might have been just logical enough to get me into trouble in a land where you can get much further by not being logical.

Within a week, the broadcast had so many official blessings that there was no longer any doubt it would take place. I decided to stage it for reception in New York on a Sunday afternoon and wired the New York office for time. I would have preferred to arrange for reception in the United States in the evening, but that would have meant broadcasting from the desert at two, three, or four o'clock in the morning, as there is an eight-hour difference in time.

I decided to broadcast from Cairo on Sunday night at eleven, which meant reception in New York at three o'clock in the afternoon. Afternoon time on a Sunday, especially during the winter months, yields as big an audience in the United States as does evening time.

My next job was to make my arrangements with Dr. Reisner. The Egyptologist proved to be a charming gentleman of about seventy,—short, stocky, cheerful, energetic. The lenses of his spectacles were the thickest I had ever seen. I understood glare of the sun reflected on the sands of the desert had done something to this great scholar's eyes, but you would not suspect it from his buoyant manner. In fact, Dr. Reisner gave the impression that poking in the sands for the priceless relics

of a vanished civilization was the greatest fun in the world, and I don't doubt for a moment that he found it so.

Dr. Reisner quickly fell in with my plans. In fact, the whole idea intrigued him, and he readily agreed to broadcast and to accept the responsibility for the Egyptological accuracy of our program.

Here was a scholar after my own heart. Less and less does one find an academic view of radio in the world of professors. But there are still quite a few who, in dealing with the phenomenon of radio, pick it up with tongs and survey it from all angles as though trying to decide whether it is something that is going to last or just a fad like Mah Jong or "Confucius Say" stories.

I explained to Dr. Reisner that the more showmanship we could get into our broadcast the more interesting it would be to our listeners. He responded by asking how he could help.

I inquired whether there were any songs that the natives were in the habit of singing while working in the excavations. He scratched his head and remembered a peculiar chant sung in rhythm with the up and down swing of the blunt pickaxes that are used by the excavation crews. Dr. Reisner explained that there was an excellent reason for using blunt-edge pickaxes,—a statue or a tablet struck with one of these blunt pickaxes might be scraped or scratched, but the possibility of actual breakage was reduced.

So far so good.

III

Come In, Cairo

A FEW days later I called on Dr. Reisner. His headquarters, a series of plain wooden shacks, suggested a mining camp in the bing-bang days of the Old West.

Harvard-trained Steve Smith acted as the eminent Egyptologist's principal aide. A small group of other young men from Harvard rounded out the staff. Lest the reader think Dr. Reisner was giving *The Crimson*, as it is called, all the best of it at the expense of budding young archæologists from other universities, let me point out that the Doctor's unit, which was known as the Harvard Excavations, was a Harvard operation. The desert is a big place and there was plenty of room for Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, and the rest, if they wanted to stake out claims.

I had called on Dr. Reisner to arrange for a rehearsal of his chanters. He shouted something in Egyptian and a native foreman came running over. Then the foreman shouted something and a crew of about forty Egyptian laborers, all carrying the familiar blunted pickaxes, came trotting over.

Dr. Reisner made another of his mysterious Egyptian remarks and the group went into an eerie chant, chopping away at the earth as they sang. This particular chant was seldom heard except when these laborers were at work and the Doctor thought they might as well do some pickaxe-swinging as they sang, to insure a reproduction of the whole effect as it was heard daily at excavations in different parts of Egypt.

The effect was great. When I told Dr. Reisner that this was tops in local color he repeated my compliment to the group and soon it was practically impossible to stop them. They put in extra touches for my benefit, and their enthusiasm increased

when they learned that they were to receive ten piastres each for their services. This was about fifty cents in American money, or the approximate equivalent of a week's work to an ordinary Egyptian excavation worker.

Pleased with my desert audition, I got busy on other arrangements that had to be made. The radio-station people in Cairo were most co-operative, and through them I arranged the whole technical set-up. They gave me the use of their mobile unit and the services of an engineer, who accompanied me to the pyramids, where we worked out all the details.

The management of the Cairo station suggested that I include in the broadcast a talk by Professor W. B. Emery, University of Liverpool archæologist, who was in charge of an excavation at Sakara, and I agreed. The genesis of this suggestion was interesting. Announcement had been made in New York by the National Broadcasting Company that we were arranging the first broadcast from the pyramids; this was carried on page 1 of the London newspapers; the British Broadcasting Company promptly made arrangements to carry the program. Naturally England wanted a British Egyptologist on the program. So I looked into Emery's qualifications and okayed him as an expert on King Tut.

My broadcast was now taking shape, and I was beginning to feel cheerful about being in Egypt. I went to bed and slept soundly, satisfied that all was for the best in the best possible world.

I was awakened from this comfortable mental situation by the alarming information that Dr. Drioton wanted to see me on "an urgent matter." I left for his office prepared for anything,—perhaps the Director of Antiquities had decided to call off the broadcast. That would be just about the limit, and I decided I would put up a terrific battle. The furious windstorms of the desert that raised blinding clouds of sand would be as nothing compared with the gale I would start in Dr. Drioton's office if he tried to sidetrack my project at the last minute. I would raise a tornado that might blow the Director

of Antiquities himself, and all the furniture, right out the window.

What I learned when I reached Drioton's office was not as bad as it might have been, but it was bad enough. The Doctor wanted to go on the air! He wanted to be on my program! This development, I felt, rated first-page in the International Goofiness Sweepstakes.

I explained to Dr. Drioton, through an interpreter, that it would be a signal honor to present the Director of Antiquities to the American listening audience, but that as he could only speak French, less than one-tenth of one percent of that audience would know what it was all about.

The Director of Antiquities persisted, but I had to be firm. It was a delicate situation, for he could have killed the broadcast right then and there if he had wanted to. I put a lot of emphasis on the fact that everything was now in readiness; that Reisner and Emery—both influential—were enthusiastically co-operating to make the broadcast a success.

I was relieved when Dr. Drioton decided he would not upset my plans. But he made no effort to conceal his disappointment. I reminded him that his Department would be ably represented by his assistant, Professor Sellim Hassan Bey, then hurried off to keep another engagement with Dr. Reisner.

Next morning I had a telephone call from Sellim Hassan. He wanted to read me his speech. Would I drop in at his office?

When I arrived, he handed me his manuscript. I could tell at a glance that it was too long. I asked him to read it, and pulled out my stop-watch to time him. He had never seen a stop-watch before and mine fascinated him. He picked it up, examined it closely and asked several questions about it before he started reading.

The speech was written in bad English, which was made to seem worse by Sellim Hassan Bey's thick foreign accent and his habit of further obscuring his meaning by emphasizing the wrong words and syllables. Prepositions were among the words that he invested with verbal italics, and the result was most

confusing. It was unfortunate, because he really had some interesting things to say.

When he had finished reading, I told him he had used up ten minutes. Actually it had taken only six minutes, but it seemed like more. I went over his text, cut it, and rewrote parts of it. Then I asked him to read it again. This time it took two and a half minutes.

"Just right," I said, looking at my stop-watch, "it runs five minutes."

He seemed a bit puzzled when I said this, but before he could voice any doubts I said, "You've got a good snappy talk now. I'll underscore the words you should emphasize."

As I prepared to leave, he asked if I had any additional instructions or advice. "Yes," I said, "read your speech over several times. It will improve with practice. And gargle your throat."

The word "gargle" floored him. When I explained what it meant, he thanked me and promised to do it.

Two days later Joe Levy telephoned me. "What," asked Joe, "have you done to the Assistant Director of Antiquities for the Kingdom of Egypt?"

I said, "Nothing. Why?"

Joe replied, "His family tells me he has done nothing for two days except read his speech and gargle his throat. He's been over the speech about four thousand times and has just about gargled his larynx into a decline."

Realizing that Sellim Hassan Bey was carrying out my advice too literally, I sent word to him that he could now relax, until program time.

Next I had a conference with the engineering staff of the radio station to make final technical arrangements. The telephone line nearest the pyramids was the switchboard of the Mena House, the famous hotel that practically has Egypt's contribution to the Seven Wonders in its backyard.

The manager of the hotel, an affable Swiss gentleman named Herling, readily saw the value of our broadcast and helped us make our technical arrangements with so complete

an absence of red tape that I momentarily forgot we were in the land of the Pharaohs.

Mr. Herling provided stenographic facilities and insisted that we take over a fine suite facing the desert for our rehearsals. He put himself at our disposal, and when I thanked him for his kindness merely said, "This is going to interest people in Egypt and the least I can do is co-operate." A smart hotel man certainly can simplify life for a radio-news executive who has wandered into a strange land.

While I was arranging things in these new quarters, Mr. Herling told me about an American dowager who had been there the week before. She had asked for a suite with "a good view of the desert." Two days later she complained about the suite Herling had selected for her, pointing out that the pyramids obstructed the view.

With Herling facilitating my operations, I arranged with the Cairo phone company for a telephone line connecting with my mobile broadcasting unit. The distance was only a quarter of a mile, and I figured this would not be expensive. The work of installing the line was to begin early the following day.

Next morning I went out to see how the telephone men were making out. I got weak around the knees as I saw a mob of 150 laborers erecting poles and stringing wire. It seemed that as far as the eye could see, and stretching on into the wastes of infinity, there were workmen putting up poles at my expense.

"By God," I exclaimed, "I've hired a whole army!"

Later I learned that the wages of the whole crew cost about the same as a couple of linemen would cost in America.

The job of erecting the poles proved simple. The natives just poked 'em into the sand and, being pyramid-minded, braced them with pyramids improvised with rocks brought up in trucks. After each pole was solidly planted, a skirted native would shinny up it and hook up the wire. This job took all of Saturday, but by the end of the day the wire was entirely set up and connected.

When we had run another wire up the side of the Great Pyramid and into Cheops' Tomb, our technical arrangements were complete.

Thousands of natives gathered for the final rehearsal on Sunday afternoon. The local papers, which had been running stories daily, had announced this rehearsal and had brought out the crowd. A group of newspaper men also turned up to write stories for American, British, Egyptian and Arabic newspapers. What seemed to impress them most was the distance this broadcast would travel by the time it reached the United States. First, it would travel eight miles from the pyramids to Cairo; from there it would go by short-wave to London; and from London it would be relayed to New York,—a total of about seven thousand miles.

Our rehearsal went off smoothly. Not until it took place did I realize how good a show we had built. Our chanters set the mood perfectly. Informed that they would be paid for this rehearsal, in addition to the main bout at eleven that night, they tried to set a new record for mood-creation. Spookiness suggestive of specters haunting the tombs of the Pharaohs emerged from the half-sung, half-sobbed mumbo-jumbo of my local-color boys.

My "cast"—which, as it finally emerged, consisted of Dr. Reisner, his daughter, Professor Sellim Hassan Bey, Ed Chorlian, Joe Levy, Professor Emery, and Steve Smith at the base of the Great Pyramid, plus Announcer Rex Keating of Egyptian State Broadcasting inside the Tomb of Cheops—carried on beautifully after my chanters had set the mood.

Chorlian opened the show as the commingled chanting and pickaxe-swinging "faded." (To get a real "excavation effect" we had the Egyptian workmen strike the rock surface at the base of the Great Pyramid.) Chorlian "came in" with a brief explanation that Egypt was the land of excavations, with expeditions everywhere seeking to find the buried remnants of a vanished civilization. This provided an opportunity to explain what the chanting-and-pickaxe effect signified.

Then, briefly, he gave a picture of the Great Pyramid, so

that anyone could visualize the actual scene he was describing. For the more poetic-minded, Chorlian gave a vivid close-up of Cheops' great monument standing out in dark outlines against the dim lights of the domes and minarets of Cairo, City of the Nile. For his more prosaic listeners he tried to interpret the Great Pyramid in terms of figures, always an effective way of getting millions of listeners to grasp the scope and immensity of a given phenomenon.

Summing up his "figure picture," he said: "This pyramid, constructed some four thousand years ago, is the most imposing tomb of some seventy strung along the desert's edge. When originally built it reared itself 482 feet. Time and the phenomenon known as 'settling' have done things to the Great Pyramid, and today it reaches only 451 feet from the center of its base to its tip, which makes it about half as tall as the RCA Building in Radio City. But the Great Pyramid to this day still remains the largest 'single-bulk building' in the world. Thousands and thousands of serfs worked some twenty years to complete it. Eighty-five million cubic feet of stone were pulled up the Nile to build this tomb for a king. It covers thirteen acres at the base. And that's lots bigger than many a Connecticut farm. If this pyramid were pulled down, and the stones used to construct a wall two feet high and a foot wide, it would stretch about 2700 miles, or about the distance from New York to California. So you see I'm not joking when I tell you the Great Pyramid is really big."

At the conclusion of Chorlian's opening remarks, Dr. Reisner gave a good human-interest picture of the significance of the Great Pyramid and its lesser brothers and tied this up neatly with his excavations in Egypt covering a period of forty years. He gave the young man's angle, and showed that there were opportunities in this field for younger men who were interested "in scientific methods of excavation that brought to light factual information that helped record history more accurately." In fact, he made it plain that his principal interest, after a long career in the desert, was in training young men to

carry on his work; and he got a quiet emotional quality into this exposition of his main purpose.

Dr. Reisner's eyes having almost failed him, it would be difficult for him to read script by such light as we could provide on the desert during the actual broadcast that night. So he had memorized his lines! Not a word had he said about this problem. In fact, I didn't realize that the Doctor had such a problem until I inquired why he had committed his lines to memory.

The old stalwart was followed by his daughter, Mary Reisner, an accomplished Egyptologist in her own right, and, like her distinguished father, the author of several books. She supplied what, in the hard-boiled terminology of radio, is known as "the woman's angle." She did it cleverly, too. There were modern overtones and touches of human interest in her stories of the vanished queens of Egypt. Vividly she reconstructed the home life of the king from whose monument we were broadcasting. With quiet humor she told stories of intrigue in Cheops' harem and the complications attendant upon living in an age that accepted the principal of polygamy.

The Great Sphinx is so close to the Pyramid of Cheops that it is commonly accepted as a sideshow to the huge triangular structure's "seventh wonderfulness"—as someone has called it. At any rate, it is part of the same picture; and as Sellim Hassan Bey is an authority on the Sphinx I had assigned him to what we were calling "the Sphinx angle" for want of a better designation, and it was to Egypt's Great Stone Face that he confined his remarks.

Now that we had pared down the Assistant Director's speech to two and a half minutes, it had snap and tang. At first I thought his heavy foreign accent would prove a handicap. In a longer speech this would have been true. Somehow his accent seemed to add something that was flavorful, a sort of exotic vocal seasoning. His five thousand or more preliminary readings of his speech had helped him master the phonetics, which had been indicated in his text, and that, plus his strange accent, made him the very breath and soul of old Egypt.

Professor Emery, Joe Levy and Steve Smith acquitted themselves well. In the limited amount of time to which they were confined they made amusing, instructive and colorful points not made by the others and helped "build" the show.

Joe Levy helped the entertainment value of the program by introducing some good-natural kidding. Said Joe in part:

"What do Americans do at the pyramids? They come to look at them, of course. But they subordinate the historical significance to the all-important business of getting on a camel for a ride around the base. Boy, that's the big thrill. Then they have their pictures taken to show the folks back home. Of course, the pyramids are always in the background, featured not nearly as much as the guide with his picturesque tarboosh and gown.

"Americans are more adventuresome than other people who visit here. They are more apt to climb to the top; women as well as men. Many, of course, go inside to see the Chamber of Cheops, from which you just heard a part of this broadcast.

"Some Americans ask unusual questions. The other day a guide was telling his party the pyramids were five thousand years old. A dear old lady interrupted, 'Do you mean 5000 B.C. or A.D.?'

"Other Americans think the commercial potentialities of the pyramids should be exploited. One movie firm wanted to buy the right to build an electric billboard for advertising purposes. Another wanted to build an escalator leading to a proposed nightclub atop the pyramids. Another wanted to run a bridge tournament up there—as a novelty."

Our rehearsal wound up with my desert stooges resuming their eerie chanting and pickaxe-swinging. For about twenty minutes after our rehearsal was over this chorus, evidently enjoying their radio trial-flight, kept chanting and mauling the ground near the Great Pyramid's base with what the newspaper crowd were now calling "those blunt instruments."

A Cairo police official (an Englishman whose name I have forgotten) had been watching this performance with a baleful eye. Finally, no longer able to restrain himself, he came tearing

over, exclaiming as he reached me, "I say, would you mind calling off your men before they chop the pyramid loose?"

So I called off my desert Volga boatmen.

That night, about a week after I had got my preliminaries under way, we put on our show for the radio audience. It ran twenty minutes and was a much better show than if it had run thirty minutes, which seemed unavoidable at the time and which I had struggled to prevent. Usually, the more you cut a program the better it gets.

As a result of the build-up the broadcast had had in the local newspapers, a crowd of ten thousand swarmed to the desert that night to see and hear us go on the air. It was really quite a sight.

Dragomans did a marvelous tourist business that evening. These persuasive local guides could not overlook an opportunity like this.

Some of their versions of what was to take place were nothing if not fantastic. No wonder they did a land-office business. A broadcast from the Great Pyramid is enough to excite the curiosity of the average person, but when these highly imaginative guides, all members of the Tall Story Club, added their fanciful touches, it became a better story than ever. Some of them, I understand, gave their accounts of what was to take place some spiritualistic aspects, and I'm not sure the boys didn't pass the word around that the spirit of Cheops was to be invoked and asked to say a few words to the radio audience.

At any rate, I realize now how shortsighted I was in not getting hold of the head of the organization of dragomans and making a deal to split with the boys. It was being said that my broadcast would be responsible for their doing a bigger business than they had done in years and I should have let myself in on the ground floor.

I dragged this idea into the conversation that night until I found someone who took me seriously, and I expect someone to proposition me if I ever again put on a broadcast from Egypt.

We received a swell press on this broadcast. The *Egyptian*

Mail, published in Cairo for the English-speaking trade, gave us a four-column story on February 8, 1938, that carried this head:

MILLIONS HEAR BROADCAST FROM PYRAMIDS—
PERFECT RECEPTION IN UNITED STATES
AND ENGLAND

Then there was a foreword which said: "The rhythmic chanting of Egyptian labourers punctuated by the metallic clang of pickaxe upon stone brought home the reality of excavations in Egypt to countless American and English listeners, on Sunday afternoon."

Every paper in Egypt featured the story, a number of them also carrying picture layouts; which reminds me that the Great Pyramid fairly swarmed with photographers the night of our big show.

Hundreds of American, French and British newspapers also carried the story.

For me the pay-off on my Egyptian broadcast came the next day. Bent on relaxing and perhaps becoming an Egyptologist in my own right, I visited one of the diggings.

As I approached the excavation where a group of natives were working, one of them looked up at me, dropped his pick, and excitedly clapped his hands and shouted to catch the attention of his fellows.

Then they all started chanting! This was part of my chorus of the night before. The man in charge explained that they were throwing in this extra snatch of song to show their appreciation. There would be no charge, I was assured; it was strictly on the house.

IV

Anything Can Happen

I HAVE had a close-up of so many strange happenings in my job that I am beginning to believe that anything is possible.

Italy's invasion of Ethiopia now seems so remote to most people that only those connected with the news side of radio can be expected to remember that the day the Italian troops entered Addis Ababa all radio channels were blocked off.

We went through a lot of determined motions in an effort to stage a broadcast from Addis Ababa describing the invasion and the general situation:—the Government had fled, no responsible person could be reached, and all was chaos.

Although we have a Don't-Take-No-for-an-Answer Department, there are times when further effort is useless. Radio transmission was being confined strictly to government business. Both our own Government and the British Government were friendly, of course. But diplomatic considerations made it impossible for them to do anything for us.

This is not going to be a little preachment on what a wonderful thing radio is, but because of the close-up I got of what was going on behind the scenes, I am able to piece together a story in which radio figures as the hero almost as melodramatically as the brave young man who rescues the heroine at the instant she is about to be cut in half by the great buzz-saw in the old mill which the villain has just fled.

All was bedlam at Addis Ababa. The Italians were sweeping everything before them, and the natives were acting as if they had gone plumb crazy. You couldn't blame them very much. Most of their leaders had deserted them, and the riots that ensued amounted to frenzy born of confusion.

As part of the general disorder and excitement, the

American Legation at Addis Ababa was being stoned. The leaderless, punch-drunk natives were also staging angry demonstrations in front of the building and threatening the lives of those within. Protecting the Legation were half a dozen native guards with rifles. Those rifles might have proven more of a liability than an asset for it would not do to shoot into that angry mob which kept growing in size. Moreover, some of the demonstrators were armed.

Our Government had evidently been expecting trouble, for someone had had the foresight to dispatch four U.S. Navy wireless operators, with complete equipment, to the Legation. Among other things, their job would be to keep the American Minister, Cornelius Van Eggert, in communication with Washington.

About six or seven miles away was the friendly British Legation. Adjoining this was the British Compound, which housed four or five hundred native troops, some of whom were equipped with machine-guns.

Those stranded in the American Legation—American newspaper men and women, wives of the Legation staff, and others—could not count on getting to the British Legation in safety. Messengers that had been sent out were stoned and had to turn back. The telephone lines had all been cut. There was no way to summon help except by radio.

The appeal for help sent out by the Chief Operator in the American Legation building was intercepted at Cavity Island in the Philippines, some 6500 miles away. Cavity immediately relayed the message to the State Department in Washington. A State Department official notified the American Embassy in London, which in turn instantly notified the British Foreign Office. Quickly the British Foreign Office dispatched a radio message to the British Compound in Addis Ababa.

A few minutes after the message was received a British rescue party set out in trucks for the American Legation. The British-officered native troops dispersed the rioters and gave those who were stranded in the beleaguered Legation safe escort to the British Legation.

In other words, a radio message had traveled from its originating point almost around the world to get help that was eight miles away.

Which reminds me of something in a lighter vein that took place in my office in the Fall of 1939 shortly after the war broke out.

We were on the air with a news round-up from European capitals. In the control room of one of our New York studios Jack Hartley of our news staff was chatting with Fred Bate, our London representative, who was due to go on next.

Hartley said to Bate, "Fred, I am going to hold up putting you on for about five minutes due to a last minute decision to have Rome come in first."

Rome knew about the switch, so did London, and now all that was necessary was to tell Ben Grauer, the announcer in the studio, to change the next announcement in his script from "Go ahead, London" to "Go ahead, Rome."

Grauer was operating in one of a series of new studios we were building. It was not yet finished and voice communication between the studio proper and the control room had not yet been effected. As a makeshift we would signal each other.

Frantically Hartley tried to signal Grauer, who was looking down at his script. It was about a thousand times as bad, Hartley afterward said, as trying to catch a waiter's eye when you want a check in a hurry so you can dash out to catch that train.

Never had Grauer been so fascinated by a script. He just wouldn't look up.

Hartley got a bright idea that would make it unnecessary to catch the eye—through the glass partition—of the man who was seated only eight feet away.

Fred Bate in London, he remembered, could communicate with Grauer in the studio. So he said to Bate, "Fred, please tell Grauer to look up."

Bate complied and Grauer looked up. Hartley, who was

unable to leave the control room, signaled to Grauer, who walked over and got his new instructions.

A message to a man eight feet away had traveled 6000 miles.

Country Home Magazine, a rural monthly which is no longer published, annually conducted a nationwide search—in the form of a contest—for the best correspondent on a weekly newspaper. The winner received a cash prize and a trip to New York.

Always on the hunt for good human-interest stuff, we made an arrangement with the publication to put the winner on the air from our New York studios. Of the five winners we put on the air three had never been inside a radio station, so their reactions to radio as well as New York (which only one of the five had previously visited) were most interesting.

One of the winners—Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Mahnkey,—a charming silver-haired lady from Oasis, Mo.,—was as cool and collected being interviewed over a coast-to-coast network as if she did this sort of thing daily. After the rehearsal there were ten minutes left before she was to go on the air. "Let's get this over with," she said. "I want to see the town."

A few minutes before the program started Mrs. Mahnkey noticed her interviewer, a veteran of radio, nervously looking at his watch. "Don't be upset by a little thing like a broadcast," she said, "there's nothing to it."

A few years later another winner—a lady from the Middle West—seemed to have something on her mind as she sat in my office prior to walking into the nearby studio whence she would broadcast.

"I wonder," she said, "if anyone would mind if—oh, never mind!"

"Is there anything we can do for you?" I inquired.

"No, thanks," she said. "There's something I wanted to ask you but it's rather silly, so let's forget about it."

"If you change your mind," I said, "tell me what it's all about."

Later on in the studio the champion weekly correspondent

brought up her mysterious question again. This time she seemed to think it was all right to bring the matter up and was about to do so when a woman from her hometown who had made the trip to New York with the champ as her companion said, "You'd better not, dear. They might misunderstand."

"I guess you're right," said the award-winner.

A few minutes before the broadcast was to start we seated the No. 1 weekly correspondent at a table microphone.

"A minute to go," said the announcer.

At this point the winner of the magazine award exclaimed, "Hell! I'd better do it after all. They're too damn loose!" With this she reached into her mouth, yanked out a set of false teeth and plunked them down on the table. The removal of the false teeth—a full set of uppers—seemed to give her confidence. She did a good job.

Another of the *Country Home* winners—a gentleman from the Far West—did a superb job, but the story is one I hesitate to tell as it makes the point that some people do a better job of broadcasting with a bellyful of liquor.

The award-winner from the West—we'll call him Mr. Z—had just arrived in New York and was being interviewed at the Waldorf by the press.

One of the reporters, a lively young man who had a knack for asking questions that got humor into a story, said to Mr. Z, "How are the *Country Home* people treating you?"

"Fine!" said Mr. Z, "they put me on a good train and there's nothing wrong with this hotel. I've got only one complaint. I notice there's a corkscrew and a bottle-opener on a chain in the bathroom. But they're no good to me. The *Country Home* crowd forgot to put liquor in the room."

This complaint got into most of the New York papers the next day. Anyone who doubts the power of the press will take it all back when he hears that only three or four hours after the first interviews appeared, packages of liquor started arriving at the Waldorf for Mr. Z, who started sampling them. At no time did he get out of control, but when he arrived at our

studios for his broadcast, he was feeling fairly hilarious. He carried off his end of the network interview with such verve and gusto that you'd have thought he'd spent years in front of a microphone. Yet he, too, had never been inside a broadcasting studio before.

"I owe it all to my fan mail," said Mr. Z when I later congratulated him on an excellent job.

When he returned to his hotel he found more packaged fan mail. After doing a little more sampling Mr. Z remarked to an executive of the company that published *Country Home*, "I'm ready for another broadcast."

When Senator Barkley was elected majority leader of the Senate after the death of Joe Robinson of Arkansas, NBC scored a beat on the election—probably the first time that the result of an election of a senate majority leader was broadcast so quickly.

After the caucus, which was secret, broke up, Carleton Smith, our White House man, and Bill McAndrew, then our Washington news chief, pushed into the room. The meeting conveniently broke up exactly on a station break. Smith, dragging a microphone cable, was caught in a mass of Senators.

McAndrew managed to get through to Barkley as he was being congratulated by other Senators. Bill joined the line, and when it came his turn to congratulate the new majority leader, he grabbed his hand and didn't let go, pulling him over to where Smith was still trying to push through a big group of Senators.

As McAndrew pulled Barkley over to where Smith stood with his open mike, the Senator said, "What's going on here?"

Bill replied, "I'm a voter in your state, Senator, and I just want to congratulate you." This tied up neatly with Carleton Smith's running account of the proceedings and the announcement he had just made of Barkley's election as majority leader.

Originally I had planned a chapter which, before it was abandoned, bore the title "Magnificent Tries." This chapter

was to be the story of noble efforts to bring off potentially great broadcasts that were stymied from the beginning by insuperable difficulties.

Such a broadcast was indicated in a letter I received from a young lady whom we'll call Miss Schmidt. She wrote:

I have tried to bring my fiancé who lives in Germany to the United States. So far I have been unsuccessful, because we are not married and the quota is open only for foreigners having relatives in this country.

Would you consider performing a marriage ceremony from New York to Frankfort via radio? I have been advised that it would be as legal in Germany as the United States. The American Consul has also informed me that the record of such a marriage would enable my man to enter without delay.

If it is at all possible, please be so kind and help me, as I am trying so hard to find a way to bring him here.

Am enclosing a photograph of us, which I thought perhaps you would like to see, as I am unable to speak personally to you.

Fastened to the letter was a photograph of a good-looking young couple.

The possibilities were fascinating and I was naturally interested. Obviously, this would be difficult to swing, but it was worth trying. If I succeeded I would have a great human-interest broadcast for my trouble and the young lady would have a husband. This seemed fair enough.

The first step, of course, was to determine whether Miss Schmidt was a real person. Practical jokers frequently single out radio for their hoaxes, and I wanted to be sure that this was not a gag.

I was able to reach the young lady on the telephone and have a chat with her to establish definitely that this was the real thing. She told me she had discussed the matter at great length with her lawyer, who had then studied the matter in

detail, she said, and had satisfied himself that such a marriage would be entirely legal.

When I asked her to give me the name, address and telephone number of her lawyer, she complied. I telephoned him and raised several questions, but none of them seemed to disturb him. He said he would send me a letter that would satisfactorily answer the points I had made.

My next move was to radio Max Jordan, who headed our continental European news staff.

I got a fast query from Max asking for more information; and then the next day I received a letter from Miss Schmidt's attorney. This letter began by stating that "since radio is a comparatively recent invention and we have no statutes or court decisions to guide us, the question as to whether a marriage ceremony conducted over the radio is valid is an academic one."

He went on to say:

"Until a proper tribunal decides adversely against such a marriage its validity could not be attacked. . . . American law is largely derived from the common law of England . . . and there are English examples of two widely separated people being married in the presence of witnesses,—marriages that were never challenged. . . .

"Recently a marriage was performed that involved a young lady hooked up by long-distance telephone with a young man almost two thousand miles away. Witnesses of such standing that their testimony could not be challenged were present at both ends. This happened several months ago and the validity of the marriage has never been questioned. The exact facts can be determined by consulting the files of *The Daily* ——— of this city."

It was a fascinating letter—(several thousand words long and full of striking allusions) —but I must admit it was not too convincing as a legal document. What I was mainly convinced of was that its author was trying hard, in the face of difficult odds, to accomplish something for his client.

A few days later I received the following message from Max Jordan:

Concerning the radio marriage, the Germans hesitate to approve of this because in the first place there is a suspicion that the young man only wants to get married to an American girl in order to facilitate his immigration to the United States, which would free him from military obligations in his homeland. Also, there are doubts in the minds of the competent officials with regard to the legal elements involved. Are you certain that the American Consul in Frankfort approves of the procedure?

Meanwhile Miss Schmidt, who had been anxiously telephoning me, awaited the reply that would mean so much to her.

The turndown from the German Government meant that the proposed marriage would not come off, but I decided not to communicate with her until I had heard from our own State Department.

Washington is also interested in new angles and possible new precedents, but Miss Schmidt's plea, while it resulted in a lot of interesting conversation around the State Department, was rejected.

The message from our Washington office read: "State Department says such marriage illegal."

Miss Schmidt was heartbroken when I gave her the news but I had done my best—to get her a mate and NBC what would have been the greatest human-interest broadcast of the year.

When I was on the staff of the *New York World* we used to joke about loving the newspaper business because you met such interesting people. I am madly in love with radio, too, because you get such interesting letters.

The Northwest Airlines had just announced a new air transport which would fly stratospheric altitudes,—the forerunner of TWA's Stratoliner.

It sounded like an interesting development, so I made arrangements to do a broadcast from the plane that made the first run from Hollywood to St. Paul.

I assigned an announcer and a couple of engineers to this airplane, first working out a plan with them. We were to stage two broadcasts, the first about an hour after the plane had left Hollywood; the second about half an hour before it was due to arrive in St. Paul.

Our Hollywood office handled the pick-up. The short-wave signal from the equipment in the plane was to be relayed to the networks via RCA's short-wave receiving station at Point Reyes, Cal.

As the plane took off the announcer in the studio in Hollywood told the radio audience that in a few moments contact would be established with the new Northwest Airliner, flying the stratosphere at a higher altitude than had ever been achieved before by a regularly scheduled air transport.

Then he was heard to say:

"NBC calling Northwest Stratosphere Airliner!"

Five or six seconds later the radio audience heard a faint crackling, followed by the voice of our announcer saying:

"Hello, NBC. This is the Northwest Stratosphere Airliner."

Then followed a lively account of the trip up to that point; how it felt to travel at that altitude; comments of those aboard the airliner, etc.

Several hours later we were all set to pick up the second part of our program. Three or four times our Hollywood studio tried to establish contact with the plane. No luck. We simply couldn't get a peep out of our crew aboard the Airliner.

The announcer in our Hollywood studio was finally compelled to say:

"We are unable to contact the Northwest Stratosphere plane at this time, and until we establish contact we will hear from our studio orchestra."

Hardly had the word "orchestra" come over the air when

the musicians started playing *Let's Call The Whole Thing Off*.

Tony (Two-ton) Galento was more than a pretty good heavyweight boxer. He was an excellent actor and his talents as a Thespian were more instrumental in making him a fine drawing-card than his pugilistic ability. Some fighters resent being told they are acting. Tony, on the other hand, was always proud of his talents as an itinerant player. In many a city they had applauded his histrionics and he liked it.

Knowing of Tony's pride in his accomplishments as a dramatic artist we felt we were on safe ground in inviting him to play Romeo to Nancy Carroll's Juliet in the balcony scene from Shakespeare's romantic tragedy. Tony accepted and the coast-to-coast broadcast that resulted was cause for rejoicing among drama lovers.

Tony had been built up as a boxing attraction by means of goofy stunts, and there was never any doubt that he would accept. The Louis-Galento fight was only four days off; and, after all, publicity is publicity.

Tony, however, gave me a few bad moments. He failed to show up for the rehearsal we had planned, and five minutes before the show was to go on the air he had not yet arrived. The page boys I posted at all entrances to the RCA Building, where our New York studios are located, reported they could find no trace of the boxer-actor. Their job was to rush Tony to the right studio the second they spotted him.

Four minutes before Milton Cross was to make the opening announcement Tony walked calmly into the building with his wife. The page boys grabbed him, rushed him to an elevator, and fairly pushed him into the studio where I was waiting none too patiently.

"What's the rush, Abe?" Tony asked. "I got three minutes, ain't I?"

In the studio, however, Tony lost a bit of his poise after he glanced at his script. He turned to sports announcer Bill Stern, who was to interview him later, and declared:

"Why didn't you tell me? I'd have gone in trainin'."

Galento's confidence returned, however, when a minute before the program got under way Stern asked: "Think you can handle Shakespeare, Tony? A lot of guys find his style baffling, you know."

"Shakespeare!" exclaimed Two-ton scornfully. "I'll moider dat bum!"

And moider him Tony did while a gathering of sports writers, drama critics, magazine editors and fellow Thespians looked on happily; for the boxer was raising bad acting to new heights. Jaded Broadwayites in the studio who on many an occasion had sat grimly through the pretty good kind of bad Shakespearian acting recognized Tony's efforts as bad acting at its very best and applauded enthusiastically when it was over.

From the standpoint of the radio audience it was desirable too that Tony be superlatively bad; this meant more fun for our listeners. If Tony had been only mildly lousy Vox Pop would have written in to say, "Why did you let that Galento play Romeo? There are lots of better actors. Frankly, I think he's a ham." There was no danger that anyone would so quickly graduate Tony to hamdom, a state enjoyed by many experienced performers.

Tony's lack of rehearsal helped his performance tremendously. When Nancy as Juliet declared: "If they do see thee they will murder thee," Tony replied: "I have night's clock to hide me from their eyes." He had, of course, garbled the word "cloak."

He also stumbled over several lines. "But I'll sock anyone," Tony said later, "who says dat proves I'm a stumble-bum actor. I just ain't fully trained. When you're booked to meet a guy like this Shakespeare you gotta do roadwork or them big woids get you winded."

Perhaps the hardest job of all was Bill Stern's. Bill's role was to interview Galento on his ring plans after the Shakespearian act was over. As the fifteen-minute broadcast neared its conclusion, Romeo and Juliet were still at it. Alas, Shakespeare's

puzzling style was slowing up Tony, and the play-acting was taking more time than we thought it would.

There was nothing for Bill to do but to interrupt. And interrupt he did. "What," said Bill, cutting in as Two-ton addressed a poetic passage to fair Juliet, "have you got to say, Tony, that would interest the fight fans?" It was then that Tony made the historic training pronouncement that went echoing down the corridors of fistiana.

"I'm cuttin' out de beer," said Tony, who all through his ring career had trained on lager. "It sours me stomach. I'm goin' to malted milks."

In 1939 when we decided to put on a broadcast featuring the winners of the Pulitzer prizes, our main problem was Arthur Krock of the *New York Times*.

His wife had been ill for months, and the night of our broadcast also happened to be the night the Krocks had selected to celebrate the termination of the illness by attending the theater.

Krock was friendly and co-operative, but he was adamant on the subject of postponing his theater date. He had told Mrs. Krock that he would take her to the theater that night, and he would not break his promise.

Our program was scheduled for 9 to 9:30 P.M. I got the name of the play the Krocks were attending and learned that the first act curtain was usually rung down a little after 9:20.

I then asked Mr. Krock if he had any objection to going on the air for a few minutes between the first and second acts. This plan met with his approval and we went ahead with our arrangements.

Jack Hartley of my department accompanied the Krocks to the theater so that we knew for a certainty where they were seated. Across the street from the theater Mr. Krock was attending is the Hotel Edison. We had a microphone in the hotel's Green Room because of the orchestra that played there. As the orchestra was not due to take the air that night, and as we understood that the music in the Green Room did not start

until late, we figured that it would be a cinch to pick up Mr. Krock there.

We sent an engineer over to make the necessary arrangements. Either the hotel had made a very recent switch in its music schedule in the Green Room or we had failed to pursue our inquiries with complete thoroughness. At any rate the orchestra was entertaining a crowded room full of diners!

We could not very well ask the hotel to interrupt its musical program for what would have seemed a meaningless interlude to the guests.

We solved the problem by putting a long line on the microphone and running it up into the men's room on the floor above. These arrangements were completed a few minutes before Mr. Krock arrived to accept the Pulitzer Award for the best Washington correspondence of the year.

While Mrs. Krock waited for him to rejoin her at the play, Mr. Krock, against a background of porcelain basins and marble stalls, made a deft contribution to our round-up of Pulitzer prize-winners.

Sometimes people show impatience over the fact that television isn't developing more rapidly. I was glad that night that we had not yet reached the point where the radio audience automatically expected its news to be televised.

One day in the late '30's a man who a few weeks previously had worked for a small station in Missouri turned up in my office to see if there was an opening in my department. He had made a sudden decision, he told me, with a meaningful smile, to quit his job and try his luck in New York.

The reason why this man—we will call him Mr. X—decided so suddenly to leave Missouri is worth a few paragraphs.

Like many another man who works for a small station, Mr. X was a combination writer, engineer, station executive, announcer and what not. He was in the habit of arriving at his post in time for a 7:30 A.M. electrically transcribed religious program. It was a fifteen-minute program. As soon as he had started the record he would make a dash for the cafeteria

on the corner to get some coffee. He had done this so many times that it was now a fixed routine. With almost scientific accuracy he knew that he could reach the cafeteria, get his coffee, and be back in the studio in not more than eight minutes. There had been a few occasions when the operation had not consumed more than five minutes, so he felt perfectly safe.

On one particular morning when he returned after having had his coffee, the station's two telephones were ringing furiously.

"I was about to pick up one of the phones," said Mr. X, "when I heard something else that made it plain why the phones were ringing. Something had happened to the needle of the turn-table that was reproducing that morning's religious record and the record was whirling round and round to the accompaniment of one phrase that was repeated over and over again. That phrase was: "O, Jesus Christ! now and forever, O, Jesus Christ! now and forever."

How could a guy ever explain a thing like that?

Mr. X did not attempt to. He got the record going properly, waited for an associate, who was also a radio Jack-of-all-trades, to show up, got his hat and coat and left the station, never to return.

"The telephones were still ringing," said Mr. X mournfully, "as I made my departure. Sometimes I hear them in my sleep and I wake up in a cold sweat."

Mr. X's frankness was engaging. I would have taken a chance on him if there had been a job. As I explained this to him, the telephone on my desk rang. A ringing telephone meant only one thing to Mr. X. Grinning broadly he exclaimed, "O, Jesus Christ! O, Jesus Christ!" and made his departure.

Parachutes and parachutists having been in the news considerably, I was receptive when a parachute jumper came in to see me and suggested a novel idea for a broadcast. With the necessary apparatus, including a microphone affixed to his

person, he proposed to leap from a high altitude and describe his descent for the benefit of the radio audience.

His point was that the public was familiar with parachuting as a phenomenon but had no idea of what it felt like to bail out and float earthward.

From experience I knew that this was the sort of thing which would be of interest to a large audience, if well done. Stunts can be overdone, but they also have their place in the scheme of things.

I never had a chance to find out how the radio audience liked the parachute jumper's description of his trip earthward. For there was no description. My parachutist, unafraid to leap into space from an altitude of over ten thousand feet, had developed mike-fright; his vocal cords were practically paralyzed and he was unable to utter a single word during his whole descent.

V

Anything Continues to Happen

FIFTEEN or twenty minutes before the start of the famous match-race between War Admiral and Sea Biscuit, Clem McCarthy, who had been selected to describe the race for us, said to me as we both sat in our broadcasting booth at Pimlico, "I'm going down to the paddock to take a final look at the horses."

A tremendous crowd had turned out, and I wasn't sure that Clem's idea was so good. Would he be able to fight his way back to the booth through that dense mob?

"Never mind, boss," said Clem. "I'll get back. You know me. If necessary, I'll have a couple of cops clear the way for me."

With this, Clem left. Two minutes before the race was scheduled to start, there was no sign of Clem. The boy I had assigned a few minutes previously to look around for our missing race announcer could make no progress through the tightly packed crowd and was compelled to turn back.

It began to look as if the exclusive we had secured on this big race might not mean very much after all. We had battled to make this solely an NBC broadcast, and now that it was, it looked as if we had no one to describe it.

We had placed a microphone along the rail in front of the judge's stand, as we planned to interview the winning jockey and the owner of the winning horse after the race. I prayed that Clem would think of this mike and try to fight his way to it. Even that was a tough assignment, but not nearly the job it would have been for Clem, or anyone else, to battle his way to

the booth, through three floors and stairways packed with humanity.

Looking down I saw Clem McCarthy, hatless, the coat almost ripped from his back, waving frantically to me from the rail at the judges' stand. I interrupted some imprecations that I was heaping on Clem's head to wave back to him. What a relief! I gave him instructions by waving my handkerchief and pointing to my wristwatch, which meant he would get the take-it-away by watching the kerchief.

In a few seconds the race was on. I took my eyes off Clem only long enough to watch the horses break from the barrier, and when I looked down at him again I found that he was standing on the rail with his left arm around a flagpole, holding the microphone in the same hand. His right hand was busy, too. It held the fieldglasses through which he followed the race that he described so dramatically.

As if to make up for the fact that he had not got back to the booth, Clem "turned it on" and gave the radio audience one of the most vivid pictures of a horse race ever given over the air.

It's good that broadcast came through. President Roosevelt interrupted a press conference so that he and the White House correspondents could listen in. We would have heard the last of it if the program had fizzled out.

When it was all over McCarthy was full of apologies. "I'll never take a chance like that again, boss," he said. "Your word will always go. I should have known better."

I should have known better, too.

So you thought Labor Day came in September! Listeners tuned to Station WHN in New York on May 16, 1940, for President Roosevelt's defense message heard the Chief Executive declare flatly ". . . tomorrow is Labor Day," and for nearly six minutes listened to a discourse on drought and crop conditions.

Engineers at WHN were speechless. Was this the President's National Defense plea?

They switched from their NBC channel, which was relaying the broadcast to them, to CBS, where they discovered the President was talking about America's defense needs.

We later explained that it all happened this way: A Purdue University professor was doing a research job on Roosevelt's speeches. For his benefit, recordings of some of the President's old speeches were being played over a private line. An engineer hearing the President's voice but giving little thought to the subject matter plugged in the feed-line to Station WHN, which in turn went on the air.

"Ladies and gentlemen—this is terrible news! FLASH!—Hanover, New Hampshire—Nine Dartmouth College students were killed in the Theta Chi fraternity house when an explosion in the house furnace filled the room in which they were sleeping with carbon-monoxide gas. . . ."

Walter Winchell was delivering his regular Sunday night broadcast. Before he was off the air he had set in motion a reaction that completely changed news policy at NBC. Dozens, then hundreds, of telephone calls from parents, relatives and friends of Dartmouth students jammed NBC switchboards in many cities.

Was Bill Soandso listed with the dead? What was the complete casualty list? . . . You don't know? . . . Good God, how can I find out? . . . Yes, I want the list of the dead so I'll know if . . .

We were swamped with telegrams too. And friends and kinsmen of Dartmouth students also called in person at NBC offices for further information.

This took place on the 26th day of February, 1934. On that day a new policy was born. No more flash stories about school fires, plane crashes, riots, train wrecks, etc., until complete details were available.

Radio formulated its news policies the hard way,—through experience. In retrospect it may seem we should have been able to look ahead sufficiently to establish a rule that would have prevented the flash that started all those frantic inquiries.

But policies stem from actual happenings more frequently than they do from anyone's ability to foresee all contingencies.

Whenever we cut in on a regular program to announce an important news item, we have to be careful that what follows the item does not set up an unfortunate juxtaposition.

When we got word of the *Macon* disaster—(this was before the Dartmouth incident)—we cut in on the Ben Bernie program to make the announcement. Bernie resumed his show after our bulletin, which read as follows: "Washington—The Navy Department confirms the crash of the Dirigible *Macon*. It is not known how many aboard are dead."

What the audience heard immediately after the speculation as to the number of lives lost was Ben Bernie singing this line from a song that was popular at the time: "Take a number from one to ten, double it, and add a million."

This incident also proved to be a policy-maker. Infelicitous contiguity can cause as many headaches as anything else, and it is now our policy to watch for and forestall possible situations of this kind.

The 14th of February was in the offing, and we decided that it would be fun to stage a Valentine Day broadcast with pick-ups from various cities that night, including one from the Rainbow Room in New York.

One of the patrons in the Rainbow Room was selected at random and called to the mike to say a few appropriate words. He was only too glad to oblige. Radiating the holiday spirit he exclaimed: "Greetings to my Valentine, my dear wife in Dallas, Texas. Dearest, I'm having a good time dancing—and I'm here alone."

Within an hour our New York office received telegrams from twenty Dallas wives. Each demanded to know if the exuberant gentleman who had just spoken was Mr. John Q. Whatchercallim—and howinell he could be dancing alone.

One day I found on my desk the following inter-office memo from one of my out-of-town associates.

“Re our phone conversation: my thought was to make a big build-up of ‘What does one hear in the inside of a stomach?’ Have a five-minute building-up process (or more) and then have an ostrich swallow a billiard-ball mike, and then—let the public listen. I’ve no idea what will be heard, and no one else *knows*. That’s the gag, of course—*What* will we hear?”

“There are a few obstacles in the way of putting this on; all minor, of course! First, there’s no guarantee the ostrich will eat the damn thing.

“Second, what kind of emetic do we use to get our mike back, or do we simply have someone hang onto the ostrich’s legs and we pull mike out by the cord?”

“Third, finding our ostrich.

“Fourth, SPCA.

“Selah!”

Before you decide that the foregoing is the last word in goofiness, let me point out that you have never read any of my inter-office memos. I am reasonably sure I have topped that one on at least three or four occasions.

My purpose in running that little ostrich epic is to point out to the reader that one of the compensations in News and Special Events is the fun we get reading one another’s inter-office memos.

If the reader doubts that radio is a field where Anything Can Happen I suggest that he raid our files and see for himself.

On the evening of July 7, 1940, I was seated at my desk minding my own business. The story of the day was Mexico’s embattled election. We had given our listeners a fairly comprehensive report of one of the most exciting elections in years and were resting our case until the following day.

Then that call came in from Mexico City. It was an historic call. Could anyone doubt any longer that people everywhere looked to NBC to settle vital questions? What an item for our Promotion Department!

A member of the Almazan Party in the city of Celya in the

State of Guanajuato, Mexico, telephoned us at his own expense to report that the opposition party had not permitted him to vote. In the interest of fair play and to right a great social wrong he was telephoning to volunteer his services for a continent-wide broadcast in which he would place what he considered the Tammany Hall of Mexico in the spotlight of publicity.

I don't recall what we told him. It isn't right to be too casual about a man in Mexico who calls New York City to volunteer his services in a noble cause.

The networks make plenty of mistakes, as the reader is now aware, but we mustn't overlook the fact that the local stations pull some classical boners, too.

The Lowell Thomas program, sponsored by the Sun Oil Company, winds up with some such commercial as ". . . and as you start out on that trip, be sure to fill your car with a tank full of Blue Sunoco."

For two or three days one of the stations that carry the Blue Sunoco program capped that commercial with this spot announcement: "Why drive your car in this heavy traffic? Use a Greyhound bus!"

The great minds in News and Special Events were pondering the problem of a St. Patrick's Day program that was different. We sent wires to our leading out-of-town master minds to insure a real flow of ideas on this great cosmic question. But the telegrams yielded nothing. No one seemed to be able to produce an idea for a St. Patrick's Day program that was different.

The best that came out of our deep cogitation was the suggestion that we get hold of fifty harps and fifty harpists to play them. The harpists were to be dressed up in—guess what color? The ensemble was to be installed in the outdoor skating rink in Rockefeller Plaza, and we were to broadcast a program by these green-clad harpists.

We queried one of the newsreels and they thought it was

a swell idea. "We can't give you any color photography, of course," one of their executives told us, "but if you get fifty harps together you will have all the color you need."

We were beginning to feel that this idea about which we had been lukewarm at the start was probably a lot better than we had realized and we almost reached the point of congratulating one another when one of our engineers reported, "You can't do it at the skating rink. I have just been boning up on harps and I find that these instruments are affected by extreme cold. The strings that wouldn't snap would give off noises more like static than music."

So we decided to put on our St. Patrick's Day program in Grand Central Station. In retrospect I wonder, Why the Grand Central Station? Some day I will learn not to ask myself embarrassing questions.

We had the Station Master's okay, and that was a start. Now all we had to do was to find fifty harpists. The Music Department disposed of this question in characteristically simple fashion. There weren't fifty harpists, they said.

At any rate, it seemed that there weren't 50 in New York, or 40, or 30, or 20, or 10. In fact, the Musicians' Union could turn up only 3 harpists and 3 harps.

You can't make a success of St. Patrick's Day with only three harps, so we gave up the whole thing.

One of the most elaborate radio hook-ups in the history of broadcasting enabled many millions of listeners, not only in the United States but in other parts of the so-called civilized world, to hear President Roosevelt take his second oath of office.

Countries to which the program was directed through our short-wave facilities and those of the Columbia Broadcasting System included England, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Brazil, Peru, Argentina and Uruguay.

As a special feature of the NBC coverage I arranged to broadcast the reactions of Americans in these foreign lands

after they had tuned in on the ceremonies. The general idea was a discussion of how it feels to "catch" a presidential inaugural by radio thousands of miles from home in a foreign land. I also decided to pick up a ship at sea and get some of the Americans on board to give their impressions of what it was like to "attend" the inauguration on board ship.

After consulting various passenger lists I came to the conclusion that the best person to handle the ship-to-shore broadcast was a friend of mine aboard the S.S. *Rex* of the Italian Line, whose work in the publishing business had given him a pretty good working knowledge of radio. The passenger list of the *Rex* revealed that there were many well-known Americans on board. If only four or five of these went on the air for a few minutes each we'd have a good chance of getting an interesting broadcast. The *Rex* would be off Gibraltar about the time I'd want her to take the air, and this would give us, in addition to our real objective, one of the longest ship-to-shore broadcasts in radio history.

I put in a shore-to-ship telephone call for my friend when the *Rex* was about two days out of New York en route for Naples, and he was called to the ship's wireless room to hear my proposal. He agreed to round up some fellow passengers and organize a ten-minute broadcast from the *Rex*.

"There's nothing to it," I said. "Get four or five good speakers and introduce them. The Italian Line is nuts about publicity, so they'll be glad to co-operate. I'll send you a radiogram telling you exactly when you're to stand by for the signal 'Come in, *Rex*,' which will be your cue to introduce your first speaker. Our announcer at this end will tell the radio audience what it's all about, so you needn't worry about that. Just put your guys on and let 'em tell how it feels to sit around aboard an ocean liner thousands of miles from the United States and listen to the radio account of the inaugural."

The broadcast from the *Rex* was a success. The speakers were well-known Americans who spoke interestingly, and fortunately the reception in the United States was excellent, even at that great distance. It added a good human-interest touch to

our Inauguration Day schedule. So I radioed my friend: "Broadcast went over swell. Everyone enjoyed it. Thanks."

A few weeks later I received a lengthy letter from him which gave me a touching picture of how I had almost ruined his vacation. This letter, which gave me That Guilty Feeling, follows:—

"You say everyone enjoyed the broadcast. You lie. I didn't enjoy it. The missus didn't enjoy it. In fact, with the exception of one or two of the speakers who had radioed their families in New York to listen in, no one aboard the *Rex* enjoyed it.

"Listen, louse. You said, 'There's nothing to it.' Let this be a lesson to you. The next time you suck a friend into a similar situation say to him, 'This is going to be a pain in the fanny. Before you get through you'll want to kill someone and a lot of people will want to kill you.' At least you will have forewarned your victim and if he accepts he does so at his own risk.

"Let me begin at the beginning. The missus and I were having a drink before dinner in one of the ship's bars. I was saying to her, 'The nicest thing about a trip like this is that you get away from the goddam telephone.' The missus agreed. Then someone started paging me. I waved to the boy who called my name and asked him what he wanted. He told me I was wanted on the telephone in the wireless room. New York was calling me!

"That was bad enough, you louse. But what followed was even worse.

"We were all One Big Happy Family aboard the *Rex* until I got your call. After that, it was terrible.

"Shortly after you interrupted my drinking with your request I consulted the purser. A resourceful purser with a desire to be of help, can, as you know, be extremely useful in almost any given situation aboard a ship. The purser suggested that I write notes to those I wanted on the program. He would see that they were delivered to the different staterooms.

"He suggested that I ask three times as many people as I

needed on my program. He told me the passenger list was made up of people who would not want to be burdened with a responsibility like broadcasting. About three fourths of them were winter vacationists who were booked at Naples for Alexandria en route to Cairo and Luxor; the rest were busy industrialists who had business missions to think about, as evidenced by the way they kept their staffs busy. He had never staged any broadcasts from the *Rex*, but he knew from experience that no more than one out of five passengers liked to be bothered with anything that involved 'preparation.' That was the word he kept emphasizing—preparation.

"As you finally gave me a ten-minute spot I decided to have six one-and-a-half minute speeches, and to devote a total of a minute to a series of ten or fifteen word introductions.

"Taking the purser's advice would have meant sending invitations to eighteen people. That sounded like a lot of work. So I said to myself, I'll start with eight and see what happens.

"I got off my eight notes and all eight accepted! Can you imagine the jam I'd have been in if I'd taken the purser's advice and sent out those eighteen invitations? As it was I had two more speakers than I needed. I would now have to cut each speaker down to a minute. This meant that their scripts would have to be written so that every word counted. As I needn't tell you, that is the hardest kind of script to write. The average speaker takes five minutes to get wound up.

"The real fun began when I started getting after my eight speakers for copies of their speeches. I was afraid to wait until Inauguration Day. We were to take the air a few hours after the President was sworn in and give our impressions of such an event far out at sea.

"To begin with, the purser was not too reassuring about our ability to pick up the inaugural broadcasts out of Washington. So I decided I'd better get my speakers to prepare their speeches in advance. We could scrap them and hurriedly prepare another set if we were able to pick up the Washington ceremonies. In the meantime, it would be wise to have eight

talks ready that didn't imply the speakers had heard the actual broadcast of the President taking the oath of office, but which leaned more on how it felt to be thousands of miles from home while a President was being sworn in.

"The real fun began when I got busy trying to line up my one-minute speeches. Five of the texts submitted ran all the way from three to fifteen minutes. Three of the eight—George Cukor, movie director; George Kirksey, United Press sports writer; and Burnet Hershey, author—wrote only two or three minutes' worth and were easy to cut and easy to handle.

"With two exceptions the others were easy to handle from the standpoint of cutting. These two kicked up a fuss and threatened to quit. I devoutly hoped they would, as that would enable me to return to my original plan—six persons speaking a minute-and-a-half each.

"When I got my two recalcitrants in a co-operative mood on the question of length I found I could do little with them on the equally important question of subject matter. One wanted to deliver a little gem of patriotic oratory. He felt stirring in him one of those masterpieces in which the standard props are the flag, the Pilgrim Fathers, Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. The other recalcitrant wanted to take a swipe at President Roosevelt. I pleaded with one to remember that this was not an Independence Day celebration and with the other to forget politics. Whereupon, all over again, they threatened to quit. This time they seemed to mean it, so I became a bit insulting and precipitated a real resignation.

"But the matter didn't end there. The purser was pretty much involved by now, having called meetings in his office to discuss the arrangements for the broadcast, and the recalcitrants appealed to him. One of them got full of scotch and put it up to the purser to see that I made an apology. I had insulted him aboard an Italian ship, which meant I had done him an injury on Italian territory, and it was up to an Italian official—the purser—to see that I apologized.

"This really got my hackles up. In the purser's presence I

told the wrench-thrower, in what was to be a peace conference in the purser's office, that hell would freeze over before I apologized. This made him madder than ever. He named some NBC brass-hats he knew and threatened to get me fired.

"Whereupon I invited him to jump in the ocean. The purser and his assistant were now thoroughly alarmed. They pleaded with me 'to do the right thing.' I insisted that 'the right thing' would be to kick my troublesome fellow-passenger in the teeth. The latter alternately threatened to sock me on the nose and to sue me, repeating the threat to have his influential NBC friends fire me. He calmed down a little when the purser explained I had no NBC connections and that I was merely a vacationist like himself; that I had been asked to run the broadcast and had agreed to do so as a courtesy.

"What an experience! Gawd! The night before Inauguration Day two of my stars—Cukor and Kirksey—got into an argument and became so peeved at each other I was sure each would refuse to appear on the same program with the other. Cukor was at that time the director in charge of the filming of *Gone With The Wind*. Kirksey, who is from the South, had had quite a talk with Cukor about the picture. He disagreed with some of Cukor's interpretations of the South, and, when the movie director clung to his points, expressed himself vehemently on Cukor's lack of authentic information. A gracious lady—my missus—pointed out that it was silly to see two such intelligent gents in a silly argument and the situation was saved when she got them off the subject of *Gone With The Wind*. That was all that was needed for they got along well enough when discussing almost everything else.

"But—Gawd!—was I worried when Cukor and Kirksey seemed on the point of insulting each other!

"It developed that I had made a good move in not counting on the *Rex* picking up the inaugural ceremonies. Thus the speeches prepared in advance and not based on the ceremonies proved a life-saver.

"When it was all over, I found that the broadcast had

caused a lot of dissatisfaction among the passengers. I had requested the purser to let them hear the broadcast by means of a loudspeaker arrangement in the Social Hall. The wireless room whence we broadcast was big enough to accommodate not more than a dozen persons, so I suggested the loudspeaker arrangement.

"The purser thought it was a good idea. The ship had the necessary equipment, which the purser instructed his assistant to have rigged up. The assistant instructed someone else, who in turn instructed someone else, and the order was never carried out. The passengers didn't hear the broadcast and some of them were really peeved. Naturally, the purser and I got all the complaints. I referred mine to him and he referred his to me.

"At the suggestion of the Little Woman, who rates being in the diplomatic service, I rounded up a few dozen of my fellow passengers who seemed most aggrieved, and bought 'em cocktails. The purser's conscience was bothering him, so he set up two or three rounds of drinks. I got stuck for only two rounds myself. If it had been any worse than that you'd have heard from my lawyer. You ought to hear from him anyway. You damn near ruined my vacation.

"Don't ever telephone me on a ship again. Perhaps it would be more to the point to say, Don't ever telephone me. Or radio me. Or wire me. Or write me. Or speak to me. . . .

"You rat! I'll get even with you some day if it's the last thing I do."

We were broadcasting the news of the 1936 presidential election.

That was one year when the result was never in doubt. All night returns from all over the country poured in indicating that Roosevelt was winning by an overwhelming margin. We put the results on the air as fast as we got them.

Well, before midnight it was obvious that Roosevelt had been re-elected. The only news would be the margin of victory.

After a while there was a monotony to our announcements: "Roosevelt is far ahead in Pennsylvania. . . . The President is swamping Landon in Illinois. . . . New York Democrats are putting F.D.R. far in the lead. . . . Landon's own state of Kansas seems to be going for Roosevelt. . . . The most crushing Republican defeat in political history now seems a certainty. . . . Jim Farley's prediction that Republicans will carry only two states may come true. . . . Hamilton still hopeful but many Republican leaders concede Roosevelt's re-election by record-breaking popular and electoral vote." Etc., etc., far, far into the night and early morning.

Even Democrats were beginning to feel sorry for Alf Landon. It was comparable to Joe Louis fans wishing their man had knocked out his opponent in the ninth or tenth round instead of the first.

It was beginning to get difficult to figure out variants on "NBC continues to be flooded with election returns indicating a record-breaking Roosevelt landslide." Practically every set of figures announced called for some such comment.

Sometime after midnight we concluded a long summary with this version: "The Democrats are sweeping the nation." For a brief interval there would be no further returns, so we switched temporarily to a hotel orchestra that featured a male chorus. The first number they played—with the voices lustily joining in—was "Ain't it a Shame."

On August 16, 1940, the newspapers of the country featured variations on the headline:

2000 PLANES RAID ENGLAND

Germany that day, as on the day before, sent wave after wave of bombers over Britain in unprecedented numbers, and by noon of the 16th some of the newspaper correspondents estimated that as many as 2500 Nazi fighters and bombers had crossed over the English Channel to blast the British coast.

The German planes were coming over almost continuously in squadrons of 50 and 100 bombers, protected by clouds of fighters. It was the most savage attack up to that time that had been directed against the southeast and south coast of Britain and against points inland from the sea in that area.

British fighter patrols were engaged in continuous dog-fights over a scattered area of hundreds of square miles along the coast. Before they could finish tackling one flight of bombers, another would come roaring across. Great Britain was fighting for her life. Then, if ever, her back was to the wall.

A group of us were gathered in the office occupied by the short-wave adjunct of the News Department. His earphones on, one of our men sat waiting for the next short-wave broadcast from London. There had been quite an interval since the last report from the British capital and we figured it was about time for something to come over.

"Here it comes!" said the man wearing the earphones at 2:25 P.M. Breathlessly we waited to hear the news.

Old Headphones started to laugh,—first quietly and then uncontrollably.

Pressed for an explanation he said, "Wait until you hear the Ediphone play-back and you'll think it's funny, too."

Here is what we heard when the wax cylinder on which the bulletin from London had been recorded was played back:

"London will soon be the new center of the diamond-cutting industry. The market in uncut diamonds has always been under British control. Since the invasion of the Low Countries, however, an ever-growing number of expert diamond cutters from the Netherlands are arriving in England. Furthermore, diamond concerns in Amsterdam and Brussels were able to ship a more than sufficient quantity of machinery and tools to England before their countries were taken over by the Germans. One diamond-cutting factory has already been established and is now operating in Birmingham, and others are in process of organization."

Publicity men contribute their share of colorful wackiness to the daily mailbag. Take this telegram, for instance:

CANARY BIRD WILL BE FLOWN PIGGY BACK IN SPECIAL
HARNES ABOARD TRAINED CARRIER PIGEON AND WILL BE
DELIVERED BY SPECIAL MOTORCYCLE ESCORT TO CRIPPLED
TEN YEAR OLD GIRL IN HOSPITAL, ETC.

You would never suspect it, but this was publicity for National Wild Life Week. The canary, it seems, was being sent in response to "a touching letter from a crippled little girl." I never did figure out how that publicized National Wild Life Week or explained to the public what it was all about.

I think they used the wrong birds, too. I didn't get a very good picture of wild life as represented by a trained canary and a carrier pigeon. I think they should have used a Cooper's hawk and a bald eagle. I don't know which should have ridden the other piggy back. They could have tossed to decide that. Thus, wild life would have been represented.

This, of course, would have left the little girl without a canary. But somebody could have brought one over to her. As I understood the complicated story—and that was only slightly—the idea was to give the little girl the canary bird. She had said nothing about having it flown to her piggy back.

The more I studied this wire and the letter that supplemented it, the more I became convinced that canary birds riding piggy back on carrier pigeons would have to wait until television came in.

Miss Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, is the hardest member of the Cabinet to work with. More than once she has given our Washington staff the jitters by arriving at the studio a minute before she was due to broadcast. She has her own ideas about how things should be done, and if they aren't done that way the sparks fly.

Once she arrived a full ten minutes before she was scheduled to go on the air and everyone relaxed—until Miss Perkins

discovered that she had forgotten or misplaced her reading glasses!

The Secretary of Labor dug through the contents of her handbag and repeated the process two or three times but the specs could not be found. Meanwhile everyone involved in the broadcast,—the announcer, the engineer and a station executive—scrambled around in an effort to find the missing glasses.

When Miss Perkins remarked that frequently she was able to use another person's glasses the announcer started rounding up reading glasses in the studio. One of the pairs he collected fitted Miss Perkins' eyes well enough to enable her to read. This was fortunate, as we were due to go on the air in two minutes.

After the broadcast one of our people mentioned that he would continue the search for the missing spectacles. "Never mind," said Miss Perkins. "It's not much of a loss. I buy my glasses in the five-and-ten-cent store."

A member of our Washington staff insists the Secretary of Labor's attitude is misunderstood by most people. "She froze up the first time a columnist called her 'Madame' and she has never thawed out. She thinks the word has evil implications. If the columnists would stop using it she'd return to normalcy."

Usually when Miss Perkins is in accord with her broadcast instructions, she carries them out meticulously. On one occasion, however, she slipped up.

The Secretary of Labor on this occasion was scheduled to introduce Representative Ramspeck of Georgia at a meeting of an important women's organization we were covering. She was to start talking on a signal from a member of our Washington staff. To be completely on the safe side we set her watch to conform to the exactly accurate official timepiece of the NBC party.

Miss Perkins failed to read her watch correctly—which might happen to anyone—and she also forgot to wait for the signal. Consequently she started her 100-word introduction before the program was on the air. By dint of jumping over a

few chairs Bill McAndrew of our Washington staff was able to keep Ramspeck from starting his speech until our announcer could shout a brief introduction of the Congressman into the microphone.

In one sense Miss Perkins had timed her introduction perfectly. She finished just as we got the signal to take the air!

In other words, nothing that was confusing to the listener took place. But the NBC group assigned to this broadcast worked up a quick sweat in the few minutes covered by the incident.

In 1937 the American Legion held its convention in New York. A big parade was to be the principal feature of the week's festivities. The reviewing stand near the Plaza Hotel at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue was the ideal place to install broadcasting equipment. A great many celebrities were to occupy these seats, including Governor Lehman, Mayor LaGuardia, the National Commander of the Legion, Past Commanders, Generals, and others in many walks of life who were well known to the public.

Our engineers chose a location for our microphones that was as far removed as possible from the public-address system and loudspeaker that had been installed in this reviewing stand. Mutual, next on the scene, was also able to locate its microphones at some distance from the loudspeaker. Columbia, the third to arrive, had no choice and had to set up their microphones under the public-address system.

The public-address system was used to announce the names of various outstanding personalities and to identify the different Legion units as they swung past the reviewing stand. Thus, the occupants of the stand were kept informed on the whole progress of the parade.

The feedback from the public-address horns did not go into the NBC or the Mutual microphones. But the Chairman's voice, a penetrating one, fed strongly into the Columbia microphones.

During a lull in the parade we decided to interview some

of the celebrities in the reviewing stand and requested the man in charge of the public-address system to announce that we were about to do this. The Columbia microphones were open as the voice of the Master of Ceremonies came piercingly over the public-address system's loudspeaker. "The National Broadcasting Company, which is doing a marvelous job of covering the American Legion Convention," was what he said—and what was heard over Columbia's microphones—"will now interview celebrities in the reviewing stand."

On and on he went. We did not realize what was happening until listeners telephoned to tell us that NBC was getting a wonderful boost over the Columbia network. Some listeners were merely puzzled, others congratulated Columbia on its Good Neighbor Policy.

VI

Two Adventurers

ONE day in June of 1937 Clifford J. MacGregor, a meteorologist on leave from the U.S. Weather Bureau, walked into my office and started talking about the weather. It was the first time anyone had ever said anything to me on the subject that sounded interesting.

He started out by telling me that the United States, having failed to underwrite adequate weather reporting, was paying a heavy price for its delinquency. Our weather bureau, he pointed out, gives us only thirty-six hours warning, whereas weeks of warning are necessary. Farmers, for instance, could harvest early if they knew a frost was coming.

Then he went on to explain why accurate prognostication weeks in advance was possible. He developed his theme interestingly, beginning by telling me that the Northern hemisphere's weather is "born" in the Arctic.

To a man long since convinced by talkative barbers and taxi-drivers that weather was the dullest theme in the world, MacGregor was a revelation. Having demonstrated how fascinating his subject was, he went on to tell me about his plans for an expedition to Arctic regions in quest of meteorological data. By means of this trip he hoped to put together a story compelling enough to help the United States toward the objective he considered essential to our best interests: five hundred weather stations which could be maintained at an annual cost of \$6,000,000. In case I thought this sounded like a lot of money to spend on weather reports, he asked me to consider the fact that Government reports reveal that annually frost is responsible for the destruction of corn worth twice as much.

The right kind of advance weather information, he pointed out, would save a big percentage of those wasted crops.

It was unnecessary to say, "Interesting, but what has this to do with me?" He was obviously leading up to a proposal that he be given an opportunity to let the general public in on the unusual story he confidently expected to be able to relay from the Arctic.

It was a superb piece of selling. Even though our expedition budget was in an impoverished state, I was interested. (We had just finished paying the expenses of the group we sent to mid-Pacific Canton Island to cover the longest eclipse of the sun in 1,238 years, and had just made a deal with Dr. William Hall Holden for radio coverage of his expedition to the little-known interior of British Guiana and Brazil.)

I would not be able to make a tremendous offer, but I wanted to make a deal. "Let me see," I found myself thinking. "Admiral Byrd is talking about returning to the polar regions again. If he does we'll want to put him on again. But that won't conflict with this. This is a different kind of exploration. Still I'd better count on Byrd biting into the budget. So I can't offer this MacGregor guy any big money. Hope he won't mind."

When I came out of this little conference with myself, conducted while the weather-bureau man continued his interesting discourse on meteorology for the masses, I made an offer of \$2000 for the rights to a series of non-commercial broadcasts, including general subjects in addition to the specialized weather theme. I explained that this was the best I could do at the time, adding that if the early broadcasts attracted attention there would undoubtedly be requests for guest spots on big commercial programs, the proceeds from these commercials to go to MacGregor.

We didn't make a deal then and there but the session wound up with each of us taking it for granted that we would be able to work out an arrangement of some kind. Although I considered it unnecessary when MacGregor had finished his convincing sales-talk, we carefully checked up on him and

found everything he had said about his affiliations, his record and his background to be correct. He had been Chief Meteorologist at Point Barrow, Alaska, an important weather station, for some time and had spent five years organizing a scientific weather service for Alaska Airways.

Meanwhile I had two of our engineers go to Newark Bay where MacGregor had put up his ship, the *A. W. Greely*, to look over the radio equipment and talk to the operator. This is standard practice before a deal is closed for expedition radio rights, for we cannot afford to announce broadcasts that have to be relayed from the obscure corners of the globe until we are sure that the expedition is equipped technically to deliver the goods.

Our engineers reported that MacGregor's equipment was good and that if some changes (which would cost seven or eight hundred dollars) were made the transmitter would be satisfactory for broadcasts and for general communication from the Arctic wastes he planned to visit. To make our broadcasts possible we were prepared to install the additional equipment at our expense.

I decided to look the *Greely* over myself and close the deal with MacGregor. At Newark we were ferried across to the vessel in a rowboat. I was glad when the brief trip was over, as I am a poor sailor in small craft.

I knew nothing about what an Arctic explorer's vessel should look like and could reach no conclusions of my own that meant anything; but as MacGregor showed me around I got the impression from this master salesman that practically everything had been thought of and almost every possible emergency anticipated.

MacGregor did his first hemming and hawing after we had made a tour of the vessel, which was swaying just enough to give me a funny feeling at the pit of the stomach. He explained that the Columbia Broadcasting System had offered more money for the broadcasting rights but that he would rather do business with us because I had encouraged him from the start and had shown a disposition to take a chance on him.

He did not *ask* for more money but he got across the idea that he had been *offered* more and could *use* more. I didn't ask whether Columbia had come to him or whether he had been shopping around. The swaying of the vessel was beginning to get me, and for a guy who talks freely at any time on any given subject that interests him, I found myself strangely conserving my energy and not wasting any of it on needless inquiries.

If MacGregor had flatly asked me for more money I might have told him to jump into Newark Bay, for the rocking of his ship—which was as incessant as the drumbeat in *The Emperor Jones*—was beginning to get on my nerves.

“. . . But you jumped in when no one else was interested, so I'd rather do business with you people,” MacGregor was saying as the *Greely's* swaying motion got in a few extra and very fancy dips. With this my lunch suddenly came up and spattered all over the deck where we were standing and talking. I turned green (according to MacGregor) but kept on talking. In my weakened condition I was a pushover. I wanted to settle the deal and get off the ship. “If you'll close today,” I said, “I'll up it \$500.”

MacGregor said, “It's a deal.” We agreed, in addition, to supply free the additional radio equipment MacGregor needed.

We worked out a tentative schedule of broadcasts. In addition to three or four that dealt with human-interest aspects of the Arctic as the birthplace of all weather,—(with no heavy technical stuff to befuddle the listener)—we discussed a general schedule that included the following:

AUGUST—Battling the Arctic ice-floes. We even planned ambitiously to try to pick up the cracking and crunching of the big ice masses as the sturdy little ship picked her way through them.

SEPTEMBER—Settling down. A description of what was entailed in establishing a temporary camp on the polar ice beside the ship.

OCTOBER—Preparing for winter, building a perma-

ment camp at Fort Conger, Ellesmere Island. This broadcast, in addition to MacGregor's own talk, would include the cook's explanation of how the members of the expedition are fed, and a statement by the doctor on how the health of the party is maintained far from the conveniences of modern life.

NOVEMBER—Thanksgiving Day five hundred miles from the North Pole.

DECEMBER 24TH—Christmas greetings from the North Pole, frequently given as Santa Claus' address in children's stories.

JANUARY, 1938—Polar winter. A discussion by Commander MacGregor with various members of the expedition in which interesting experiences would be rehashed.

FEBRUARY—The Polar Aurora. A description of the magnificent Aurora Borealis. The success of this program would depend on whether radio transmission would be possible during the magnetic disturbance responsible for this multicolored natural phenomenon.

MARCH—Return of the sun at the end of the long Polar winter.

APRIL—Home life in the Arctic, MacGregor to report his experiences after living with the Eskimos in company with some of his shipmates.

MAY—Over the top of the world. A broadcast—possibly two or three—from the expedition's six-passenger auto-gyro, which would be fully equipped for radio transmission. "Flying over the North Pole" was one of our tentative subjects.

JUNE—Hunting seal, walrus and other Arctic animals. Preparations and equipment necessary and a description of an actual hunt.

JULY—Summer in the Arctic.

AUGUST—A summary of the expedition's adventures and scientific findings.

None of these advance schedules is ever carried out fully. Unpredictable circumstances have a habit of marring this or that phase of your plan.

For instance, MacGregor did not get to the North Pole. Several flights, however, were made to the Greenland Ice Cap. "The closest we were to the pole," his own record states, "was about 180 miles." Some of the broadcasts from the plane in the region of the Pole proved to be real thrillers.

If it is true that advance schedules such as the one we planned can seldom be fully carried out, it is also true that you land worthwhile unanticipated broadcasts. In the case of the MacGregor expedition we got most of what we bargained for and some pleasing extras.

One of the unplanned features that developed was a two-way conversation between MacGregor in the Arctic and the Holden party—the first radio-equipped jungle expedition—from the tropical Amazonian wilds. It proved to be one of those striking "contrast" programs.

Incidentally, MacGregor earned some extras too. We were able to get commercial sponsorship for enough broadcasts to add several thousand dollars to the original price stipulated. It was important for MacGregor to earn all the money he could in order to help finance a costly trip.

MacGregor, primarily a scientist, proved also to be a real showman. He even brought Eskimos to the microphone, had them jabber a few excited sentences and then he explained what it was all about.

One of MacGregor's most remarkable feats was his prediction—two and a half months in advance—of a generally cold and late spring for 1938. This we naturally crowed about in one of our own broadcasts, pointing out the potentialities of long-range prognostication of this character.

Some of the other highlights of the MacGregor broadcasts proved to be:

An account of how the *Greely* encountered and dodged moving icebergs that could have crushed her. They were compelled to tack forty-six times in one six-hour period.

The story of how the vessel, caught in an uncharted harbor with a ten-foot tidefall, went aground, and how they got her off.

A description of how, after starting to unload provisions on the beach, terrific gales twice blew them out of the dismal little harbor at Reindeer Point. Considerable food was ruined by the incoming tide.

An exciting account of the explosion of one of the engines. Swift work in putting out the resultant flames saved the ship from burning.

The story of how it felt to have ice form around the ship until the *Greely* was in an icy straightjacket six feet thick.

MacGregor proved to be an interesting combination of meteorologist, master of ceremonies and journalist. More than once he showed that he had the makings of a good newspaperman. Once he radioed me: "Have located unusual Eskimo family here including Ootah native who accompanied Peary to Pole. Ootah only Eskimo still living who accompanied Peary. Suggest native program built around him. Think you should locate Matt Hanson of original Peary group or Peary's daughter and have one or both on hand to greet Ootah in two-way broadcast. Rush reply."

The guy operated like a good reporter!

It was too bad we weren't able to carry out the enterprising meteorologist's plan. We could not locate Hanson but we got in touch with Admiral Peary's daughter, Mrs. Stafford, in Washington. She accepted, but the day before she was to broadcast she had to leave Washington to rush to the bedside of a member of her family who was seriously ill. By the time she was available again Ootah and his family, who had encountered poor hunting, were heading south where food was not so scarce.

I've never known a precisionist like MacGregor. Months before his return from the Arctic he notified me that he would put in at Newark at 2 P.M. on a certain day. And that's exactly when he arrived!

MacGregor liked being told he had proven himself a good showman, but he quickly got back to his main theme. "Fine," he said. "But it's good we also succeeded at our principal task, which was to demonstrate that routine observations can spot

well in advance the great masses of polar air that move off in a southeasterly direction to make fog for London and showers for Berlin."

MacGregor typified useful adventure as much as anyone I have ever met in arranging for broadcasts over a period of years in the field of exploration.

On July 16, 1938, one of the boys in the News Department picked up a newspaper and read a story about a young flyer named Douglas Corrigan who had just made a solo non-stop transcontinental flight to New York in an outmoded second-hand plane that he had bought for \$900. It was a dull day, there was not much doing, and I thought Corrigan might yield a three or four minute spot.

Corrigan was an unknown, but there was always the possibility that if we put him on the air we might get a newsy slant of some kind out of him. Transcontinental solo hops were a dime a dozen, but the public has an insatiable appetite for aviation news and might even stand for a few minutes of chatter on flying a jalopy from coast to coast. And maybe this pilot of a Model T air-flivver would some day be real copy.

It was Milt Burgh of our news staff, one of the best radio news men in the business, who had the hunch about Corrigan. Milt got in touch with him and got him to drop in on us. He asked Corrigan about a rumor that he might attempt a flight to Europe. The flyer replied that he had no plans for such a hop and would let us know if any developed. Beyond this he would say nothing.

Corrigan went on the air for us and discussed his flight east in his outmoded plane. It was a minor broadcast but we tried to pay Corrigan \$25 for it. He refused to take it. There was nothing in his refusal to indicate he considered the sum insufficient. Apparently he did not want anything for his efforts. We finally sold him the idea that we at least should pay his taxi fare back to Roosevelt Field, which was to be his next stop. He had told us that he was on his way there to look his

plane over. We finally prevailed upon him to accept \$15 as expense money.

The next day Corrigan hopped into his crate, and some twenty-six hours later he set it down in Ireland on his now famous wrong-way flight.

In record time Corrigan became a world figure. His name was on everyone's lips. Newspapers, magazines and radio were bombarding him with cables and radiograms in an effort to sign him up for articles and broadcasts. And dozens of efforts were made to get him on the transoceanic telephone.

We supplemented our efforts from New York by instructing our London office to get hold of Corrigan at once and arrange to put him on the air. When we finally reached Corrigan he agreed to go on the air for us—after he had done a broadcast for the Columbia Broadcasting System. CBS, it developed, had booked the facilities to Ireland a half hour ahead of us, which meant that we would have to trail.

I reminded Corrigan in a radiogram that NBC was the only broadcasting system that had shown any interest in him as a result of his coast-to-coast flight and we hoped, therefore, that he would go on first for us from Ireland.

Perhaps he would have if we had moved in a little faster and sewed up the facilities before CBS did. In other words, perhaps we and not Corrigan are to blame for the fact that the wrong-way flyer did not go on first for NBC. In fact, it developed that we were lucky to get him on at all.

When my first radiograms—couched in businesslike language—elicited no reply, I decided to try a flippant approach. In the interviews given out on his arrival in Ireland Corrigan specialized in wisecracks. In fact, he did so thorough a job of kidding everyone and everything I was convinced that perhaps my previous messages had been too serious. So I sent him the following radiogram:

WHEN YOU WENT ON AIR FOR NBC IN NEW YORK WE
TRIED TO GIVE YOU \$25 AND YOU TOOK ONLY \$15 (stop)
WILL GIVE YOU OTHER \$10 FOR EXCLUSIVE BROADCAST
NON-COMMERCIAL WHENEVER YOU ARE READY.

This brought forth the following message from our London representative who had been assigned to Corrigan:

CORRIGAN UPSET BY YOUR LAST WIRE.

I patched things up by sending another wire explaining that I was only fooling. Corrigan agreed to go on for us.

It developed that Corrigan had an uncle and an aunt, the Rev. and Mrs. S. Frazer Langford, and a ninety-two-year-old grandmother, who were living in Hollywood. I arranged to have Buddy Twiss, our Hollywood special-events man, get hold of these members of Corrigan's family and plan a two-way conversation between Los Angeles and Dublin.

When you don't land the first program, you have got to do something different. This two-way conversation between Dublin and Los Angeles proved to be such a good human-interest story that it got a big play in the press. Although there was nothing startling about what was said on this program, it was unquestionably a timely and effective stunt.

Because it attracted so much attention, elicited such a heavy mail response from all over the country, and has been cited so many times as the ideal unrehearsed human-interest broadcast, I am quoting from the script as recorded by a stenotypist as it came over the air:

CORRIGAN: Hello, Hollywood and hello Uncle Frazer and Grandma. I guess you're surprised, but then I guess I am, too.

MR. LANGFORD: Hello Douglas. This is your uncle.

CORRIGAN: Hello, Uncle Frazer.

MR. LANGFORD: Hearty congratulations, and I want to announce that you are an uncle. Lucille Ann, born 12:17 A.M., eight pounds, four ounces, on the sixteenth. . . . Do you need any money?

CORRIGAN: I don't think so.

MR. LANGFORD: Well, I'd better send you some anyway,—through the American consul.

CORRIGAN: O.K.

MR. LANGFORD: Don't try that flight back!

CORRIGAN: Oh, no, no, I'll say not.

LANGFORD: How did you get along on the trip?

CORRIGAN: Like any other trip.

LANGFORD: What was your altitude?

CORRIGAN: Around seven thousand feet most of the time. . . .

ANNOUNCER: Douglas, this is the announcer in Hollywood. Your aunt, Mrs. Langford, is a little bit worried about your being in Paris among all those beautiful girls she understands they have over there. She wants to caution you.

MRS. LANGFORD: Douglas, you wait until you get back and get an American girl.

CORRIGAN: I'll fool you, I won't get any.

MRS. LANGFORD: We are all simply thrilled by your trip. It is just wonderful. Grandma wants to say hello, too.

ANNOUNCER: Grandma, come right up close.

GRANDMA: Hello, Douglas. Hello, Douglas.

CORRIGAN: Hello, Grandma.

GRANDMA: I hope you will soon be home so we can see you again.

CORRIGAN: I'm not sure when I'll be back.

GRANDMA: We miss you. Don't you try to fly back. Come back by boat. Come back by boat. Did you hear? Come back by boat.

LANGFORD: She says to come back by boat, Douglas.

CORRIGAN: Yes, I know. She says to come back by boat.

LANGFORD: That is what you are going to do, isn't it?

CORRIGAN: As far as I know now, yes.

MRS. LANGFORD: Are you going to see Lindbergh while you are over there?

CORRIGAN: I don't know what I am going to do. I just got here and I have been so busy that I can't make up my mind about even eating supper yet.

LANGFORD: What are your plans?

CORRIGAN: No plans made yet. Everything has been in such a whirl. I don't know why. But I will make my plans later.

LANGFORD: I see. How about sleep? Have you had any sleep?

CORRIGAN: No sleep last night, and I don't feel sleepy now.

LANGFORD: You got the news about Evelyn's baby?

CORRIGAN: Yes.

LANGFORD: Douglas, were you in any danger at any time while you were flying over the ocean or over Ireland?

CORRIGAN: Why, no, I was just up there above the clouds in nice clear air, and there is no danger in clouds. You can go through them if there is nothing behind them.

LANGFORD: How much gas did you have left when you landed?

CORRIGAN: Oh, there's a lot of gas, about thirty gallons left.

LANGFORD: Did you have any weather reports before you started?

CORRIGAN: Yes, weather reports between New York and Los Angeles.

LANGFORD: Why didn't you tell Uncle Frazer that you were going?

CORRIGAN: Well, I thought I would tell him when I got back there.

LANGFORD: Well, you put yourself on the front page all right, and you have given us some publicity, too. I am glad it is the right kind.

CORRIGAN: O.K.

LANGFORD: Is there any message that you want us to give to your girl here in Hollywood, Douglas?

CORRIGAN: I don't know where you would find her.

MRS. LANGFORD: What will I tell Evelyn?

CORRIGAN: Well, I don't know. I'll get back there and tell her myself.

LANGFORD: How did you come to think you were in Los Angeles?

CORRIGAN: I didn't think I was in Los Angeles, but that is where I had started for.

LANGFORD: Now, wait, you're kidding, aren't you?

CORRIGAN: O.K.

LANGFORD: We are hoping that they won't crack down on you too hard for an outlaw flight.

CORRIGAN: I hope not.

LANGFORD: You still want to be a transport pilot, don't you?

CORRIGAN: No, I never did.

LANGFORD: Is it true that you plan to start designing airplanes when you get back?

CORRIGAN: No, that is too hard work.

LANGFORD: You aren't going to start a service to Ireland by any chance?

CORRIGAN: No, I'll let somebody else do that.

LANGFORD: Would you make the trip over again?

CORRIGAN: With a better ship, maybe. I mean a newer ship, not a better one. I don't think you could get a better one.

MRS. LANGFORD: I don't, either.

LANGFORD: We will be thinking about you, Douglas. We prayed for you. Then we went to bed and slept well and awoke and got word that you were there. Lord bless you, boy!

MRS. LANGFORD: Goodbye, and come home quick.

Another idea occurred to me as a means of getting NBC a different type of coverage. Corrigan, after all, had flown to Europe without a permit. Nobody gave a damn, but it did give us an opportunity to ask Dennis Mulligan, Director of the Bureau of Air Commerce (of the Department of Commerce) to go on the air for five minutes and give the official Government view of Corrigan's violation of the law.

As one Irishman to another—Mulligan to Corrigan—the Director of the B.A.C. pointed out that Corrigan headed his plane in one direction and wound up flying the other way, which he took to mean that he, as an official, should also look the other way. Then Mulligan administered a mild verbal spanking in which his admiration of Corrigan was obvious, even though he did say that the lad now in Ireland had set a bad example for impressionable young flyers who might be

tempted to try the same stunt and break their necks in the process.

There was something about Corrigan's unauthorized flight to Europe in a dilapidated plane that won the admiration of the whole world. America temporarily went Corrigan crazy. Newspapers printed their headlines backwards, and Tin Pan Alley started grinding out Wrong-Way Corrigan songs.

One of the Alley's most prolific lyric writers sent me a few dozen lyrics he had written all in one day. He cited his remarkable productivity—a record even for him—as proof of the greatness of the occasion. Never in all his career as an immortalizer in song of great events—(this was his special field)—had he been so inspired. Even on the occasion of Lindbergh's historic hop to Paris he had been inspired to produce only five lyrics.

The Corrigan feat, he insisted, topped anything within his memory and he therefore thought we ought to do something "big." His recommendation as to how we could achieve this bigness was that we have his six best heart-throb lyrics set to music by "some of NBC's staff composers who don't happen to be busy with other work" and that we then broadcast a program of Corrigan songs. He suggested that the program be called "Right-Way Corrigan" and that for a theme song we use what he considered the finest of his lyrics:

They call you Wrong-Way Corrigan,
But the people know you're right.
In life you'll star and star again
Because you made that flight.
You had no license, you broke the laws,
But the people are strong for you because—

CHORUS:

The right way, not the wrong way, boy,
You flew into our hearts.
Your daring filled the land with joy,
The nation's gloom departs.
We laughed at the Irish nerve you had
When you made your "wrong-way" start,—

The right way, not the wrong way, lad,
You flew into our hearts.

You're Irish as the Blarney Stone,
As Killarney's famous lake,
In Courageland you stand alone,
Adventure is awake.
You had no license, you broke the laws,
But the people are strong for you because—

CHORUS:

The right way, not the wrong way, boy,
You flew into our hearts, etc.

When Corrigan booked passage back to the United States on the S. S. *Manhattan* I had broadcasting equipment installed on the ship, and took the necessary precautions to make sure that Corrigan would be ours exclusively on his return trip. Kenneth Downs, of the International News Service, was also on the ship, and we arranged to have him represent us and handle the Corrigan broadcasts.

The world was suffering from Corriganitis, which is the only excuse I can find for the seven broadcasts from the ship. Surprisingly there was no criticism that we were giving the public too much Corrigan. In fact, the fan mail indicated that the public could not get too much about the wrong-way flyer.

I suppose everyone secretly visualizes himself putting one over on the authorities. The public, at any rate, kept chuckling over Corrigan's insistence that he thought he was flying toward California. Perhaps that explains the sustained interest.

Shortly after the *Manhattan* left for the United States I made elaborate arrangements for the broadcasts in the United States on Corrigan's arrival. I put a crew of six—two news men, two announcers and two engineers—aboard a fishing vessel which I hired at New Bedford. I got permission for our crew to board the *Manhattan* from the fishing vessel at Nantucket Lightship. Usually such permission is granted only in a situation involving an emergency.

The Rev. Langford had an amusing delivery and we invited him to come on from the Pacific Coast to greet his nephew and participate in the welcoming broadcast. But the Reverend had not received a reply to any of the congratulatory cables he had sent young Corrigan or to any of the others involving offers of all kinds that he had received for submission to the wrong-way flyer. As a result, Langford was loath to come on to New York to greet his kinsman.

However, we persuaded Langford that his nephew's failure to communicate with him was undoubtedly due to the fact that he had been swamped by messages of all kinds and so besieged by back-slappers and camp followers that he had probably found it difficult to observe the amenities. Langford was placated and came on to New York and participated in the welcoming broadcast.

It will be recalled that after the tumultuous reception accorded Corrigan on his return to New York, he set out on a barnstorming tour. A schedule of twenty-one cities was made up, and he was given a big reception and dinner at each stop.

In every one of the twenty-one cities the city fathers put in a bid for coast-to-coast broadcasts featuring Wrong-Way Corrigan. We accepted the programs in a few instances, although we feared the public might soon be Corriganed to death. When we sidestepped one of the local Corrigan hullabalos, we would find ourselves bombarded with telegrams urging us not to overlook this opportunity to put on the air, for all his countrymen to hear, one of the greatest figures in the history of aviation, a man who . . . etc. In most instances we compromised by finding a local spot for the broadcast.

My Corrigan file contains enough amusing letters and telegrams to provide the nucleus for a whole book on the Corrigan comic opera. One of the choicest items in this collection is a letter from John Doe, our special-events man in the city of Whatzitzname. I quote:

"Thought perhaps you would be interested in the way this city received 'Wrong-Way' Corrigan. I could give you

more chuckles if I told it to you in person, but you've got to get it while it's hot.

"Our hero is certainly getting fed up with the welcoming committees—which is certainly in his favor—and he is sure enough leaving an army of bewildered greeters in his wake.

"Upon landing he was greeted by the stuffed shirts and a number of the town's society gals carrying flowers. When presented with the flowers he let them drop to the ground and informed said greeters that he was plenty tired of getting bouquets.

"When the photographers got a bit rough, he pushed one of them in the face and said, 'What am I, a horse or something? Tell me what you want me to do and I'll oblige.' When the photogs asked him to laugh, he informed them he didn't have a laugh left in him and would only laugh if something funny was said or done.

"When I introduced him on our local broadcast I said, 'Mr. Corrigan, tonight thousands of my fellow townsmen will be on hand to greet you as your parade passes down our main thoroughfare.'

"The broadcast here was not on a network, so you didn't hear his reply: 'What! another parade. I'm sick of them, and, besides, I'm hungry.'

"Here are a few more quotes,—the questions are mine, the answers Corrigan's—from that priceless broadcast:

"What would you like for dinner?"

"I hope it won't be chicken because that's all I seem to get at these banquets."

"Would you like some good old-fashioned ham and cabbage?"

"No. I don't like cabbage. Neither do I go for corned beef. I'm not that kind of an Irishman."

"Are the girls bothering you much here?"

"Yes. But I know how to handle 'em. I tell the blondes I like brunettes and I tell the brunettes I like the blondes.' . . .

"While the broadcast was still in progress he saw an old

friend and yelled, 'Hello, Spike, wanta see ya when the crowd thins out!'

'At the public reception the Mayor made an enthusiastic speech and presented Corrigan with the key to the city. Corrigan acknowledged it this way: 'Why didn't ya gimme the key this morning? I'm leaving at daybreak and this key won't do me any good. Besides I came into the city without a key so I guess I can get out without one.'

'Next on the program: A local Kathleen Mavourneen, Chairman of the Irish Lassies Society, made a speech on behalf of her organization and presented a beautiful harp made of green carnations. Said Corrigan: 'Well, I saw a lot of harps over in Ireland, too many in fact. . . . What can I do with this kind? The flowers will be all spoiled by morning and besides I ain't got no room in that old wreck of mine to haul 'em around.'

'This will kill you. Mr. Q., a local bard of dubious attainments, was introduced by a man named Corrigan, the gag that's being worked to death. Mr. Q. then proceeded to leath-erlung a poem telling what the wrong-way flyer's feat meant to the world, for which he received a great round of applause. When he finished Corrigan said, 'That guy who just read that story or poem, he didn't do me any good because if those birds down in Washington get hold of a copy they'll be madder than ever at me, so I wish he wouldn't make any more copies of it.' . . .

'One of the legion of toastmasters present then jumped up and said: 'From the local Corrigans to the Wrong-Way Corrigans, I wish to present you with this fine leather jacket to replace the one you now have.'

'Wrong-Way Corrigan replied: 'Well, it's pretty and all that, but why should you give me a jacket when you see I got one? This one is still good. It's a little dirty, but you can see it ain't worn out at the elbows or any place. I'll take yours along with me, but my own is good enough; besides, mine fits good and I don't know about this other one.'

'Some of the dames from the Irish Society came over to

our broadcasting booth complaining that they had been shunted aside for the Mayor's wife, the only woman allowed on the platform. . . .

"During the broadcast one of the few Corrigan hecklers yelled to me—not loud enough, thank God, for the mike to catch it,—'Why don't you tell them on the radio that this guy Corrigan is a phony? He's from the North of Ireland. I found out his father is a Presbyterian minister!'"

Long and loud were the arguments that resulted when we continued to turn down requests for radio time from the committees of greeters in charge of Corrigan receptions in different cities. In some instances the city fathers would go after the local NBC man with an ax, and in a few cases we changed our No to a Yes in order to make it possible for our local news man to continue living in the town in question.

Here is a typical telegram from our news director in Hollywood, which city we thought had been sufficiently Corriganed:

AFTER SAYING "NO" ON CORRIGAN ARRIVAL, WAS CALLED BY GROUP OF LOS ANGELES BUSINESS MEN WHO ADVISED ME EVENING CELEBRATION IN COLISEUM FOR CORRIGAN WILL BE BIG THING. ANTICIPATE CROWD OF 125,000. PICTURE STUDIOS ALL SENDING TALENT FOR SHOW. 150 PIECE ORCHESTRA FURNISHED BY MUSICIANS UNION, CIVIC OPERA CHORUS AND OTHERS PARTICIPATING INCLUDING MANY NAMES. THEME OF CELEBRATION "WRONG WAY CORRIGAN." CLOCKS IN COLISEUM WILL RUN BACKWARDS, CROWD WILL BE FORCED TO ENTER THROUGH EXIT. CORRIGAN WILL ENTER COLISEUM IN CAR DRIVEN BACKWARDS AND MANY STUNTS PLANNED TO CULMINATE IN HIS CROWNING AS "RIGHT WAY CORRIGAN." UNDERSTAND COLUMBIA TAKING TRANSCONTINENTAL. MUTUAL TAKING COAST. POSSIBILITY TRANSCONTINENTAL DATE WILL BE EITHER SEPTEMBER 12 OR 13 AROUND 8:00 P.M. PACIFIC STANDARD TIME. HOLDING UP FINAL WORD TO COMMITTEE HERE UNTIL ADVISED

I finally relented and okayed a fifteen-minute program in which no local orators were to participate and the program

was to be confined to a welcoming brass band and a brief speech by Corrigan.

There followed a series of messages which indicated that Corrigan's visit to Hollywood was developing into a civic free-for-all. Here is one of the messages:

RE CORRIGAN'S ARRIVAL. FOUR DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS IN LOS ANGELES QUARRELING WHO IS OFFICIAL GREETER AND TRYING TO ESTABLISH ARRIVAL DATE FOR CORRIGAN. HAVE BEEN INFORMED HE WILL BE HERE ON FOUR DIFFERENT DAYS. BECAUSE OF INTERNAL STRIFE ON MATTER AND FACT SAN FRANCISCO IS DOING ARRIVAL THERE, BEST IF WE WASH OUT WHOLE THING HERE. ADVISE.

To which I replied:

YOU SAID IT. WASH OUT CORRIGAN. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

VII

My Day

"A GOOD way to give people an idea of what your job is like," said the man who originally suggested this book, "would be to attempt to record the events of a typical day,—the log of a radio-news and special-events director.

"I've sat in your office on busy days. That cluster of telephones on your desk is not there to impress anyone. You are constantly using them. Calls to and from Europe seem to be as much of a commonplace as ordinary local calls. And then there are your visitors, a steady flow of them. And all that mail. The three factors—phone calls, visitors, letters—combine to put one in a different sort of world.

"Why not keep a record of a complete day? Almost any day will do. It doesn't matter whether it proves to be an important one from the radio standpoint."

"Okay, pal," I replied. "I'll see what I can do. In fact, I'll try it tomorrow morning."

That means we'll be telling the story of a day during the summer of 1940.

Like thousands of other guys in offices, the first thing I did that day was to start reading my mail.

Read a letter from the Navy Department at Annapolis. It outlined the football policies for the 1940 season as they affected radio.

Read a wire from our special representative in Panama who claimed that he had not received a check for his last broadcast. Asked my secretary to check on this.

Ken Fry, our Chicago news chief, called up. He wanted to know what to charge for a news broadcast out of Chicago at

10:50 P.M. Chicago time. I told him the price would be 25% of the gross station time.

Mr. T. Sato of Tokyo dropped in. His job with the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation corresponds to mine. Said he wanted to meet me because he had seen my name signed to so many radiograms he had received from our office. He asked a lot of questions about our operations, which I answered. He told me that he was leaving for South America in a few days to study the short-wave methods in use there. A few phrases that he used tempted me to ask him whether one of the purposes of his mission was to open new markets for Japanese products in South America, but I refrained.

Found my eye caught by a letter on my desk which bore six signatures. It read as follows:

"We are six persons refugees of Germany. I am a merchant 38. My wife is 37. My daughters range from 13 to 22. I and my family are Austrians. We have lived in Czechoslovakia for six years. Now by the total occupation of Czechoslovakia we have lost the rest of our money. We have had applications for a permit to enter Australia or New Zealand, but shall not have the necessary sum of money to pay the fare. . . . Therefore, we have decided to do a sporting trip from here to Australia to show the world that we refugees are having enough courage. The ship we shall use is a bark of two or three tons, with sails, and a motor of four cylinders, which gives us approximately two knots speed per hour for the bark. By giving us the amount of 280 pounds (about \$1000), an amount we are wanting to complete the trip, we should promise you the only right for the broadcasting of the description of the travel."

Asked a member of the news staff to bring up to date the biographies of King George, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, the Pope, and President Roosevelt.

A radio man from Zurich dropped in to ask for a job. There was no way in which he could fit into our news department, but he sounded intelligent, and I made a note of his qualifications.

A friend in an advertising agency called up to ask how Pearson and Allen were last night. "Fine," I told him. "Splendid," I added.

A well-known civic leader called up. He told me that the House of Commons planned to recognize the Czechoslovakian Government then in exile and suggested that we put Masaryk on the air. I pointed out reasons why this would not be a good idea, and he agreed.

A member of the staff of the *Newark Ledger* called up. He wanted a couple of tickets for a broadcast. I pointed out that I would be glad to accommodate him but it happened to be a Columbia broadcast. Suggested that he call them. He thanked me for the suggestion.

Found a memo on my desk from Helen Guy of the Keep Costs Down Department, asking when I planned to okay the rest of those expense accounts for the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. Right now, I said to myself, and proceeded to okay them.

Read a wire from our Hollywood news chief, whose correspondence is nothing if not colorful. It went this way:

OFFER DIAPER CHANGING CONTEST FOUR PROMINENT ACTORS ACTRESSES FOUR MEN HAVE CHALLENGED THE FOUR WOMEN TO DIAPER CHANGING CONTEST PLANNING LUNCH BEFOREHAND AT WHICH ONLY BABY FOOD WILL BE SERVED WINNER JUDGED ON BASIS OF NEATNESS DISPATCH COMFORT SPEED CORRECT FOLDING OF DIAPER PROPER INSERTION OF SAFETY PINS AND SO FORTH ARE YOU INTERESTED?

I had just finished dictating my impassioned reply when my secretary informed me that Washington was calling me. The call was from an important official in Washington. I was all set for a news lead of some kind. But it developed that his call had nothing to do with the news. He wanted four tickets to the next "Information Please" broadcast.

Ken Berkeley, manager of our Washington office phoned. Said the Immigration Bureau wanted the name of a fellow Walter Winchell mentioned in his broadcast a few weeks

previous as having obtained a passport fraudulently. Checked the script and wired the man's name.

Dictated a memo to the Script and Production Departments outlining a plan for broadcasting the first anniversary of the Second World War.

Read letter five or six from a man who plans to walk across the United States from the San Francisco Fair to the New York Fair and cannot understand why we do not consider it a great idea. He persists in his belief that it would be a great idea to do a series of broadcasts based on his experiences. Among other things, he promises statistics on automobilists who give him a lift. Wants to wear a portable broadcasting unit on his back and describe his adventures as he hoofs it from coast to coast. Does not want "a great deal of time." Says an hour a day will suffice.

Listened to a broadcast by Joan Livingston, a reporter we have just sent to Shanghai. She brought me up to date on the news from the Far East, and came in clear.

One of our engineers—a darn good one, too—dropped in and suggested that I consider a new policy, this to involve our announcing only "good news," and skipping the horrors of war. I took two minutes out of the busy day to ask him how he would like to buy a newspaper with page one removed. "I see your point," he said as he departed.

My secretary announced a chap who had been sent in by a friend. He had an idea for a new round-the-world airplane race. There were to be two planes in the race, one starting from New York going east, the other starting from New York going west. There would be great interest in the outcome of this race, my visitor said in a loud, booming voice. I consulted our aviation expert, who told me that such a race, all other things being equal, would be one-sided. The plane starting east from New York would have all the best of it in the matter of situations involving the wind and would, therefore, win easily. When my caller started arguing his case I asked him where the planes would refuel in war-torn Europe and Asia.

Continued my efforts to locate Jimmy Bowen, our special

representative in Montevideo who did the famous exclusive broadcast for us describing the scuttling of the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*. Inquiries in Montevideo having yielded no information I tried to get in touch with his mother. The address I have for her is the Wellesley Club in Washington. Unable to reach her there. Some one at the Wellesley Club gave me a Miami address for Mrs. Bowen. Tried to reach her at this address by telephone but was unsuccessful. Sent her a telegram which was returned with the notation "Not living there any more."

Telephoned Wells Church, Radio Director of the Republican National Committee, to inquire when Senator McNary would deliver his acceptance speech. Got the information and wired Don Thompson, our Special Events man in San Francisco, to take a full crew up to Salem, Ore., where the Vice-Presidential nominee is to deliver his acceptance speech. Ran into a snag in fixing the time for the broadcast. McNary picked a period when the "Information Please" program is on. Knowing how political speakers in the past have hurt themselves with the radio audience by insisting on time that meant a cancellation of "Information Please" I urged against the McNary choice. In a subsequent telephone call I learned that McNary had not changed his mind, he wanted the "Information Please" spot. Members of the staff of the Republican National Committee assured me, however, that McNary would be willing to go on after "Information Please."

Had a puzzling visit from an executive of the French Radio System who tells me he is in this country to study American radio methods. In the light of what is happening to France, a number of things he told me left me bewildered, to put it mildly.

A member of the staff of *PM*, the new New York daily, telephoned. Wanted to know if it is true that the German Embassy is peeved because Lord Lothian took over a guest spot on the Pearson and Allen broadcast last night.

Mike Jacobs telephoned. Said he just wanted to know "what was new." The only thing I could tell him that was new

was a barroom story, so I told him that. Mike also wanted to know if we could send over a check that we owed him since the night before. Got the check and sent it over to him. Mike is a swell egg, and I am always glad to accommodate him.

Bill Stern dropped in. Wanted to know if he could broadcast a certain tennis tournament. Told him he'd be our choice if we were going to handle this tournament, but we were passing it up.

A girl on the publicity staff of a big piano company dropped in. They have a new type of piano that they want me to hear. Ideal material for a broadcast, she says. I reminded her that ours was a news department, and that her news was more appropriate in the *Piano Gazette*. She insisted that a new piano was news. "That's news to me," I said.

Word comes in that Molotoff is to speak in Moscow. Dictate wire to our Moscow representative inquiring whether we can have the broadcast. Know what the answer will be, a loud resounding NO. Official Russia is mike-shy; but it's my job to keep on trying.

A member of the news staff consults me on a "dangerous" line in a broadcast to be delivered in less than an hour by a well-known commentator. The line *was* dangerous—because there were no supporting facts. I killed it, of course.

A radiogram is dropped on my desk. It is from our London office and it queries me regarding a short-wave report that the refugee ship *American Legion* will stop at Kirkwall, England. Checked hurriedly and found that the report was correct; that the ship was due to stop there to check on the mine-field situation. There is tremendous interest in the *American Legion* since the President's announcement that he had warned Germany not to attack this mercy ship.

Lowell Thomas telephoned about his forthcoming tenth anniversary. Described our plan for its observance over the air and he seemed greatly pleased. . . . Anniversary parties can be terribly dull. This one, I hope, will be different. As part of a plan to prevent unnecessary dullness, I am working on a stunt to be called "Every Man His Own Crossley." H. V. Kal-

tenborn, Raymond Gram Swing, John B. Kennedy, H. R. Baukhage, Earl Godwin, John W. Vandercook, Gabriel Heatter and other well-known commentators who will be present will be asked to contribute a paper on the subject, "Why I Am America's Greatest Commentator."

Usually the guest of honor at a party of this kind is bored to death listening to speeches telling how wonderful he is. Under my plan the guest of honor will listen to other guys in the same business tell how marvelous *they* are. I hope Lowell remembers to thank me for my thoughtfulness.

Edwin C. Hill telephoned. He wanted to know if John B. Kennedy, of our commentator staff, could fill in for him for a few days on his CBS program. Told him Kennedy could substitute for him but strictly as a one-shot operation.

G. W. (Johnny) Johnstone, Radio Director of the Democratic National Committee, telephoned. Said that Senator Bankhead would make the introductory remarks when Vice-Presidential nominee Wallace delivered his acceptance speech.

Someone from a trade paper telephoned. Wanted to know why we would not carry the World Series. Explained that Mutual had it sewed up exclusively for their client, the Gillette Razor Company. We were strongly pro-baseball, I pointed out, and would tackle the game more earnestly if broadcasts of baseball series didn't necessitate the cancellation of so many programs day after day.

Telephoned the crew covering the Army maneuvers in upstate New York. Asked them if they considered it good broadcast material. "No," they chorused as one man. One of them characterized the maneuvers as "premeditated dullness," and suggested that our Legal Department prosecute the Army. Instructed three-fourths of the crew to return home, and arranged to have our military observer, General Fuqua, cover the maneuvers in his nightly broadcast.

Asked the Engineering Department to design two sets of earphones to be worn by horses. In further pursuance of our epic inquiries into animal psychology, we plan to have the driver of a milk wagon talk to his horses three or four blocks

away through a microphone in our studio. The idea is to see if the horse recognizes his master's voice and obeys the "Whoa!" and "Giddap!" instructions. Sent one of the office boys to buy two straw hats for the horses. Figured I would get more co-operation out of the nags if I presented them with seasonal headgear "on the house."

Talked to Fred Bate in London on the short-wave cue channel. Wanted to find out how serious the bombing of London was proving. (NOTE—This was during the early days of the air attacks on the British capital.) While he admitted that England had her back to the wall, he pointed out that the damage done had not been nearly so great as represented in some of the newspapers. Asked him to elaborate on this. He was quite halting in his replies, struggling for a preciseness that would preclude interruptions by the censor. I said, "Why don't you let the censor go on and explain it?"

Whereupon the censor cut in and started telling me the story. He admitted that Croydon had been severely bombed but pointed out that it is twenty-five miles from the city. To visualize the thing correctly, he suggested that I think in terms of a town twenty-five miles from New York, pointing out that I would object if the bombing of such a town on the outskirts of New York were provocative of headlines saying that New York had been bombed. The censor pointed out that while many German planes have managed to fly over London, they had suffered heavy losses. Asked to particularize, he said that the Germans were losing four to five planes to every one lost by the British.

Also talked to John McVane, Fred's assistant in London. John is new and needed suggestions. He had tightened up and his delivery was not as good as it might have been. I pointed out that he could improve his delivery considerably by forgetting his newspaper style and writing more conversationally. Told him his sentences were too long. By shortening them he would give himself more natural breathing pauses and thus would be able to deliver a more relaxed type of talk.

Interviewed a man sent in by an advertising agency. He

was looking for a job. Told me he considered himself an outstanding radio writer. Has not yet written anything for the air but is perfectly willing to try as soon as he gets the call.

John Sheehan of the General Electric's short-wave station dropped in to discuss the South American situation. Made some suggestions which seemed to help him with the problems he had.

A lady recently arrived from Paris dropped in. Wants to do fashion broadcasts, picking the latest Parisian vogues. Pointed out that the latest Parisian vogue was the swastika and that we had been covering that situation for some weeks.

A telegram on my desk reveals that a Long Island woman who runs a home for friendless animals wants us to give her a plug on the air. She feels that we should do this as her institution is non-profit-making. Its principal function is sheltering lost and deserted dogs. Wants us to do a broadcast announcing that they have:—

1. A 250-pound male St. Bernard, approximately two years old, owner unknown.
2. A handsome-looking police dog, owner unknown.
3. A white spitz poodle, owner unknown.
4. A fox terrier, owner unknown.
5. A Boston bull crossed with some type of terrier, owner unknown.
6. A dachshund, owner unknown.

If we would give her time regularly we would solve the lost-dog problem in New York City. Pointed out that if we did this for dogs, we might also have to do it for cats and other pets, and where would that lead?

Found myself reading a letter from an enunciation purist who points out that in a recent broadcast we termed Arthur Krock a Washington *co*-respondent for the *New York Times* instead of a correspondent. Next time we will keep out of trouble by referring to him as a columnist.

Read a request—the third of its kind since I have been here—from a surgeon who wants to perform an operation on himself and broadcast a “play-by-play” as he proceeds. His let-

ter goes into considerable detail. Strange how many times that accursed word "educational" bobs up in connection with hay-wire suggestions.

The surgeon thinks his broadcast would be—you've guessed it—educational. Wonder what he means by that—that people will learn so much by listening they will be able to operate on themselves?

A medical man who would make a proposal like that must be broke. No sense in telling the guy his idea is screwy. Besides he might reply that it is no screwier than putting singing mice on the air—and then where would I be? Easiest out will be to tell him that such a broadcast would be too gruesome. . . . I dunno. He might be one of those argumentative people and ask me if the war news, with special reference to air raids, isn't more gruesome.

Hell, I'll just tell him it's against our policy to take such broadcasts. Let him guess why. . . . Miss Latimer, take a letter to Dr. ———. Dear Dr. ——— . . .

A few weeks ago we received a letter from a New Jersey farmer offering us the broadcasting rights to a whistling cow. We were compelled to turn down this rare opportunity.

The farmer is in again. In fact, he's on the telephone trying to find out about a second letter he sent us the other day. Apparently he thinks we doubt the talents of his bovine. May his crops wither and his house burn down and his well go foul if she don't whistle like a human bein'! In fact, she whistles so good he'll be darned if anyone can tell her from a person whistlin'. Come on over and have a listen, folks, if you think it ain't so. . . .

The farmer evidently thinks that he failed in his first letter to explain the possibilities sufficiently and perhaps his price was too high. Instead of one broadcast for \$500, he would now let us have three broadcasts for a total of \$300 or \$100 apiece. I would have to stipulate, however, that someone who knew how to handle cows be assigned to feed and look after the animal. As the three broadcasts would probably take place on different nights, the farmer would not be able to be with the

animal all the time and he wanted to be sure she would be properly taken care of as he had hopes of selling her to the circus as a sideshow freak.

There was a postscript, which was longer than the letter itself, that went into a great many other considerations. Among other things, the farmer pointed out that if his price was too high he would be glad to dicker with us. He was a reasonable person, realized the value of the radio publicity he would get and knew this might help him make the sale with the circus. If necessary, he would send his hired man to stay with the cow in our studios. This would make it unnecessary for us to hire a caretaker.

Or, if we preferred, we could stage the broadcast from his barn. If the cow didn't whistle, he would eat a bale of hay.

Maybe I'd better write him that what I fear is that his cow is too talented. How, in other words, would anybody be able to tell that it was a cow whistling, not a human being? . . . Guess I'll have to think it over. Can't write that guy again until I think of something that will really end the discussion.

Let's see what else is in the mail. Here is a letter from a man who informs me that he has invented a self-launching lifeboat. He invites me to witness a demonstration of his boon to mankind so that I can see for myself what a splendid broadcast would result if the product of his inventive genius were described for the benefit of the radio audience.

The inventor points out that this new lifeboat of his can be launched in a few seconds from a steamer traveling at full speed. It automatically catapults itself into the sea when a certain gas is released.

To convince me of the faith he has in his invention he is going to put his whole family in the boat for the demonstration so they can all be catapulted into the sea together. His confidence is so great he suggests that in addition to an announcer we have ALL our sponsors on hand for the demonstration of the newest method of saving the lives of those who are compelled to abandon ship. He evidently feels that one of our sponsors may see a good business opportunity in Never

Fail Self-Launching Lifeboats and perhaps go into production and launch a radio program. . . . This program comes to you through the courtesy of the Save-a-Life-a-Minute Marine Corporation. Send in six lifeboat box tops and get a ship's clock free.

The day's mail is seldom complete without inventive genius rearing its pioneering head, but this seems to be a two-invention day. "Years ago," reads the letter that is now on top of the pile, "my grandfather invented what he called 'an illuminating device for frightening mice.' You will find it registered in the U.S. Patent Office as Letters Patent No. 305,102.

"I see by the radio columns that you people are looking for novelties in news telecasting. As I have a television set and don't think you are yet doing much to give the public good television novelties, I think you ought to consider a telecast built around the invention referred to. It has never been marketed, so it would be news to the public; and as it is useful it would also serve a purpose, which is not true of most news.

"Besides you got the radio public used to hearing about mice on the radio a couple of years ago with your Singing Mouse Contest, so I guess there will be no objection to the idea because it involves mice, which are unpleasant creatures to most people.

"This invention was described in the original application for a patent as a new, ornamental illuminated device for frightening and exterminating mice; and it has for its object to provide an article of this character which will be arranged and adapted to effect the purposes stated without the use of deadly poisons.

"To this end the said invention consists in the figure of a life-size cat on cardboard having several coats of illuminated paint arranged so that the figure will shine in the dark; and, furthermore, in smearing said figure with peppermint, which is obnoxious to mice, and thus the device will have the effect of driving away these rodents.

"The cat is shown in a sitting posture, with its head turned slightly toward the right and its eyes directed toward and

watching an object near by. Because the figure of the cat is covered with several coats of the illuminated paint it will shine in the dark. . . . Then to the imitation cat the oil of peppermint is generously applied. Mice find this odor sickening and it will drive them away. The eyes of the cat are coated with a thick application of phosphorus, to make them shine with more brilliance than the body of the figure. To the back of the figure is attached a swinging flap, arranged to be folded flat against the back or swung outward to rest on a stand or on the floor, so as to support the figure in an upright position.

"The device serves two functions, since it will frighten away mice, and also makes an attractive ornament to place on the mantelpiece or the sitting-room table when not in use as an anti-rodent device. . . .

"It is also useful, in connection with its main purpose, to place on the outside windowsill facing the window so as to shine through the same and be seen in the dark by any mice whose holes are so located they would be likely to look in this direction when they come out. It can also be placed in pantries, on shelves where there is food that might lure mice out for a sniff, or on floors likely to be traversed by mice in getting to the things they come out to nibble at. . . .

"To my knowledge, phosphorescent effects have never been employed in telecasting, so this would be something original and different. I would be willing to announce the news about this new way of discouraging mice without any charge to you as this might result in my finding a backer to put this invention, which has been deeded to me, on the market." . . .

Is somebody pulling my leg? There is so much ribbing in radio it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between a hoax and the real thing.

I'll have someone look up Letters Patent No. 305,102 to see if it's genuine. Not that there'll be any broadcasts featuring mouse-discouragers if it is. I'm just plain curious.

Impossible! Old Faithful is in again. Old Faithful is an Oriental epic that keeps bobbing up time and again. Originally it came to me as something that had happened in China,

then the setting was Korean, now it is Tibetan. At least five times a year Old Faithful is submitted as a news item. Consult the chapter called "Offshoots and Oddments" for two versions of O.F. . . . But this letter offers O.F. at the most reasonable rate yet,—only \$10. Alas, we can't buy. Having spilled the Chinese version eight or nine years ago, we've got to stick to our story.

But what completes my day, what makes it a memorable one is this letter from Buddy Twiss, our news chief in Hollywood:

"Regarding your book, obviously it would be a great error of omission if the Pacific Coast were left out of your opus. As a matter of fact, it damn well better be in there, if you expect any plugs from our Pacific Coast book-review programs.

"Seriously, here are some items in chronological order, which you might be interested in. If any more information is wanted about any of them, let me know and I will get the complete dope.

"*MACON BROADCAST*—We did a broadcast from the *Macon* just a few days before it crashed off Monterey, California. As a matter of fact, we found after we got in the air the ship was scheduled to go south with the Navy, and after we finished the broadcast it was necessary for our crew to drop out through the belly of the ship in the little planes the *Macon* carried on board. They took us down two at a time and Thompson and I, very white-faced, jammed into one seat.

"On landing at Crissy Field, found that we had hooked our parachute clips to each other's parachute and put the one free hook into a ring in the side of the plane. After disembarking, we waited for the next plane carrying the engineers, which came in some minutes later. In the meantime our ship had taken off and returned to the *Macon*.

"De Wolf was one of the engineers in the second ship and on alighting from his first flight stated that the program must have been all right as he had passed our ship on the way back, and the pilot had reached out and clapped his hands in mid-air. The pilot of De Wolf's ship tapped him on the shoulder

and advised him that was not an applause indication, merely pointed out to the incoming pilot that there was no ceiling, dangerous landing, with the fog right on the ground. De Wolf has not been up since.

“RCA MAGIC KEY BROADCAST—This one you may be familiar with. It has to do with the well-known Admiral from North Island, who refused to go up with the experimental four-motored ship we were using for the job. If you remember, the rehearsal came very early in the morning. It was very involved, with pickups all over the country and a special round-robin loop to New York. We provided a stand-in for the rehearsal and it was necessary for everyone to use earphones.

“As you know, in a round-robin loop of this length, there is a full second-and-a-half or two-second lag in the return from microphone to New York and back by wire into the earphones. Because of the refusal of the Admiral to participate in rehearsal, he was not aware of this lag, and no one remembered to tell him. The recording we have of it is the greatest comedy bit we have had on the air. The Commander in Chief of the fleet called him on the air and he replied, ‘Aye, Aye, Sir.’ He paused for a moment and heard the ‘Aye Aye’ come back on the earphones, thought he forgot to say, ‘Sir,’ so said it again and it came back ‘Aye Aye Sir Sir.’

“From there on he went on to identify the ship, which was the XPBY2. He got out the XPB and then it started coming back in his ear while he was still talking and the ship turned out to be the X P B WE P WE.

“After that the old boy broke down completely and did two minutes of double talk with engineers here frantically checking equipment and Hartley started to phone from New York asking what the hell was the matter. After we got his earphones off, he returned to normal.

“SWALLOWS OF SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO—This story you are also familiar with. The only thing that can be pointed up is the fact that Special Events Department NBC saved a mission. They were about to close the mission from lack of funds, when we first did a broadcast. At the first broad-

cast there were twenty-five people present in the mission, most of them curious local people who wanted to know how a broadcast was put together.

"The second year this figure increased to five hundred, and the last time we did the show there were 60,000 in the mission with the gate closed to prevent the people from ruining the gardens. Since then, any number of discoveries have been made in the mission with the excavation work paid for by the admission charged to visitors brought by our broadcasts. The mission is now more than self-sustaining.

"DOUG CORRIGAN—When you phoned from New York requesting two-way talk between Corrigan's uncle in Hollywood and Doug Corrigan in Ireland, it was about forty-five minutes before we located his uncle. Columbia was also looking for him. He called me back after I had contacted him and said they had asked him to come to their studio. This was seven in the morning, and the broadcast was set for after nine, which left two hours for anyone to get at Reverend S. Frazer Langford. In order to avoid any delay for our broadcast, we sent a limousine and chauffeur out to his home to pick up Reverend Langford and his wife and Doug Corrigan's grandmother. The chauffeur had instructions to drive them around, call the studio every fifteen minutes, which he did. During that period of course it was impossible for anyone to contact any member of the family.

"After we had the broadcast set up, and the chauffeur had phoned in, he was told to bring them to the studio, where we kept them until broadcast time. Most of the interviews with the press associations and the local papers took place in the studios (all pictures were taken there too) as the only information left at the Reverend's home was that he had gone to NBC.

"MALIBU BEACH FIRE—You will recall phoning out for a pickup on this job. We got in contact with the phone company, picked up a phone truck and three linemen. In our mobile unit we had two engineers and two program men. We agreed to meet at Malibu Beach. When we arrived there the

entire hillside was ablaze, but the phone company managed to get us a line in a nearby station.

"After putting out a small fire which was burning at the sidewalls, we did a fifteen-minute broadcast at this spot. In checking in at the studio, we found you wanted another fifteen-minute show. In the meantime the fire had burned over the hill away from the ocean and into a canyon.

"We started our caravan again, and spotted a mansion high on a bluff overlooking this canyon. The floor of the canyon was ablaze. We decided if we could set up a receiving point at this home we could get down into the floor of the canyon with a beer-mug * and get a pretty good pickup.

"After getting lost two or three times, we finally found the home with a watchman on guard at the gate, a couple of dogs, and a gun in his hand. We gave him \$5 and told him we were with NBC and all we wanted to do was use his phone line.

"Before he could say yes or no, there were seven men swarming over the house; the linemen ripped the phone off the wall and began testing for a line; our engineers were out on the balcony stringing an antenna for a beer-mug reception, while others were setting up receivers.

"About fifteen minutes and we were all ready to go, when a tall, distinguished man entered the room. In the hubbub of getting things ready we paid no attention to him, but dashed out with the beer-mugs and down into the canyon. We were able to get up the canyon about two miles, and conversed with our pickup point, they using a flashlight and we the headlights of our car, conversing in Morse.

"After we finished the show, we all went back to the house. The distinguished gentleman was still wandering around. I walked up to him and apologized for intruding on his home; I told him the phone company would reinstall his phone; I gave him my card, and tried to explain that radio, in covering the spot news field, sometimes had to do some very odd things. He took my card, carefully withdrew his own card from a neat

* A small portable transmitter, which is a complete licensed broadcasting station by itself. It is no larger than an ordinary shoe-box and weighs only seven pounds.

case, and handed it to me and without a word walked away. He was Frank Barham, Editor and Publisher of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*.

"MOVING MOUNTAIN—This is just by way of a side-light on the newsreel boys. During Los Angeles's famed Moving Mountain scare, which was really nothing but a small hill, we were all watching the phenomenon very carefully as were the other networks and the newsreel men.

"There is one chap by the name of Fox who works for Universal who is really on his toes. I ran into him at the Malibu Beach Fire, the Los Angeles floods, and I frequently see him on race-track assignments.

"As a matter of fact, we have covered together at least fifteen different events, this fellow always being there ahead of me. I live just around the corner from Elysian Park, where the mountain was supposed to be moving, and had a man posted in the Park to phone me if anything happened. He called, and ten minutes later I was at the scene, and down at the foot of the slide was Fox, with his camera set up, grinding away, throwing flares into the slide for better light."

Thank you, Buddy. You have more than made my day. A few more letters like yours and my book will be finished.

VIII

Kilocycle Kampus

KNUTE ROCKNE was the first big figure in football to realize what network broadcasting meant to the game. In 1930 he would not definitely fix the starting time of a home game until he had determined which open time we had. Many a Notre Dame game started fifteen to thirty minutes earlier or later than it would have otherwise because Rockne wanted to take full advantage of available broadcasting facilities.

It was Rockne's idea that radio was making new football fans all over the country, that it was giving the game a brand-new importance, that it would build new stadia and start the sport on a wholly different kind of boom from any it had ever known.

Rockne was right. Teams that once were known only in one section of the country have been nationalized by radio. Many a team, in fact, has been adopted by admirers who have never been within a thousand miles of the campus of their favorites. Some day a profound student of the game will trace the radio alumni to their earliest beginnings, make one of those impressive surveys—studded with charts and graphs—showing how they have affected attendance and the sport in general, and assign them their proper place in the gridiron scheme of things.

The Kilocycle Kampus is too big and sprawling to be analyzed by a mere radio news director. This is a task that calls for some Brookings of the sports world.

To one thing I can attest, however, and that is that the radio alumni, among whom are to be found some of the country's most rabid football fans, have made it increasingly necessary for us to observe the strictest kind of impartiality in

reporting the nation's many Annual Grid Classics. Not even the rarest vintage Old Grad, aged-in-the-ivy and bristling with Yalevard partisanship, can reach the heights of scorn achieved by members of the radio alumni who think their adopted school got a raw deal at the hands of a certain announcer.

We just can't give the fans too many sidelights. One that we added to our broadcast of an Army-Navy game—at best it was an unimportant novelty—made quite a hit. I refer to our having an announcer equipped with a portable transmitter stand by and describe the scene as the rival captains tossed a coin to determine which team would kick off and which goal line each would defend.

The coverage of the Army-Navy game is probably the most intensive of all. We short-wave a running account to the Philippine Islands, Honolulu, Alaska, and other faraway places where there are Army or Navy posts, or enough interested Americans to make up an audience, however small. For great is the wrath of the football fan who feels that he has been neglected on the day of the big service game. We can't get a full account to all the remote corners of the globe where there are Americans but we see that at least the final score is flashed around pretty generally.

The broadcasting of football games has increased the importance of the football "spotter." The spotter is a young man, frequently an incapacitated member of each team's squad, who helps football writers and broadcasters identify the players. Things happen so fast in modern football that the spotter is frequently a life-saver. Always a help to sports-writers, he is even more important to the person at the microphone giving a running account of a game.

The announcer can't wait for the players to unscramble so he can learn by the numbers of the jerseys who figured in this or that play. The spotter, who knows the players on the squad so well he can spot 'em by the way they stand or run, or by their gestures, and who also knows all the plays in his team's bag of tricks, tells the announcer in a split second just who figured in this or that play.

Even a football announcer like Bill Stern, who is a real student of the game and a quick-witted analyst of what is happening on the field, frequently cannot put all the parts of the puzzle together fast enough for instantaneous description without the aid of a spotter.

We used to have our troubles with the spotters. They would become so engrossed in the game and so excited over what was happening that they would forget to supply the information that was needed for instantaneous relaying to the radio audience. But we have them trained now.

As far as can be determined, spotting was started by Notre Dame, which has a long record of making life easier for the sportswriter and the sports announcer.

Our mail shows that football fans have an unfailing interest in the question of how a big game is covered for the benefit of the millions who attend by ear. A good way of giving the picture is to give some idea of the preparations that are made by a sports announcer like Bill Stern, who covers the big games for us.

Bill usually arrives on a Wednesday or a Thursday in the city where the game is to be played the following Saturday. He meets the coach of the home team and arranges to see the best available films of the team in action. Naturally, no set of films will completely tip the hand of a coach who is preparing for a big game. But the pictures are valuable reminders of how the team shifts, how the players look in action, etc. In most instances, such films are taken from an angle comparable to what one would see from a broadcasting booth so, generally speaking, they give a good idea of what the team will look like.

Many coaches do not hesitate to give Bill confidential information about trick plays, withheld up to a certain point in the season, and information about the assignments that certain players will have in connection with those plays. Some coaches even tip off Bill as to the signs which indicate that such-and-such a play is about to be set in motion.

Part of Bill Stern's value lies in the fact that he has the confidence of the coaches, who know that he will not violate a

confidence or spill information that might give aid and comfort to the opposing team.

Bill also arranges to have at least one meal with the home team at the training table. In talking with the players before, during and after the meal, he does not confine himself to football. He discusses their hobbies with them, the careers they are planning, and is thus able to gather a great many sidelights that add to the human interest value of a broadcast. Such information is particularly valuable during "time out" when there is a chance to add some colorful bits of information to what the listening audience already knows about the players who are momentarily in the spotlight.

By the time the game starts, Bill Stern is a walking compendium of information about every man on the field and every man who is likely to take the field before the afternoon is over. He knows everything that is to be known about the players. Nothing has been left to chance. His knowledge is the result of preparedness that overlooks nothing.

One of Bill's secrets was given away by a fan magazine. This publication revealed that Bill made a practice of carrying a camera without any film in it. He would single out certain players whose features he wanted to fix in his mind so that there would be little likelihood of his not recognizing them instantaneously as he looked at them through his field glasses from the broadcasting booth.

These players would be requested to pose for pictures. While they posed for him, Bill would concentrate on studying their features through his filmless camera.

Bill has an excellent memory for faces, and by the time he finished one of his make-believe picture-taking sessions, he had increased his knowledge of what the players looked like, and what their mannerisms were. Bill has become so expert in these matters that he does not have to place too much reliance on his spotters.

The spotters are important. But the natural flow of a broadcast would be impaired if too much depended on them.

They should supplement the sports announcer's information rather than act as his main source.

Bill Stern will go anywhere to pick up information about the players, anecdotes that help his broadcast during the interval between halves or some other lull in the gridiron proceedings.

Those big pre-game dinners at which the Old Grads whoop it up for Dear Old Pennsylvornia are not much fun unless it happens to be your own school. As these dinners are very much alike, an outsider could be excused for not wanting to attend one after he had attended his tenth. But not Bill Stern. If these whoopla parties bore Bill—and they should by now—he doesn't show it. To him they are hunting grounds. Invariably he comes away with a brand new story about this or that player, or some bit of useful or colorful information that will fit into his broadcast. He is too busy to be bored. He is gathering material.

Once he has a complete dossier on the home team, he goes to work on the visiting team. Wherever possible, he duplicates the same ritual. If there are movies available, he sees and studies them. He hobnobs with the coach, the staff of the coach, and winds up by attending the visiting team's do-or-die dinner, at which identically the same speeches, phrased differently, are delivered.

Friday night Bill locks himself in his room and types out his notes on both teams on 3 x 5 cards. If Bill had to attend a dinner that night, you can bet he gathered his information quickly and left early, for nothing must interfere with his Friday night study of the assorted information he has so assiduously gathered. The least important data are sorted out and held in reserve; his basic facts are arranged in logical order and marked so that he can tell at a glance what is on each card.

Saturday morning Bill checks and doublechecks on the numbers the players will wear. Typographical errors in football programs are rare, but they do happen. Such mistakes have caused trouble for football announcers in the past. There

have also been troublesome cases of players swapping jerseys with teammates. Bills carefully checks on all of these possible pitfalls. It is laborious work, but he considers it part of his job.

By Friday Bill and his two spotters—the one from the home squad and the one from the visiting team—know one another well. But Bill believes in a pre-game drill with his spotters, and regularly goes through this routine. He asks searching questions during these sessions and frequently turns up important last-minute information.

Needless to say, other football announcers have their own way of thoroughly preparing themselves for the broadcast of the big game,—men like Ted Husing, for instance. I have had a better opportunity to get a close-up of Bill's methods than those of any other football announcer, hence the concentration on Bill's way of doing things.

There is nothing accidental about your network announcer's ability to give you a play-by-play description of a football game that involves intricacies and unexpected developments that puzzle even many a spectator thoroughly familiar with the sport. It is a story of painstaking preparedness which frequently borders on drudgery.

The Old Grad and the Former Star represent one of the principal problems of the football announcer. It is not unusual for a member of the Class of 1906 or 1913 to tackle the announcer before the game starts and remind him that he—Samuel K. Swivelhip—ran ninety-five yards for a touchdown in that memorable game about twenty-five years ago. He is usually accompanied by another former luminary who kicked thirteen field goals in one and the same game, which of course is still a record.

All sorts of people put all sort of propositions up to the football announcer, who sits anxiously waiting for the game to start. As he takes a final look at his notes he is greeted by—

1. Someone who says, "My name is Bill Soandso. My son

in Seattle is listening in. Tell him I wish he were here with me."

2. Someone who wants mention made of the fact that the Class of 1905 is holding a reunion after the game.

3. Various and sundry old grads who think the announcer should have a drink with them.

4. A beaming old soak who has something like this to say, "You can't very well tell the radio audience what a swell announcer you are. Somebody else has to do that. I'll be glad to go on for a few minutes and tell what your broadcasts have meant to me and a lot of other people for years."

5. Someone who wants the announcer to leave his booth for just a few minutes to say hello to his family.

6. Someone who is launching a new movement that ties up with college athletics. On one occasion it was an organization that proposed to dedicate itself to the encouragement of outdoor sports among college boys who have athletic ability but are timid about going out for teams. It was tentatively called the Find Yourself Movement. The announcer was asked to serve on one of the committees.

In self-defense, football announcers make a lot of promises,—anything to get rid of a pest as the big game is about to get under way.

One reason why it is so simple to pester the average football announcer is that very few colleges make proper provision for the broadcasting of football games. Only a handful of college athletic associations realize what radio can do for football, with the result that very little effort is made to provide adequate facilities.

Most of the early football broadcasting booths were too small, or badly located. Until recently the booths assigned for football games at the Coliseum in Los Angeles were behind the goal line.

Some of the booths built in recent years indicate a desire to co-operate, but with no knowledge of what is needed. In this category I place the glass-encased booth, which does so efficient a job of shutting out outside noises that the announcer finds

it almost impossible to gauge the reaction of the crowd. Only by looking through the glass at their faces can he tell whether they are quiet or whether they are shouting, and he cannot examine enough faces to have more than a hazy idea of what is really going on.

Year after year, Bill Stern, and his CBS colleague, Ted Husing, smash the glass panes from the front of the broadcasting booth at a certain university. One of the officials of the college jokes about the advisability of arranging a net to catch the broken glass, but does nothing to remove those superfluous panes. Annually, Stern and Husing have to break the glass.

Only a small percentage of the Southern colleges have broadcasting booths. At many a football game in the South we have to construct a makeshift booth to house our crew. In the early days before we took such precautions, equipment was frequently damaged by rain.

Before Knute Rockne would allow any broadcasting booths to be built at the Notre Dame Stadium at South Bend, he asked Sid Strotz, then our Chicago program chief, to send over a radio engineer to advise him. Rockne said he wanted to build the finest radio booths that could be built. Constructed in 1930, they are still the best booths in the country for football broadcasts. They are so arranged that the engineer is stationed in the rear of the booth in a separate compartment and all he has to do is watch his dials and listen to his announcer. He cannot see the game.

It has been demonstrated that this sometimes is an advantage. An engineer who becomes too interested in watching the teams on the field sometimes fails to turn his dials on time to equalize the noises that well up from the crowd, band music, etc.

Broadcasting facilities are particularly poor at the two big baseball parks in New York, which are converted into football fields annually in the Fall,—the Polo Grounds and the Yankee Stadium. At the Polo grounds we set up shop in back of the scoreboard. At the Yankee Stadium, we rig up one of the boxes

as a broadcasting unit. Someday the owners of these properties will wake up and install adequate radio booths.

One of the jobs of the announcer in charge of the football-broadcasting unit is to find the leaders of the opposing bands and make arrangements for the copyright clearance in connection with all of their songs so that we will be protected on any that we may broadcast.

One of Bill Stern's pet stories has to do with his search for the leader of the Alabama band the day before the 1939 Tennessee-Alabama game. Bill was so busy rounding up information about the players on both teams that he had failed to keep track of the announcement of a concert to be given by the Alabama band. After searching all over Birmingham for the missing band leader he returned to the Tutweiler Hotel, where he was stopping, to see if the manager could help him with his problem. Bill's worries were soon over. A bellboy conducted him to the Main Ballroom of the Tutweiler Hotel where the Alabama band, in all its glory, was playing its whole repertoire for the benefit of an admiring throng.

The 1939 Alabama-Vanderbilt game was an important one for us to cover because both teams were possible Rose Bowl nominees. There were no radio booths at the Vanderbilt Field at Nashville, where the game was played. After a hurried consultation, the college authorities agreed to erect, at the top of the stadium, two booths that looked very much like telephone booths.

Not long before the game started, some wag painted the word "MEN" in prominent letters on the NBC booth, and the word "WOMEN" on the Columbia booth. Throughout the game, men and women tried to fight their way into these booths only to discover that the only kind of facilities we had were the broadcasting kind.

At a Notre Dame—Southern California game in Los Angeles Bill Stern, who did the running account for us, was receiving the scores of other games, these to be worked into his broadcast whenever there was a natural opening for such an interpolation. He noticed that the score of the game which he

was covering was given incorrectly. Three times within fifteen minutes he announced the score of the Notre Dame—Southern California game and three times he received a telegraphic message from Western Union, who were supplying his score service, informing him that he was broadcasting the incorrect score of the Notre Dame—Southern California game. Bill continued to give the correct score, which clashed with the figures on the tape. Finally, a message came over the tape saying, "This is Western Union. Can't you read?"

One of the basic facts about football broadcasts—especially where big games are involved—is that there will be a certain amount of correspondence criticizing the announcer for doing a biased job, and a certain amount of mail congratulating us on our wonderful coverage. The people who criticize us are not soreheads. Humanly enough they are irritated when their favorite team loses, and even when they cannot point out specific instances of favoritism shown the winner, they try to establish their case by insisting that at a certain point in the broadcast there was an exultant tone in the announcer's voice that indicated clearly he was tickled to death that those blankety-blank West Dakotas were winning.

Invariably there is criticism when more than one broadcasting system covers the same game. Many fans argue that we should get together and cover two different games; that we should draw lots to see which broadcasting system covers Game A and which covers Game B. They forget that a big broadcasting system furnishes a service to a big list of stations from coast to coast and that it is their duty to broadcast the best game available. The question is one that thousands of fans annually raise, but there isn't much we can do about it. A trade paper points out that it would be just as sound to argue against two newspapers front-paging the same story as it is to contend that two broadcasting systems should not cover the same game. Practically all these complaints come from dial jumpers, who like to hop from game to game and listen to a whole series of contests during one afternoon.

One of our jobs is to lend a touch of novelty to our broad-

casts of big games. The fact that annually the Yale and Harvard Clubs in London hold radio parties the day of the Yale-Harvard game suggested a stunt that we presented as a feature of the broadcast of this contest at Soldiers Field in 1937.

At half-time we presented brief greetings from the Presidents of the Harvard and Yale Clubs in London, speaking from that city. A loudspeaker system carried their words to every corner of the stadium. The crowd at Soldiers Field seemed to enjoy this unexpected feature of the game. There was much applause and much goodnatured kidding. It was a cold day at Cambridge, and when one of the speakers from abroad told how he and his pals were gathered around the radio beside a fireplace, glasses upraised, to drink a toast to Yale or Harvard, or both—I forget which—someone in the Yale cheering section cried out against the injustice of the London alumni drinking alone, and soon all over the stands there were cries of, "Pass the Bottle, you London ———'s."

At one of the Army-Navy games in Philadelphia we picked up twelve hundred Army and Navy officers singing service songs in Honolulu. Because of the difference in time, these officers would be listening to the game at about 7:00 A.M. We suggested that they stage a joint breakfast, at which they could sing their heads off.

The crowd at Franklin Field seemed to get a real thrill when we announced that we had arranged to have them hear Army and Navy songs piped in from Honolulu. The crowd joined in the singing, that was transmitted with great clarity all the way from the Hawaiian Islands, and the stunt was considered quite a success.

Another year an unusual situation provided an opportunity for a good human-interest sidelight. By an odd coincidence, it developed that both the Army and Navy had selected football captains that came from the same town, Kankakee, Ill. The boys were Allyn Bergner, Navy captain, and Harry Stella, Army captain, who had been classmates at the Kankakee High School.

At half-time during that year's Army-Navy game, we briefly told the story to the crowd by means of a loudspeaker system, and then presented the Kankakee High School band in West Point and Annapolis songs broadcast from Kankakee. Then we let the spectators decide for themselves whether the town of Kankakee was for the Army or the Navy by picking up the cheers for both teams that were being given in the town square. Naturally, the Navy supporters at Franklin Field felt that the cheers proved conclusively that Kankakee was for the Navy, while the Army side concluded that the yelling from Kankakee proved that the Illinois town was predominantly for the Army; so everyone was happy.

As the football season comes to an end we grimly await—sometimes in ambush—the first publicity blasts on the Battles of the Bowls. Some of the bowl contests have a legitimate place in the gridiron scheme of things while there are others that merely represent Chamber of Commerce high-pressuring at its worst.

In fact, I have moments, as I read the bowl-game releases with sidelights about the glories of this or that section of the country, when I feel that it would be far more appropriate to stage a contest of some kind—say, a bungalow or a lot-selling contest—between the Illikota Real Estate Board and the North Missconsin Boosters Association than to set up a post-season football game between teams representing the two sections. The rivalry frequently seems to be more of a real-estate than a gridiron one; and I wonder whether a play-by-play description of a contest between two rival sets of house-and-lot auctioneers wouldn't come as a pleasant relief to the radio audience after we had broadcast the seventh or the eighth in the Bowl Game Series which are quaintly referred to as Traditional Inter-sectional Rivalries.

Beginning with the Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl steam-ups we taint the air with an excess of speculation as to the teams that will oppose one another. . . . At least that's what some people think. Others think it's wonderful. Holders of both

views seem to listen in droves and some people think that's the answer.

One of the familiar cries is that "our game" (meaning any one of three or four of the more recently established "post-season classics") comes closer to deciding the football championship of the country than any other similar contest (the thinly veiled reference being to the Rose Bowl, of course).

The Sugar Bowl crowd, for instance, insisted that even though the Rose Bowl fixture was more ivy-mantled it did not come as close to settling the 1940 title as did the Sugar Bowl game between two unbeaten teams, Boston College and Tennessee. The point, friends, seems to be that the Rose Bowlers picked Stanford to play Nebraska, a team that had been beaten and therefore . . . Oh, hell, you finish it.

On the whole, we manage to keep the various bowl-game promoters fairly happy, but the question of whether they keep us happy is something else again. The intersectional battle royal of the collegiate mimeograph machines is an annual event that can assume terrifying proportions, especially when the telephonic blitzkrieg phase is reached and the rival camps stage verbal artillery duels in which the transmitters are manned by the ablest word-gunners that ever sent adjective-filled dumb-dumb bullets hurtling over the wires.

At the conclusion of the 1939 football season the dive-bombers and armored units that were protecting the advances of the different bowl-game aspirants swung into action in record time and had shot their way into our sport department's consciousness to such an extent that we were thinking of creating special shelters to which we could run when the panzer mimeo-squads started cutting through our defenses and the hot-air raids began in earnest. About a half-dozen different teams claimed to be the best in the country, all of them thought their records should be featured in lengthy broadcasts, and all in all the situation was on the bewildering side.

And then I got an idea. Why not a Lemon Bowl game between the two worst teams in the country? The running account of such a contest would make an amusing broadcast and

might prove to be the relief needed after the country had been gassed into a numb so-whatishness by the fumes of the rival mimeo-gunners.

The truth of the matter is that the football season really ends when the regularly scheduled games have been played. A post-season contest seldom has the natural appeal of a big game on a regular schedule, especially one that brings together undefeated rivals in a contest destined to make or mar the season for one or the other. Most of the post-season games get public attention—and are built up—largely through the claims of Teams C, D, E, F and G that they are better qualified than Team B to meet Team A in the annual Porridge Bowl Game.

It struck me that my Lemon Bowl Game, in addition to providing a good broadcast, would be fun for the spectators and might serve as healthy criticism of the more strenuous of the bowl-game promoters.

I discussed the idea with my associates in the News Department, and they were all for it; so I got busy trying to find out which were the two worst college football teams in the United States.

We sent out telegrams to all our stations requesting the records of the worst teams in their territory. Soon we were in possession of a number of wonderfully bad records. After careful study, supplemented by personal investigation, we decided that the worst football team in the country was that which represented the Spearfish Normal Teachers College of South Dakota.

It had been stipulated, in looking for the sourest teams in the land, that only three-year records would be considered. In other words, we did not want to make the mistake of selecting a team that was merely having an off year, and which, while it undoubtedly played inferior football, did not rank with the really bad teams of the country. To be considered for the Lemon Bowl honors, a team had to produce scores that established sustained inferiority over a period of three years,—1937, 1938 and 1939.

Such a team was Spearfish Teachers, whose three-year total

of fifteen defeats and only five victories gave them the fine defeat record of 75%, the best showing we could find. Since the Spearfish record represents the fruits of a nationwide search, and since it is a superlative thing of its kind, it is appended for the reader's information.

<i>OPPONENTS</i>	<i>1937</i>	<i>SPEARFISH</i>
Springfield Teachers	7	0
Aberdeen	33	0
Chadron Teachers	20	6
Huron	18	19
So. Dakota Wesleyan	19	13
So. Dakota Mines	7	6
	<i>1938</i>	
Huron	28	7
Springfield	13	0
Chadron Teachers	20	0
Aberdeen	6	0
Billings Poly.	6	7
Regis	6	0
So. Dakota Mines	20	0
	<i>1939</i>	
Aberdeen Teachers	26	0
Huron	14	0
Bottina Forestry	0	19
Billings Poly.	0	33
Regis	14	0
Springfield	0	7
So. Dakota Mines	3	0

Spearfish Teachers almost lost out as a Lemon Bowl candidate because of its 1939 record of three victories out of seven games played, but its over-all record for three years pulled its average up (or should I say down?) sufficiently to help it emerge as our No. One prospect.

We got in touch with the Spearfish coach, told him about our Lemon Bowl idea, and asked him if he thought the NBC

research, which had fixed upon his team as the worst in the country, was accurate.

There was no doubt about his team being lousy, he admitted. As to whether it was the worst in the land he couldn't say for sure. He'd never seen anything worse, but there might be. If we didn't succeed in finding a punker team he'd be glad to play in the Lemon Bowl Contest if it was all right with the school authorities. The fact that the profits would go to charity would make it easier for him to swing it.

Next we busied ourselves determining a suitable opponent for Spearfish Normal, and the auspices under which the contest should be played. Neither problem was simple. For instance, we had just about decided that Slippery Rock Teachers College was the second worst team in the country when they double-crossed us by winning their last and most important game. We finally fixed upon Milsaps College of Jackson, Miss., as the second most inept eleven in the land, and the one to secure as Spearfish's Lemon Bowl opponent, although we had not notified her of the honor we planned to bestow upon her.

Before getting ourselves definitely committed to a contest between Spearfish and Milsaps, I got busy on the question of sponsorship. In seeking such sponsorship it would be helpful to show that we had given careful study to the question of the teams that should battle it out for the lemon laurels, and I was proud of the fact that we could produce two such splendid products of laborious research as the Spearfish and Milsaps squads.

The regular football season was over and the first of the year was not far off. I was preparing to leave for Florida with Walter Winchell who spills his news over our Blue Network and who, by the way, has irreverently designated the writer as "my favorite program spoiler." Winchell usually takes a winter vacation in Miami, and someone representing the News Department is always on tap as program-improver and spoiler.

As Walter would rather have me spoil his program than anyone else, I gave myself the assignment.

While in Florida I decided to see what I could do about

obtaining sponsorship for the Lemon Bowl Game. First I consulted Hal Leyshon, Pulitzer-prize-winning Editor of the *Miami Daily News*, which owns the station that is the NBC outlet in Miami. Hal has a good sense of fun and agreed to help me explore the possibilities of my idea.

Hal put me in touch with the local Commander of the American Legion, to whom I explained my idea in detail. The two worst football teams in the country would play under the auspices of his organization for the United States Title-in-Reverse and the net proceeds would go to some local charity.

The Legion Commander was definitely interested and agreed to talk the matter over with some of the local bigwigs. A series of pow-wows took place in which I learned a lot about civic pride. One local brass-hat would have nothing to do with a game in which the two worst teams in the country played, on the ground that "Miami stood for the best." I pointed out that here was an opportunity for Miami to stage the best football comedy that the gridiron had ever known. NBC was ready to richen the mixture by securing the services of some of the leading radio comedians. They would alternate with outstanding football announcers like Bill Stern in describing the epic struggle for supremacy between Spearfish and Milsaps.

It was planned to get the comedians to do a deadpan job of describing what they saw. The more seriously they seemed to take the occasion the more fun would result.

Anything was possible. The Lemon Bowl title was to go to the loser, not the winner. The loser would win official recognition as the worst team in the United States. A game in which the two worst teams in the country strove to lose would really be something to watch.

On the other hand, each team might have decided to do or die for dear old Spearfish and Milsaps, with a resultant determination to win, even though it meant allowing the lemon laurels to go to the rival outfit. This would have been good clean fun, too. Meanwhile, we'd be building up an amusing broadcast and doing a constructive job of deflating the Jeff Peters type of "promotion engineer"—(no fooling, one of them

once called himself that)—employed by many a football-frenzied institution of learning.

Pretty soon we started striking snag after snag. Violent objection was made to a proposed lemon-colored ticket to the game, to be printed on lemon-shaped cardboard. This was a little too much for local pride to swallow. It was bad enough to have the prize football lemons of the country playing in Miami, which “stood for the best,” but to print up tickets that looked like lemons was rubbing it in.

It was felt, too, that the Lemon Bowl battle might be interpreted as a Bronx cheer for the forthcoming Orange Bowl game in Miami which CBS was scheduled to broadcast,—a contest, which like most other bowl games, claimed to be the nation’s outstanding post-season contest. So one irrevocable decision was made by the local boosters. The title “Lemon Bowl” must be scrapped.

I made a fresh start with a contest to be played for the benefit of a local milk-fund charity and to be called the Milk Bowl Game. This sounded rather tame, but we could still have our fun if we staged the Spearfish-Milsaps game.

These touchy city fathers! One could have understood Spearfish and Milsaps showing some reluctance about agreeing to display their football inferiority for the benefit of spectators, the press, radio and the newsreels. But civic pride—that was a deterrent I had not counted upon.

Because of the doubts expressed as to the wisdom of sully-ing the fair name of Miami by officially sanctioning bad football, the support of important local boosters could not be counted upon. Bad football had been played in Miami and other parts of Florida for years, but it had never had official encouragement. It was something you just didn’t discuss, like a relative in jail. If Florida football did get into the conversation, a good Floridian could be depended upon to change the subject to oranges, the weather (if mentionable that year), Hialeah, or one of the other glories of the State.

The lukewarm reception of the Milk Bowl idea, which, because some of Miami’s more dynamic go-getters interpreted

it as a slap at the Orange Bowl game, made it extremely doubtful whether the American Legion would be able to guarantee the money needed to cover the traveling expenses of the contesting squads, their living expenses for a week, etc. In all, a \$7000 guarantee was needed, and this was not in sight.

A whole-hearted acceptance of the idea by the city fathers would have meant one of those whirlwind ticket-selling campaigns that would have quickly sold enough tickets at twenty-five cents to a dollar a head to meet the guarantee and show a respectable profit for the milk fund. Without enthusiastic support from the city spark-plugs, it would have been difficult to draw a crowd, and, rather than see the job done half-heartedly, I called the whole thing off.

This made me pretty sad, but it was the only thing to do. A bad football team needs the psychological aid of a responsive crowd before it can show what it can really do. You can be a pastmaster of the fumble or the muffed signal, but if there is no crowd on hand to cheer you on to bigger and better blunders, you are lost.

In retrospect I realize what a wise decision I made. If I had gone ahead with my plans despite the half-hearted support of the local somebodies I might have had a serious situation on my hands. With no crowd to spur them on to epic boners, the two worst teams in the country might have played good football, and the few thousand spectators, made hungry by publicity for super-lousy football, could easily have decided they had been cheated and that the doublecrossing they had received called for the tarring and feathering of both teams.

Remember the classical story of the French commuters who, accustomed to bad service, customarily arrived twenty-five minutes late for the train to Paris? One morning the train arrived on time and the enraged Frenchmen, having missed their train, wrecked the station.

I shudder to think what might have happened if, having promised the radio audience a broadcast of the world's most awful game, we were in a spot that necessitated giving them the play-by-play of a good contest. . . . What a narrow escape!

IX

Scoops

THE thrill-packed career of Germany's famous pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* came to a finish at sunset on Sunday, December 17, 1939, when her Commander, Captain Hans Langsdorff, stood in a motor launch and pressed an electric button that blew her up. Not many seconds after the explosion—and the most significant word in this paragraph from the radio standpoint is that word “seconds”—millions of radio listeners in the United States heard these words in a voice throbbing with excitement: “We have just seen the *Graf Spee* explode five miles from the coast. The ship has been scuttled!”

It was the voice of James Bowen, special NBC representative in Montevideo, who was so identified in a brief announcement. Bowen while connected with my office on a short-wave line which kept us posted on developments in the story the whole world was watching, suddenly shouted, “Give me the air! Quick! The ship has exploded!”

Both networks were immediately cleared and Bowen's voice was heard throughout the United States over more than 175 stations.

The barges and launches into which Captain Langsdorff had loaded the single men of the pocket battleship's personnel, and the German cargo steamer *Tacoma*, which had taken aboard the married men, had not yet started for shore when Bowen, five minutes after we broadcast his flash, took the air with a “blow by blow” description of the ship's sinking.

A few quotations from Bowen's broadcast, recorded in our office as it came in, will serve to illustrate the stirring nature of this historic radio news story: “. . . The ship is moving now, rolling from side to side. There goes another explosion!

The after turret has gone up. Evidently the powder magazine caught fire. She is going down. She is going down by the stern. The stern is now completely under water. Flames are still shooting up in the air and there are great clouds of smoke. . . . The explosions continue intermittently as though additional bags of powder or chemicals or arms, just reached by the heat or the flames, are going up. . . .

"There has been a tremendous amount of excitement here all day. I have been going back and forth, being pushed around here on the docks. I had to cut off on one broadcast due to almost falling into the water with the amplifier, the microphone and the rest of the radio equipment, along with the powerful binoculars I'm using. . . .

"A tremendous crowd—the estimates run from 70,000 to 200,000—have been pushing around on the docks all day long. . . .

"She is still going down. The bow is under. She seems to rise a little bit at the stern. That is possibly due to seeing it from here. She went down stern first. That left the bow a little bit in the air. Now she seems to be settling, going down a little bit more. . . .

"The aft turret is gone completely. Part of her superstructure is gone. The stack is still there. She is down in the shallow water to its full depth. Her superstructure is out of the water. She is now absolutely on the bottom. The only thing now showing is the superstructure. . . .

"The *Graf Spee* is still aflame, so it is hard to say whether or not anything will be saved. Possibly the action of the water will save something. . . .

"I saw the *Graf Spee* four hours after her arrival in Montevideo. I made at least ten trips around her in the last three days. . . . I saw them patching up the shell holes, repainting, and then welding on new plates. . . . Last night we described that work. . . . It gives you the thought that the decision to blow up the *Graf Spee* was a last-minute one. . . .

"The crowds are just about shoving us into the water. We are in a bad way. But we will do the best we can. . . . We

know more or less what is going on, but we don't want to tell you what we think is going on. We want to tell you what we can see.

"We are hampered by the people on the Rambler, as we call it. The Rambler is a waterfront walk, wider than the boardwalk at Atlantic City. It is absolutely blocked. It is impossible to move. You can't walk in one direction or the other. If you want to shift your position you just have to follow the swing of the crowd. . . . The Rambler is choked with automobiles and people.

"The *Graf Spee* seems to be settling a little bit more at the moment. It is possible that the rest of her will disappear from view. . . .

"We will be back on the air later."

We have scooped the opposition in our time and we have been scooped. Sometimes so-called scoops have debatable angles. It is a matter of record that we scooped the world on the scuttling of the *Graf Spee*.

The reaction to this electrifying NBC "exclusive" was exhilarating, to put it mildly. President Roosevelt, who had tuned in at his home in Hyde Park, used the word "thrilling" to describe our *Graf Spee* coverage.

The press was extremely fair to us. We had the only radio voice circuit from Montevideo and immediately on receipt in New York of Bowen's flash, the press associations flashed their papers with full credit to NBC.

We also scored when, putting the flash on our short-wave beams to Europe, we were the source of extras published in Paris and London and were so credited. Routine cable confirmation lagged considerably.

When it was all over I had a great many roses tossed at me, but if I had not been lucky enough to have a man like Jimmy Bowen at the other end we would have lost out.

A man with less resourcefulness and tenacity would have failed to produce what I was after.

Try to visualize Bowen on the Montevideo waterfront. He

was connected by telephone with four Uruguayan radio men who took up four other positions along the shoreline. Bowen supplemented what he saw through his powerful glasses with some of the material that these men, also equipped with strong binoculars, fed him in their native tongue.

As none of the Uruguayans spoke English, Bowen, whose linguistic ability was a factor, did a lightning-fast job of translating for the radio audience such observations of his four native associates as he considered usable.

Never did a broadcaster have to think faster and never did one fulfil the requirements more satisfactorily.

Bowen, by the way, only about a half hour before scooping the world on the *Graf Spee* scuttling, made an unusual request of me as I sat at my desk in New York. There had been a brief lull in the excitement over the dramatic possibilities of the situation off the Montevideo shoreline, and Bowen and I were chatting on the short-wave "cue" channel. "By the way," said Bowen, momentarily getting away from the story for which he had been standing by almost constantly for seventy-two hours, "will you please call the Vassar Women's Club in Washington and ask my mother to listen in. We haven't seen each other for several years."

With Bowen still on the line I had a call put through to Mrs. Bowen. She was not in but was expected back any minute. I left her son's message.

At the conclusion of Bowen's broadcast of the scuttling I phoned his mother again and succeeded in getting her on the telephone. She had received my message in time and had heard her son's spine-tingling description of the blowing up of the pocket battleship. She was deeply moved by "a wonderful experience" and most grateful to us for relaying her son's message.

We knew very little about Bowen, who had been pressed into service for this special job. We wanted some information about him for our releases to the press, and Mrs. Bowen supplied the necessary biographical data. She told me that her son was born in Lowell, Mass., was educated in Boston, had

served with the A.E.F. in the first World War, was forty-three years old and married. He had been manager of the American Club in Buenos Aires and at the time of the *Graf Spee* excitement was acting as Uruguayan representative for an American motion picture company.

Percy (Bill) Clark, our technical representative in Montevideo who handled the details of the *Graf Spee* broadcast, has been in South America for the past decade. He is one of the cleverest and best-known radio engineers on the South American Continent.

For days, letters and telegrams poured into our office in connection with the broadcast, which so many radio writers have since referred to as "historic." One of the most interesting of the telegrams was received from Captain L. W. Sherman, United Airlines pilot, who wired us from Denver not long after Bowen concluded his running account:

HOPE THIS IS NEWS WHILE FLYING UNITED AIRLINES
COAST TO COAST TRIP THIS AFTERNOON OVER BUFFALO
BILL COUNTRY OF NEBRASKA I GOT PERFECT RECEPTION
OF SINKING OF GRAF SPEE OFF SOUTH AMERICA ON MY
AUXILIARY RECEIVER AND PASSED ON TO MY PASSENGERS
THE RUNNING ACCOUNT OF NBC SO THEY GOT SCUTTLE
JUST AS QUICKLY AS DID THE PEOPLE IN MONTEVIDEO I
THEN GOT DISTINCTLY YOUR BROADCAST FROM LONDON
AND BERLIN I WAS FLYING 11000 FEET AT 180 MILES AN
HOUR

I find it necessary to keep in constant touch with my office. I never get out of telephone communication with the news-room and frequently I drop in at night.

The NBC news department is capably staffed and I never feel the need for dropping in when I'm off duty because of any fears that something will be badly handled in my absence. I have no delusions of indispensability.

But the NBC news-room is a fascinating place. I find it hard to keep away from it. Somewhere between the lurid melodramatics of some of the "pulp" fictioneers in dealing with

toilers in the different journalistic vineyards and the more orderly excitement of organized news coverage lies the truth about a job like mine. Its range is all the way from dull routine to the sort of thing that happened the night I dropped in at the office as bells were ringing all over the place to herald the flash: "HOLLAND INVADED!"

Only a half hour earlier we had had a broadcast from Amsterdam, which told the radio audience that "everything is very quiet and peaceful here tonight. The soldiers are strolling along the boulevards with their girl friends."

Hitler had again acted with startling suddenness. There had been talk for months of an invasion of the Lowlands and on several occasions military preparations indicated that it was about to happen. But repeatedly it failed to happen and when it did it caught most of the world off guard.

Holland invaded! We immediately released the news over both NBC networks. But as yet there wasn't much information to supplement the brief tragic bulletin.

I immediately tried to reach someone in Holland,—in Amsterdam, anywhere. There was nothing but confusion. I couldn't raise a soul who could tell me anything. The trans-oceanic telephone, which had helped us get so many important stories, was never so useless.

I had instructed a member of the news staff to get hold of Dr. Alexander Loudon, Netherlands Minister to the United States, at the Dutch Legation in Washington. He was in New York, we were told. Our Washington office confirmed this. Where in New York? We phoned our heads off until we got an address.

I sent Jack Hartley, resourceful and energetic member of the staff, to the New York address Washington gave us. "If Dr. Loudon is there," I told Jack, "bring him in. Do anything short of kidnaping him to get him here."

Hartley found Dr. Loudon. The Dutch Minister had no statement to make. No. He wouldn't say a thing. How could he? He had no more information than we. Holland was invaded. What comment could he make on that except to say

he was heartbroken? PLEASE! NOTHING whatsoever would he say. There was nothing, nothing, NOTHING that he could say that would have any significance. . . . Perhaps when there was more information, when the world had some idea of what was going on, when there were some details, perhaps then. . . . No! Nothing now!

Hartley was reporting to me by telephone. I asked him to let me speak to Dr. Loudon.

"I have nothing at all to say," was his greeting. "What can I say?" There was emotion in his voice. I hated to press the matter further. But Dr. Loudon could be of help to us and we could be of help to him. I urged him to come to our office. He finally agreed when I said, "You tell me you have very little information. We're beginning to get some details. And as fast as there's additional news we'll get it. You ought to be where you can find out what's happening as fast as possible. I don't know a better place than our news-room."

In about half an hour Dr. Loudon was in my office. He was accompanied by a friend—a prominent Dutch banker whose name I have forgotten.

There was no censorship yet and information was beginning to come in about the parachute troops. Dr. Loudon was aghast at what was happening, but he was confident. Tense with excitement, he presented the most stirring picture I have ever seen of a man who could hardly wait for the news. He would sit down only to jump up in a few seconds. He was on and off his feet a dozen times during his first ten minutes in my office.

The news was fragmentary at best. I was in constant touch with our London and Berlin offices in an effort to get a fuller story. After trying ceaselessly to raise one of our people in Holland we learned that telephone service between the United States and Holland had been suspended. Diplomatic calls were the only ones that could get through.

I pleaded with Dr. Loudon to call up the Foreign Office at The Hague to see if he could scare up any news to supplement the sketchy information we had and to see if they had

any objection to his issuing a statement. The Netherlands Minister told me how to put the call through so that it would be quickly identified at the other end as of diplomatic origin.

Some of the things that happen in situations of this kind seem incredible in retrospect. Think of the irony, for instance, of Dr. Loudon, true to the diplomatic code, insisting he would pay for the telephone call! While the operator was trying to reach The Hague the Minister and I did a little Alphonse-and-Gaston act as to whether the Netherlands Government or NBC would pay for the call. Needless to say, NBC won.

This sounds trivial, of course, but I don't think I'll ever forget that picture of the Netherlands Minister, the break in his voice eloquently describing his state of mind, trying to observe the amenities in a great crisis in his country's history. These little things, especially when you think about them long afterwards, somehow sharpen the dramatic outlines of the major happenings of which they are a part.

Dr. Loudon, in remarkably fast time when you consider the chaotic state of Holland that night, got the Foreign Office at The Hague on the telephone. He was not able to add considerably to the information we were getting from the press associations,—that is, information he would be allowed to give out—but the telephone call made news, for the Foreign Office thought it would be a good idea for Dr. Loudon to issue a statement. The nature of this statement was discussed, and a few minutes later I was helping Dr. Loudon prepare it.

If some of the information he had secured over the telephone—(which had to be in the “off the record” realm)—had been incorporated in the statement, it would have made even more important reading, but the fact that the Netherlands Minister was to make a statement on behalf of his Government was news in itself.

I notified the press that Dr. Loudon was in my office and would shortly issue a statement, and soon the reporters and photographers came swarming into the NBC news-room.

As this was “one for the book,” in that my office had temporarily become the Dutch Legation, the reader may be inter-

ested in a few quotations from Dr. Loudon's statement as pounded out by me. Let me point out that Dr. Loudon, with his Washington aides unavailable, needed assistance in the preparation of his statement and asked for it. He speaks perfectly good English and it is easy to carry on a conversation with him, but he seemed stymied by the problem presented by even a brief prepared statement, and I was glad to help him put together what his Government had asked him to say.

Here are a few excerpts from what the radio audience heard at 2 A.M., or two hours after we had broadcast the "Holland invaded" flash and I had set out to find Dr. Loudon:

"... Presenting Dr. Alexander Loudon, Netherlands Minister to Washington, who has just spoken by telephone to his Foreign Office at The Hague. Here he is now. Dr. Loudon."

Dr. Loudon:

"I have just spoken to the Foreign Office at The Hague. The bombardments are still under way. . . . We did not even receive an ultimatum. Two hours after the invasion began the German Minister to the Netherlands handed the Dutch Government, through our Foreign Minister, a declaration which has already been heard over the radio, as issued from Berlin. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has given our answer, and I read it to you just as I got it over the oceanic telephone: 'With indignation Her Majesty's Government refutes the allegations and insinuations that the Dutch Government had entered into any agreement whatsoever of an inimical nature with any foreign power, and which would have been aimed against Germany. . . . Due to this unprecedented attack, without any warning on the part of the German Government, the Netherlands Government considers itself at war with the German Reich.' This is the end of the statement. My Foreign Minister also tells me that a division of Nazi parachute troops have landed . . . and are meeting with stubborn resistance from the Dutch First Army Corps. . . . Her Majesty the Queen has met the situation with fortitude and calm."

The Mutual Broadcasting System had telephoned to see if they could send a man around to interview Dr. Loudon. Need-

less to say, I said, "Sure, send him," but we had the Dutch Minister's broadcast sewed up as our very own.

Hendrik Willem van Loon, who is prominent in the Dutch colony in New York, was at the studios of the Columbia Broadcasting System where, as a leading authority on the Netherlands, he was to broadcast a talk on the startling developments in the Lowlands. He telephoned Dr. Loudon and asked him to join him at Columbia. He wanted the Dutch Minister to do a broadcast from the Columbia studios. Dr. Loudon made a very polite declination, winding up with an elaborate "thank you."

"I'm going to broadcast from here," said Loudon. "Everyone is very nice to me here."

I didn't blame CBS for trying to wrest Dr. Loudon away from us. We did not own the Dutch Minister. But we saw him first.

Dr. Loudon, as depressed as he was, thanked me for helping get his country's views before the American public with such dispatch. He was greatly pleased to know that as a result of calling in the press so promptly the late editions of the morning papers all over the country would carry the statement of the Netherlands Government. I also told him that we would do a thorough job of rebroadcasting his statement later in the day for the benefit of those who did not hear the original broadcast which we had put on at so late an hour.

Even so, our mail revealed that there are a great many late listeners, a habit that seems to be growing among the more devoted followers of radio news. Because of the difference in time, we picked up more and more listeners as the program moved westward.

Perhaps by this time I should have let Dr. Loudon alone, but I was eager to get a broadcast out of the Netherlands and asked if he would help. He agreed to do what he could, but expressed the belief that it would be extremely difficult. He told me that he would like to stick around for any further news of the invasion that might come in. And while waiting

he'd be glad to call the Foreign Office at The Hague again and see what could be done.

"But," he added, "I must call at *our* expense this time."

Again we went through our ironic Alphonse-and-Gaston act and it was decided that NBC, having already benefited greatly, should certainly pay for a telephone call that might yield another important broadcast.

Before long Dr. Loudon was once again talking to the Foreign Office. He told them what we wanted. "The National Broadcasting Company has been very helpful to me," he said. "Anything you can do for them that does not interfere with official business will be greatly appreciated."

The Foreign Office asked for the name of the person we wanted to put on the air. I gave them the name of Margaret Rupli, a Washington girl who had done some excellent radio reporting for us out of Amsterdam. There was a lot of telephoning back and forth. Finally Dr. Loudon said to me, "The Foreign Office reports that Miss Rupli has left Amsterdam. Her husband, who was with her, is English, so they both decided they'd better get out. But she has been very thoughtful, the Foreign Office informs me. She has left the name of another girl—a Miss Louise Wight—who is ready to broadcast for you." The Foreign Minister himself called her out of bed to come to the studios in Amsterdam.

It was the first time a foreign ministry had gone to work for us. It was a wonderful experience. Dr. Loudon, although he had not once definitely said that a broadcast could be arranged, went ahead and made the arrangements!

Not much later I was in conversation with Miss Wight over a two-way radio channel from my office.

"Miss Wight," I said, "who are you?"

She replied, "I'm the wife of an American banker who is now in Sweden. I've been here six or seven years, and know my way around. I attended the University of Wisconsin. That's the story of Louise Wight. Now what do I do?"

"Just tell what's happening," I replied, "and, when you finish, say, 'And now I return you to the National Broadcast-

ing Company in New York.' You go on in ten minutes. Round up as much vital information as you can and give a few intimate glimpses of what you see with your own eyes. Forget you're not a radio professional. Tell the story as you would in conversation with a friend. That's the best kind of radio reporting."

Dr. Loudon seemed to get a real bang out of helping us. For a man who was going through hell, he had an amazing capacity for interesting himself in the other fellow's job.

I sent to a restaurant for some food. Dr. Loudon contented himself with a glass of milk, which he did not finish. His friend toyed gloomily with a sandwich.

It was now pretty late. Dr. Loudon said, "Well, that's enough bad news for one night. I've got to return to Washington."

He and his wife were to leave on a plane at seven that morning. I insisted on saving him the trouble of booking accommodations. "Let me do that for you," I said. And he started thanking me all over again as he departed. I had to work fast to get in a few thank-you's of my own.

Louise Wight proved to be a born trouper. She did a fine job. It was the first broadcast from the Netherlands since the invasion. Among other things, Miss Wight broke the first story of how Nazi parachutists dressed in Dutch army uniforms were being guided to their objectives by German servant girls disguised as men (employed by Dutch families until the Germans invaded the country).

"You were swell," I said to Miss Wight over the cue channel when the broadcast was over. "What shall I do with your check?"

"Start an account for me at the National City Bank," she replied. "Goodbye. I've got to get out of here! Air-raid warnings are sounding all over the place. You ought to be able to hear them."

"Honey," I pleaded, rather informally, I'll admit. "Stay where you are for another minute. I'm going to put you back on the air."

"What do I do?" she asked, reverting to her original query.

"Just say," I said, "'This is Louise Wight of NBC speaking to you again from Amsterdam. The air-raid warnings are sounding. Just listen to them.' Then say nothing until you sign off."

From the sound of them, the shrieking sirens were good for another minute or two.

A few seconds later Miss Wight was back on the air. She spoke her little piece and with stunning showmanship added a wallop which was part of her original conversation about the air-raid warnings: "And now I've got to clear out of here! Goodbye!"

One of the most important of our Second World War scoops is one that gives me very little to write about. On Sunday night, July 7, 1940, at 7:15 P.M., Bill Hillman, for fifteen years an important figure in the I.N.S. European service and now European chief for *Collier's Weekly*, in a broadcast from London on a Blue Network round-up from European capitals, announced that he had learned on the highest authority France would soon announce the adoption of the Fascist form of government. Hillman went into considerable detail. Everything he said was confirmed when the official announcement appeared for the first time the following day in the afternoon newspapers. The morning papers didn't carry the story.

It was a great beat but that is all I can tell you about it.

X

Scooped

THE airplane in which Howard Hughes would attempt to break the round-the-world flight record was nearing completion. A great deal of money was being intelligently spent and reports indicated that Hughes' special Lockheed would prove the fastest, sturdiest, most airworthy craft ever used on a trip of this kind.

We had been promised an "exclusive" and our whole organization was naturally excited about the possibilities. This was to be the round-the-world flight to end round-the-world flights.

We were in a wonderful position to make capital of this particular exclusive. We had men in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and other cities on around the globe, and could make preparations well in advance to handle the series of Howard Hughes round-the-world broadcasts we were planning.

The excitement in our office reached its peak in June, 1936. The Howard Hughes flight was on everyone's lips in the News Department.

Ever since Magellan, over four hundred years before, had attempted the first circumnavigation of the globe, there have been all kinds of trips around the world. All of them—from the slowest voyages to the more spectacular airplane dashes—have appealed to the popular imagination.

To the chronicle of round-the-world adventure a new and great chapter was about to be added—perhaps the greatest chapter of all—and we felt honored to be selected to write the radio pages.

Never was there so much conferring in our office about a big event that we had been fortunate enough to land exclu-

sively. William Burke Miller, NBC's Night Program Director, Frank E. Mullen, then of RCA, John F. Royal, at that time in charge of all NBC programs, and Albert Lodwick, Howard Hughes' representative, were the principal conferees.

The Hughes flight had everything, including scientific value. This was no mere stunt, no mere dash around the world. Hughes' staff would be equipped to gather valuable weather data and other information that would be of permanent aeronautic value.

Frankly, as a radio news man my primary concern was straight hardboiled flight news:—the exciting things that happened, the story about stubborn foreign officials who were more concerned with governmental red tape than with flight records, etc.; but it was also true that Hughes was doing something more important than his round-the-world predecessors and we were determined to give him the finest coverage possible. Top-flight NBC men would be on hand at all the plane's stops to do on-the-scene broadcasts that would please Hughes and his associates and would prove a real thrill to the vast radio audience that tunes in when there is a promise of colorful and dramatic aviation news.

How we nursed this story along! Our files show that almost two years prior to Hughes' take-off we launched our campaign to sew up these round-the-world broadcasts as our very own and when we were told we had succeeded we felt that here was another triumph of preparedness.

We had overlooked nothing. Our parent company, RCA, had arranged to have one of its transmitters and other RCA equipment installed in the Hughes plane, and one of NBC's best men, Dick Stoddard, had been named as radio engineer for the flight. We sent Dick to Seattle so that he could supervise the installation of the radio equipment at the plant and be in on all the technical radio aspects of the flight at the very beginning.

On November 7, 1937 I received a letter from Stoddard that proved to be Installment One of a long series of disillusionments.

Dick said that while he did not want to sound too pessimistic he thought he ought to point out that some strange things were happening. Others were trying to horn in on our "exclusive," and judging by the attention they were getting Dick wondered whether NBC had been granted some new kind of exclusivity that included everyone else.

To complete my happiness Dick tipped me off confidentially that Howard Hughes was thinking of discarding the RCA transmitter and seemed to be planning the installation of another type. This, of course, was puzzling, as there could be no question as to the efficiency of this transmitter which we had made available for the broadcasts from the plane. Nevertheless, Dick pointed out, it looked as if it was being shelved. This all seemed mysterious to him and he thought I ought to know about it.

I telephoned Dick at Seattle several times and got the impression that our great big scoop was being slowly but surely deflated. You can't blame the rival broadcasting systems for trying to elbow their way into a story as big as this one. They succeeded, and it was done so neatly that I want to express my admiration of the Old Smoothie who evolved the plan.

A representative of one of our competitors—if I were sure of his identity I would publicly acclaim his diplomatic talents—sold the New York World's Fair the idea that the Howard Hughes flight should be tied up with the Fair. After all, the Fair had a Court of Peace and what was Howard Hughes but a good-will ambassador spreading the peaceful message of civil aeronautics? What could be more appropriate than World's Fair sponsorship for the flight? That would make it possible for Mr. Hughes to shake hands with Grover Whalen before leaving to spread the gospel of peace and understanding. This would mean a lot of publicity for the World's Fair and surely Mr. Hughes wanted to do something for the Fair. Everyone wanted to do something for the Fair. Mr. Hughes proved no exception.

Naturally, now that Mr. Hughes was making his flight under the auspices of the World's Fair, NBC would have to un-

derstand that exclusives were out of the question. A round-the-world flight under the auspices of the World's Fair could not very well dodge the responsibility of making its radio privileges available to all broadcasting systems. Was this a world-wide proposition or wasn't it? And if it *was*, didn't that take in the *whole* radio world, not just NBC? Right!

After a while we began to feel thoroughly ashamed of ourselves for having even *thought* of the Hughes flight as an NBC exclusive. Did we have a cosmic social consciousness or didn't we? How could we ever think that we could sew up a Messenger of Peace as our very own when peace belongs to all?

"You shabby old monopolist!" I said to myself and—by way of further satisfying my conscience—sentenced myself to stand in a corner and say over and over again, until I'd said it one hundred times, "I love Mutual and CBS." Now and then, as a postscript, I added, "Peace—it's wonderful."

The World's Fair Publicity Department did not do things by halves. Mr. Whalen would not merely shake hands with Mr. Hughes before the flyer departed. He would also shake Mr. Hughes' hand—warmly, too—on his return. This would be another contribution to Peace.

As an officializing touch Mr. Hughes' Lockheed was to have "NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR" painted on it in big letters. As the theme of world amity continued popping into the discussions (in a bewildering sort of way), it was suggested that a few doves of peace might help get the message across. At NBC there isn't anything we wouldn't do for Peace, from gracefully submitting to the castration of an exclusive, to seeing Mr. Hughes' plane properly festooned with those lovely white birds. He had given us the bird and we generously wanted to give him a whole flock in return.

As an added contribution I even suggested that Al Lodwick, who, it will be recalled, represented Mr. Hughes, be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. After a while we found ourselves referring to him as Old Pax Lodwick. For it was Lodwick who, in collaboration with a high-pressure World's Fair executive typical of the First Flushing Dynasty, had Whalen:

ized the round-the-world flight and had made it impossible, by introducing the Peace theme, for us to declare war, which was our first impulse when we found we had been hornswoggled out of our exclusive.

Pax Lodwick did so thorough a job of persuading us to "go along" that we even decided to forget that a contract had been signed with his boss for the use of our transmitter, which we now knew would not be used.

I'm glad we decided not to disturb the peace, although—now I think it over—it's good no one said to me for the eleventh time: "You people wouldn't want to stand in the way of the World's Fair getting a lot of extra publicity, would you?"

We managed to stand it the first ten times but no one knows what might have happened if it had been said once more. Like Cousin Egbert, we can be pushed just so far.

We downed our homicidal impulses and promised to cooperate with the other broadcasting systems in making the Hughes flight as successful as possible from the radio standpoint.

Pax Lodwick called a meeting at the Rainbow Room, Mr. Rockefeller's de luxe saloon in Radio City, for the purpose of showing NBC, CBS, and Mutual how peacefully we could get along together when we really made up our minds to do so. Paul White represented Columbia, G. W. (Johnny) Johnstone represented Mutual, and I represented NBC. (Johnstone has since become Radio Director for the Democratic National Committee.)

Paul White was the first to disturb the peaceful atmosphere. Paul, who carries on his person a folding axe for splitting hairs, insisted that Dick Stoddard be referred to in all printed publicity, and on the air, as an RCA engineer, not an NBC engineer. This was a little hard to follow as Stoddard *was* an NBC engineer. But Paul feared NBC would get too much publicity if Stoddard was properly labeled.

Someone advanced the argument that since Stoddard would use an RCA transmitter it would be logical to label him an RCA engineer. This made it necessary for me to point out,

for the benefit of those who did not possess the information, that there had been considerable talk about supplanting the RCA transmitter. Gravely someone interposed that, regardless of whether RCA's transmitter was used or not, RCA was NBC's parent company and since Stoddard was an NBC man he could properly be called an RCA man.

The preceding paragraph should give the reader a good idea of the weightiness of the deliberations that took place when White, Schechter and Johnstone got together.

Paul White won his point. Dick Stoddard, an NBC engineer, was to be referred to as an RCA engineer. At least we left it that way for the time being.

The net of all our conferring was that our exclusive became an arrangement whereby the National Broadcasting Company would be extended "privileges at least as favorable as those extended to other broadcasters" in connection with the Howard Hughes round-the-world flight.

Pax Lodwick imposed a clause that I found so restrictive I protested vigorously against it. This clause read: "Because Mr. Hughes does not wish to commercialize the flight he has requested all members of his crew to obtain permission from him before making public speeches or giving interviews about the flight."

This would have meant that when the plane came down at one of the appointed stops, and Dick Stoddard, as radio officer, was among those interviewed by the press, the interview would go something like this:

"Did you have any trouble maintaining radio contact all the way here?"

"Huh?"

"Suppose I put it differently. How did your weather reports come in? Were there any points where you couldn't get essential information?"

"No spick English."

I momentarily forgot that Lodwick was the symbol of peace as I sailed into him for imposing a condition that amounted to making a dummy of Stoddard, not only for the duration of

the flight but for the rest of his natural life. Lodwick, too, forgot that he represented Grover Whalen's Court of Peace and took healthy swings at me in the verbal bout that ensued.

We finally compromised by adding a qualifying clause whereby Stoddard, or any other member of the crew, would be permitted to speak if he submitted advance text sufficiently early for Mr. Hughes to read the copy and grant his approval (Mr. Hughes to make any changes in the text that he deemed necessary).

Of course the stipulations designed to keep from "commercializing" the flight were magnificently ironic in view of the published statistics showing that a big percentage of those who visited the World's Fair, now Mr. Hughes' sponsors, did so to see the attractions in the so-called Amusement Area, where they could view such non-commercial exhibits as Billy Rose's Aquacade and the various "meat shows," as they are known in honky-tonk circles. Among these was one that offered a group of naked nifties billed as cover models for "famous magazines." (The famous magazines represented included *Rosy Romances*, *Boudoir Tales* and *Sex-Appeal Stories*.)

Another feature of Mr. Hughes' sponsorship was "The Debunkers," a pavilion where two pajama-clad girls lay stretched out in bed under a big sign announcing that if you hit a certain target which released a spring ("step right up, folks, three balls for a dime"!) one of the beds would collapse and send its occupant sprawling onto the floor.

Tired of battling, I merely hinted at these non-commercial attractions of Mr. Hughes' sponsor, but I only succeeded in puzzling Lodwick, who was already bewildered by so many other things that I did not press the point.

While all this was going on I had something more important to think about—the Sino-Japanese war, which had just broken out. When the Japs launched their invasion we were using the Government transmitter in Shanghai for broadcasts out of China. Then came a report that Japanese airplanes had bombed the Shanghai radio station and that we would have to send our own equipment.

As yet I had had no definite word that the RCA transmitter was being discarded. A good way of finding out was to announce that if the various rumors and unofficial reports were correct I would be very glad to take the transmitter off Mr. Hughes' hands. This brought matters quickly to a head. . . . Yes, the Hughes flight would not use the RCA transmitter. Our courtesy in making available this transmitter, undoubtedly a fine one, was deeply appreciated, but because of "policy reasons" (whatever they were) Mr. Hughes would be compelled, etc., etc.

This was all I wanted to know. I instructed our Pacific Coast office to have the transmitter—that Pax Lodwick was treating as if it had contracted some contagious disease—crated and shipped to China, where it did a lot more good than it could do waiting around wistfully in Seattle for someone to adopt it.

Finally everything was settled, ruling that no broadcasting system or station would be permitted to have direct contact with the plane unless this had first been approved by Mr. Lodwick; that there would be no exclusive broadcasts; that the first broadcast would be a joint one from the field before the plane took off; that the next one would also be a joint affair after the take-off; that Dick Stoddard, radio officer for the three broadcasting systems, would merely be referred to as "a radio engineer" on CBS and Mutual broadcasts, whereas on our own networks he would be referred to as an NBC engineer; and that we would decide the order of the next three broadcasts by the process of flipping a coin. Each of these three broadcasts was to be an exclusive, and we all agreed to leave it to chance to decide which of us got the first, second and third. The toss of the coin determined that NBC was to get the first of the exclusives from the plane, CBS the second and Mutual the third.

CBS, NBC, and Mutual were asked to stand by while the newsreels took some shots of Grover Whalen and Howard Hughes standing beside the plane and saying goodbye. After these newsreel shots had been taken, the three broadcasting

systems were to put on their joint broadcast. Usually each of us—NBC, CBS, and Mutual—watches the other two like the proverbial hawk to see that there is no monkey business. Needless to say we all trust one another implicitly, but temptations arise and the first thing you know someone is violating an agreement.

NBC and CBS made the mistake of taking their collective eye off Mutual for a few minutes, which was all the time that Mutual needed to get its microphone up with the newsreels. This meant that while Hughes and Whalen were doing their stuff for the movies, Mutual was broadcasting what Hughes and Whalen were saying for the newsreel sound track.

Later on the Mutual representative proved to be very much chagrined, but over the wrong thing. He seemed proud of the fact that he had beaten us to the air, but he seemed positively annoyed when the joint broadcast got under way and Mr. Hughes repeated identically the same statement that he had made for the benefit of the newsreels. Mutual had been doublecrossed!

The next broadcast, a few hours later when the great Lockheed was well out over the ocean, was to be the program that NBC-CBS-MUTUAL would get jointly. This was to take place at 10:30 that night. At about 10:15 word came from RCA in New York that this was to be an exclusive CBS show. We informed RCA that this could not be a CBS exclusive because of the arrangement entered into by the three broadcasting systems whereby this was to be a joint show.

The man in charge of this operation in the RCA office said, "My orders are to take instructions from Mr. Lodwick as to the allocation of broadcasts. He tells me this one is Columbia's." By the time we were able to get hold of Lodwick it was too late to prevent Columbia from getting the broadcast exclusively.

When I finally got hold of Lodwick I did not address him in a very dignified manner. In fact, I seem to recall that I threatened to knock his block off. Al has since acknowledged

that we had not been fairly treated and insists it was all a mistake; so we patched it up.

Meanwhile, NBC had a good opportunity to demonstrate how well it could take a ribbing. The Howard Hughes round-the-world flight which had originally been an NBC exclusive had next become an NBC-CBS-MUTUAL operation and was now a Columbia exclusive. We got a thorough joshing and deserved it.

In some way Paul White had put one over on us. When a thing of this kind happens there is no sense in making a lot of excuses. Whatever you say is interpreted as cry-baby stuff. The lamest of all excuses is to say that the other fellow was unethical. Most people interpret such a lament as an effort to get back at a rival who beats you to a story.

You find yourself taking your kidding as philosophically as you can and making such mental notes as this: "That so-and-so put one over on me. I'll have to get back at him sometime."

We got the next broadcast from the plane.

It was highly appropriate, since originally the round-the-world flight was to be one of those exclusives that our Promotion Department would be able to brag about, that Mutual, which got the broadcast after ours, landed a much better one,—in fact, the best one of the whole flight.

Listeners who stayed up late from coast-to-coast heard Hughes, over the Mutual network, say: "All I can do is hope we can reach the other side. The high temperature caused us to burn up quite a bit of excess fuel and it may be necessary to land short of our goal."

The next day this story was emblazoned on the front pages of the late editions of the New York morning papers as a Mutual scoop,—which it was—that put CBS and NBC in total eclipse for at least a day.

Once the plane made a stop, broadcasting was on a catch-as-catch-can basis. The first stop was Le Bourget Airport in Paris. Here our well-known European commentator, Fred Bate, took the air first. We had made arrangements far in

advance, and while it now is obvious that such arrangements frequently do not mean anything, this time they held.

However, Columbia did practically as well as we. They apparently had convinced the French Government that an international scandal would result if the wire that we had sewed up was not shared by Columbia; so their European chief, Ed Murrow, was given the use of our wire immediately after Bate finished.

Bate and Murrow are gentlemen of the old school, nothing like Schechter and White, and would rather die than double-cross each other. Bate and Murrow could no more fight over a broadcast than Schechter and White can keep from fighting over one. They decided to work together and do a joint broadcast when Howard Hughes took off from Paris on the next leg of his journey, the jump to Moscow. Their broadcast would not be identified as coming from the Columbia Broadcasting System or the National Broadcasting Company, but would open with some such salutation as "Hello, America!"

For hours while Bate and Murrow went on and on with their Alphonse and Gaston act the microphone atop one of the hangars at Le Bourget was open at a cost of several dollars per minute while the two men took turns at such soul-stirring remarks as: "There is a lot of activity all around us. Mechanics are running in and out of the hangar. . . . I think he is coming out now. No, that isn't Howard Hughes after all. But he will be here any minute. . . . The air is full of expectancy. In a moment the door of the huge hangar will open and out will come the great silver Lockheed plane."

On and on and on they went. They could not help themselves. A minor job was being done on the plane, and our man and CBS's had no course open to them but to keep up a running fire of small talk about the flight, Le Bourget, the interest of the French people, the weather, etc., etc.

For fifty-five minutes Alphonse Bate and Gaston Murrow kept it up. Each endorsed the other's homely observations in one of the greatest displays of plain and fancy platitude coin-

age in the history of radio. It was remarkable. In fact, in some ways it was as wonderful as the flight itself.

At 8:30 P.M. New York time Murrow went off the air to make way for an important Columbia commercial program. They figured that fifty-five minutes of chatter about a hangar door that was about to open was enough for any audience. So they signed off to make a little money for themselves while we grimly continued to serve the cause of aeronautics by giving the listening public a few more variations on what the scene at Le Bourget was like, with additional spine-tingling references to the door that was about to open.

Exactly two minutes after Columbia went off the air Fred Bate said "There she goes! She has taken off!"

And that was our scoop.

It is hoped that the reader has made a mental note of this achievement because at no subsequent point in the Hughes round-the-world flight did we reach so lofty a peak of achievement.

"How were we fixed in Berlin?" I was asked as the Hughes plane neared the German capital. How were we fixed? We were sitting pretty. Then for the benefit of each interrogator I would point to a stack of radiograms that made it plain to anyone who could read that we had done a masterful job of sewing things up in Germany. A study of those radiograms and the carbon copies of the messages that elicited them showed that I had been working on the Berlin broadcast for eight months.

There was to be no stop in Germany, but there was to be a broadcast from the plane while it was flying over that country en route to Russia. Max Jordan, our Continental manager, had arranged with the radio authorities in Berlin for a two-way conversation between Radio City in New York and the airplane. This was to be another one of those exclusives.

Well, we did get it exclusively but the signal was so poor that the best we could claim for this particular broadcast was that it was the most exclusive example of sustained inaudibility ever to emanate from an airplane flying over Germany.

This Howard Hughes round-the-world flight was getting to be such a hard-luck story that my more superstitious associates were beginning to regard it as a jinxed venture. When we finally succeeded in landing an important broadcast exclusively, no one could hear it.

In the thirteen minutes that intervened between our broadcast and the CBS one that followed atmospheric conditions had cleared up sufficiently to enable our gloating competitor to get perfect reception on an interesting two-way conversation between the plane and an English-speaking German announcer in Berlin.

We dismissed Berlin as a bad dream that we didn't want to think about any more and started concentrating on Moscow. We had a man there who knew his way around. We had been in touch with him for months, and we were confident that we had everything lined up for an exclusive.

But things didn't work out that way. Columbia was off the air when the plane reached the Russian capital. So this time, for the sake of variety, it was Mutual that horned in on our exclusive instead of Columbia. And this time we could not plead hard luck. What happened was strictly our own fault. We had failed to instruct our man at Moscow to say "Hello, NBC" as he opened his broadcast. In the absence of instructions he used the familiar "Hello, America." (It has since become standard for our foreign reporters to open with, "Hello, NBC.")

In some mysterious way (we have never been able to determine how) Mutual picked up this broadcast. If not for the oversight that was responsible for the failure of our man in Moscow to say "Hello, NBC," WOR, Mutual's principal station, would have been in the awkward position of bootlegging a broadcast with our label on it.

Later I found out that Mutual had not even sent a wire to Moscow asking for a broadcast. We, on the other hand, had been working on the Russian angle for months, and the best our efforts yielded was bracketing with the opposition. In fact, as I study the record, I find that Mutual, which originally en-

tered the picture as a sort of distant relation and was spending practically no money, was doing very nicely, thank you.

The foreign aspects of the Hughes flight having been so much bad news for us, it was with a feeling of relief that we started making plans for the American coverage, beginning with the stop at Fairbanks, Alaska. I sewed up the line between Juneau and Seattle and this time was really set for that big exclusive.

By now I need not say that we didn't get it. This time we had made no mistakes and had a legitimate excuse to blubber about our hard luck. A mechanical failure that would not happen more than once in a thousand times caused us to trail Mutual in our broadcast from Alaska by three or four minutes.

By this time I was beginning to feel pretty blue about the round-the-world flight. It was like being in a crap game and never rolling a seven.

A standard method of heckling me was to sneak up behind me and whisper "Howard Hughes." It got to be quite a game around the NBC office. Everyone got into it,—important executives, commentators, announcers, office boys, and even the NBC bootblack.

Need I tell you about Canada, too? Here we had arranged for exclusive No. 117-K. We made an ironclad arrangement with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which sent mobile units to practically every outpost where a plane might land on its way from Alaska to the United States. Never was there such thoroughness. But that's all there was. The report that the plane was to land somewhere in Canada was either incorrect or there had been a last-minute change in the plan.

The plane was to continue on its course and stop at one of three cities: St. Paul, Detroit or Cleveland. We telephoned our stations in those cities and told them to be sure to watch out for Howard Hughes. In each of the three cities arrangements were quickly made to run a line out to the airport and to be in readiness to go on the air the minute the big Lockheed was sighted.

When it seemed likeliest that Hughes would set his ship

down at St. Paul I telephoned Stanley Hubbard, General Manager of KSTP, and pleaded with him to see that nothing was overlooked in covering the airport. I said to Stanley, "If we ever wanted a broadcast, this is it. We have taken a licking on this Hughes story all around the world. We want to save something out of the wreckage by reporting the landing in the States first, if it is humanly possible."

I felt better when Hubbard, one of the ablest radio executives in the country, said, "Don't worry. I have everything under control."

The following morning I was seated at my desk sipping some coffee when suddenly the bells on the press association teletype machines rang out piercingly and flashed: "St. Paul: Hughes lands at St. Paul Airport."

In a split second I reached for the radio at my elbow and turned the dial to WOR, and there was Mutual describing the arrival of Howard Hughes.

I picked up the telephone and frantically tried to reach the KSTP crew at the St. Paul airport. I couldn't raise a soul. I then telephoned the KSTP control-room and asked the man at the controls if he knew what was wrong. While I held the wire he tried to reach the crew at the airport. Then he resumed his conversation with me: "I tried to reach our men at the airport but I can't get hold of anyone. I don't understand it."

It developed that the KSTP crew had gone to breakfast and were enjoying a leisurely meal while NBC took another licking.

John F. Royal, my boss, sent for his secretary and dictated a telegram. It was a message to KSTP that went like this: "For your information Hughes has arrived in St. Paul and departed. Love and kisses."

As for me, I just sat at my desk and muttered.

Having lost out so many times in a row I decided to handle the next broadcast myself. This would be the plane's final stop, Floyd Bennett Field, where Hughes had originally taken off on his globe-circling flight.

For over an hour I kept a line open. I didn't care what our announcer said. "Stall your head off," I told him. "Tell them about the crowd. Describe the tough job the cops are having keeping the mob back. Tell them about the wives of the flyers. And if you can't think of anything else, tell them it all over again."

We were connected with my private telephone circuit in the NBC News Room so I was able to pass along to the announcer the bulletins that were coming in. Columbia and Mutual were doing the same thing. Each of us would sign off briefly and then go back on the air again, which we were all equipped to do almost instantaneously.

In desultory fashion, the Columbia announcer, struggling for something to talk about, asked one of the airport officials a question that he had been asking at regular intervals. The question was: Well, when do you think the plane will get in?

The gentleman who was asked the question looked up and suddenly said, "There she is now!"

I had also spotted the plane the very same second.

"Give us the air" I shouted into my private microphone connected with the studios. Why it took three or four minutes to get back on the air I'll never know.

Nothing seemed to go right for us in connection with the Hughes flight. Once again Columbia had beaten us on the same story.

Here is how it happened. NBC, CBS, and Mutual, as I have pointed out, took turns in going off the air briefly while waiting for the plane to arrive. When we went off the air the last time Columbia thought it would be a good time to go back on, and their microphone was open when their announcer, fumbling for a question, repeated the query that resulted in the unexpected but nonetheless epic "There she is now!"

But that wasn't all. Columbia having just given us a shel-lacking, it was now Mutual's turn.

Despite the big detachment of policemen that was assigned to holding them back, the crowd surged forward as Howard

Hughes and his crew stepped out of the plane. As Grover Whalen stepped forward to greet them, Al Lodwick cautioned us not to get tangled in that milling mob. "If you gentlemen will stand in line we will bring the plane up to the apron, the police will get the flyers through the crowd, put them in an automobile and escort them right up to your microphones. Then you and the newsreel men can have a fair shot at them."

The Columbia and NBC announcers did as Lodwick suggested. I hovered over our man as a guarantee that this time we would not be beaten.

The Mutual announcer evidently didn't like it where we were standing, because he sneaked off, and the first thing we knew we saw him, microphone in hand, walking beside Grover Whalen and picking up Whalen's greeting and the acknowledgment of Howard Hughes and his crew.

Chalk up one more kick in the pants for NBC. Disconsolately I returned to the office. On the way I found myself rationalizing in an effort to make myself feel better about the whole thing. Oh, well, I thought, we have beaten the opposition a great many times, and maybe this was our turn to get a good trimming.

But when I reached my office and sat down at my desk I discovered that I hadn't succeeded in cheering myself up very much. In fact, I just sat there and muttered some more.

XI

The Floods Came

WE ASSIGNED twenty-three broadcasting units—a total of eighty men—to cover the great floods of 1937.

Assignments of this character go to resourceful types who are ready for anything. They must be prepared to operate on their own, with no home office to guide them, when they get out of communication with us; and, when they are in touch with us they must be prepared for unreasonable as well as reasonable instructions. They must be schooled in the art of ignoring the home office, when necessary, without getting too apoplectic about those idiots in New York and their damp-hool orders, and they must submit gracefully if we are called upon to tell them that what they are broadcasting is not of general interest.

These flood crews have to take chances in locating their equipment. Sometimes they can get a broadcast through, sometimes they can't.

During the floods of '37 the water had reached the top of the wall along the waterfront boulevard at Evansville, Ind. There at the edge of the breakwater one of our crews found a big flat-bottom stern-wheel river-boat with two barges fastened to it by means of steel cables. One of the barges had a queer sort of wooden canopy that sheltered people, horses, cattle and dogs.

Our crew got permission to board this boat, which was going down the river to take some people and cattle off a small island. In a driving rain the two members of this broadcasting unit, one an announcer and one an engineer, carried over four hundred pounds of equipment—a portable transmitter, twenty-five storage batteries, etc.—across a hundred feet of big slippery

rocks to a treacherously balanced plank that never stopped moving, and from this precarious bridge they had to get their equipment on the boat. They succeeded in carrying out their self-imposed assignment but claim to have aged five years apiece in the process.

Two members of the crew were stationed on the roof of an Evansville hotel. Their job was to string antennæ and set up receiving equipment so that they would be able to pick up what the short-wave crew on the boat sent and relay it to Chicago by means of the telephone line to which they were connected. At Chicago the broadcast would be put on the network.

The men on the boat, which had not yet departed, were working out their plans for broadcasting when their antenna was snipped in two as the boat, wobbling back and forth on the rising water, got too close to the overhanging limbs of a tree. Then the Captain, who had been rescuing people near the river bank, found it necessary to change the plan for his contemplated trip. This in turn made it necessary for the NBC crew to change their plans.

Our men then went through as risky a job of unloading their equipment as the earlier job of loading it on the old tub had been.

While one man guarded the equipment the other walked farther into town in an effort to find a taxi. When the reconnoiterer finally found a cab after walking four miles, the driver, who in the flood excitement had left his home without a hat, insisted on going home for it to comply with local police regulations that stipulated he must wear a chauffeur's cap while driving a passenger.

So our man was compelled to wait until the literal-minded taxi man drove home for his hat. Not even the argument that the police were preoccupied with rescue work and would not be concerned at this time with an infringement of a minor municipal regulation could budge him from his stand.

On the fourth day this crew had been out, a telephone company representative notified them that broadcasting would

have to be suspended. The rising waters had flooded the lobby of the hotel and put everything out of commission, including the switchboard. Our men had had the foresight to set up our improvised studio on the eighth floor, well above the level even this record-breaking flood would reach, and the next day the telephone company enabled us to resume broadcasting by running special cables for us over housetops and into the upper stories of the hotel.

Which reminds me that among the unsung heroes of every big flood story are the emergency telephone crews. I have marveled more than once at their ability to set up circuits under conditions so hazardous that only the unreasonable would have remonstrated if they had turned us down cold in the first place. Disaster after disaster over a period of years has seen these men performing almost superhuman feats to make broadcasting possible. Much of the credit given us for getting the news through when ordinary means of communication fail belongs to them.

I've had it on my conscience for some time that we have taken bows for courage and resourcefulness in making possible certain broadcasts that would never have taken place if not for the fact that the telephone emergency crews never let us down. If it's humanly possible to do a job they do it.

The American Red Cross has been kind enough on several occasions to acknowledge the importance of our co-operation in floods and other disasters. For their benefit—and for the information of anyone else who cares—I hereby transfer 50% of the laurels to telephone linemen whose names I don't even know.

During the floods of '37 NBC was constantly bowing from the waist in acknowledgment of public and private praise of its usefulness by local authorities as well as the Red Cross and the Coast Guard. There was no doubt that we had made ourselves useful in turning our facilities over to the Red Cross whenever they needed them to broadcast special requirements, to keep in touch with neighboring towns and learn what their needs were, to communicate with their main headquarters and

other relief agencies, and to make other important uses of a swift means of communication; but there would have been no facilities to turn over to the Red Cross if not for the telephone minutemen.

While passing out the laurels, I might point out the cooperative spirit of the airlines, which invariably offer planes and pilots for broadcasts from the air over the flooded areas. These broadcasts, in addition to giving the listening public graphic pictures of what is happening, sometimes prove of value to the relief authorities. A broadcast of this kind is most effective when it is a two-way affair, with the relief officials asking the observer in the plane specific questions designed to elicit vital information.

Some of the best human-interest stories of floods and other disasters result from the simple expedient of getting survivors to a microphone and asking them questions. The right questions usually elicit replies whose spontaneity and simplicity are more effective than the most carefully prepared and best-written script.

I must bring down a lot of cuss words on my head as I yip my head off—from my comfortable office—for more and more good human-interest broadcasts. In some cases the men I bark at have not had a decent meal or a comfortable place to sleep for days and I've never been quite sure whether restraint or fatigue is responsible for their not telling the New York office to go to hell more often.

One of our flood reporters set out one morning on a tour of an armory in which survivors were quartered. Hundreds of cots had been installed, and as our man looked the scene over he rightly felt: there should be a human-interest goldmine here. Men, women and children, some reclining, some sitting on their cots, were swapping stories about their experiences. It was a cheerful scene on the whole, for the first reaction of most disaster survivors is one of gratitude that their lives have been spared, if not their homes.

With so much colorful material to select from, the NBC man felt he could look the field over—(the flood story was no

longer spot news, and this was a mop-up broadcast that would not go on for a few hours)—and pick people for his program who seemed reasonably surefire.

Despite grim reminders of the tragedy—people weak from hunger and exposure, and doctors and nurses all over the place looking after the fever-ridden—there was enough “thank God I’m alive” conversation to kill any reluctance our man might have had to barge in on wholesale suffering in quest of a story.

Having looked over the whole armory, our reporter picked out five or six adults whose conversation sounded good, and about the same number of children, who seemed to have recovered their strength. He asked them if they would like to accompany him to his hotel for breakfast and a few words over the microphone about their experiences. They all seemed eager to get out of the armory, and soon they were on the way to our representative’s quarters.

Breakfast over, the NBC flood reporter had a chat with his group of survivors preparatory to putting them on the air. To insure spontaneity he carefully avoided telling them what to say, confining his remarks in the main to telling them how far from the mike to stand, to answer questions as though carrying on an ordinary conversation, and a few other fundamentals. He decided to open with one of the youngsters—a boy of twelve or thirteen—whose voice had caught his attention in the armory—and follow with one of the adults.

Addressing the youngster by name, the announcer asked him how it felt to be suddenly evacuated from a flooded home. “Aw, it’s nothin’,” was the gist of the boy’s nonchalant reply. “This is worse than usual, but nearly every year we have some kind of flood trouble.”

The announcer’s introduction had prepared the radio audience for at least a few harrowing details but none were forthcoming. Our little survivor seemed positively bored! The NBC man got him off the air fast and substituted another lad. This one (whose favorite game must have been the familiar juvenile pastime known as “follow the master”) echoed the sentiments

of his predecessor. There wasn't a thrill or a moist eye in a year of it.

The adults were better, but the blasé kids had already spoiled this particular program. On the whole we've been lucky with our broadcasts involving statements from survivors, so we're philosophic about our flops.

Our floods files are full of striking items. One memorandum tells how an NBC crew, after putting some Red Cross officials on the air, were discussing conditions with these relief workers. The subject of inoculation against typhoid came up. One of the Red Cross men mentioned the total of those inoculated in the flooded areas. The total seemed impressive to our representative, but the Red Cross man said, "It's not a bad beginning. It would surprise you to know how many obvious cases escape our attention in all the excitement. By the way, have you fellows been inoculated?"

It developed that they had not, and that they would soon be going for radio material into a district where typhoid had broken out. Dipping his needle into a flask of rye whisky—(there were no facilities for boiling instruments and no more antiseptics would be available for several hours)—a doctor in the Red Cross party who had a serum kit on him inoculated each member of the NBC crew, swabbing the arm punctures with more whisky.

Thus originated one of the worst gags in NBC's *Sour Pun Anthology*,—the one about the man who made the rye face while being inoculated.

We had so many crews covering the 1937 floods we could not keep track of them until we evolved a system of reporting their movements on a map.

So that our flood coverage would be more than an eye-witness account of human suffering we put flood-control experts on the air to discuss ways and means of preventing a recurrence of a tragedy like the 1937 disaster. This inevitably means stepping on a few Congressional toes; but these discussions have been so objective that in the main the reaction has been favorable.

When all wires are down and before the telephone crews can swing into action, radio amateurs, familiarly known as "hams," play an important part. It is not unusual for a ham to get a friend to act as his relief man so that he can relay short-wave messages for the police and the Red Cross twenty-four hours a day. As I have heard Niles Trammell, President of NBC, point out several times, William S. Paley, President of the Columbia Broadcasting System, performed a valuable public service when he established an annual award to go to the ham hero of the year.

By special permission of the Federal Communications Commission we put the radio amateurs on the air during the worst days of the 1937 floods. Many of our stations voluntarily put themselves on a public-service basis, canceling enough commercials to lose money during the disaster in order to carry a complete flood coverage, including the work of these hams.

Judging by the letters that poured in, thousands of people found in the messages that were being relayed by the amateurs a thrilling and constructive service. Because of their dramatic value even messages applicable only to a special territory were put on a nationwide hook-up.

In addition to their worth as exciting program material they helped so to build a picture of emergency, of distress and dire need, that they were a factor in getting people to heed appeals for help that could properly be aimed at the general public. The area affected by the Ohio and Mississippi floods stretched across many states, and I have always contended that there was no better way of bringing home to the whole United States what a great disaster of this kind meant than by nationalizing the relay job the amateurs were doing.

During the period when other means of communication were not functioning and would not get going until the telephone linemen and others could perform the necessary repairs without too great a risk, our own engineers in many parts of the country—most of whom have home radio transmitters because they get so much fun out of acting as hams on the

side—stayed home beside their equipment. Thus they were in a position to relay important messages to our crews and pick up emergency messages these men on the scene were trying to get through. Hence the relief authorities, temporarily marooned by the lack of national communication facilities, could make their needs fully known and get as much help as possible.

Digging into the files of the ham relays of those strenuous days I find such messages as these, taken from “platters” that were made during those flood days as permanent records:

“Please stop the white ambulance which is somewhere in the central part of Louisville. This is important. Have the driver call his office. It may save two lives.”

“Attention, all home owners! Please boil all your water before using. Do this if it is humanly possible. Certainly boil all your drinking water.”

“Blankets needed! Blankets! blankets! blankets! Any kind will do! No matter how worn they are they may save lives.”

“Will Coast Guard boat please stop at Meredith and Portsmouth Avenues and pick up two stranded women,” etc.

“Homeless men, women and children need clothing—any kind of clothing. Here’s how to get it to them,” etc.

“Mr. Maloney of the Red Cross, please contact your office immediately!”

“Boats! boats! boats! Fifty-six people marooned in a warehouse at 14th and Main. Fire has broken out near-by and is blowing in that direction. Hurry! Hurry!”

“Warning! Residents of 3rd and Hillcrest, extinguish any exposed fires or flames used domestically for cooking or any other purpose. Gas escaping from mains.”

“Watch out for heavy debris floating down South Main Street.”

“To persons in cities and towns near the flood zones who own trucks: Please get in touch with your local Red Cross. Trucks are needed to transport food, clothing, serum and nurses. The need for blankets continues. Please send any blankets you can spare to the local Red Cross.”

On and on it went—messages by the hundred. If the reader

followed the broadcasts of the 1937 floods he may recall some of those we put on the air.

It would take too much space—and also would amount to taking more after-the-event bows than would be good for us—if I attempted to reproduce even a small percentage of the letters in our Pats-on-the-Back file of this period acknowledging NBC's help during the emergency.

Here is an excerpt from a typical letter received from the Chairman of a Red Cross Chapter:

“On behalf of the people of my town and the Red Cross I want to thank you for putting on special announcements when we were trying desperately to contact certain people in the flooded area. We had two responses within ten minutes after the first announcement was on the air. Our telephones were out and we wanted to get information about these folks. With your co-operation we were able to get several families out to safety.”

We thought we knew something about using words sparingly in news broadcasts, but the floods taught us new tricks of condensation. In a thirty-minute program on January 22, 1937, we covered the flood situation in five states—Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee—featuring, in addition to news reports by our crews, rebroadcasts of relays picked up at the request of the relief authorities.

You're in show business even when you're reporting a flood and anything you can do to temper the grimness of things with a laugh is all to the good. Naturally I'm against converting human suffering into a listeners' holiday by means of radio pratfalls but there are legitimate brighteners that a guy in my job should take advantage of.

A good human-interest story released by the United Press in the early days of the '37 floods gave us an opportunity for a brief comic interlude. The U.P. reported that the shrill cry “Water! water!” was heard coming from Billy Doyle's Pet Shop in Portsmouth, Ohio. Piercingly the cry continued. Investigation revealed that one of the parrots in the shop was responsible.

This bird had added "Water! water!" to its original repertoire, which consisted of shouting "Polly wants a cracker!" in tones varying from a hoarse whisper to an ear-splitting shriek. It seems the parrot liked to drink water after eating a cracker and someone had taught it to yell for a drink when it wanted one. The sound of "Water! water!" appealed to the bird so much that eventually it practically abandoned "Polly wants a cracker!" and, when in the mood for a bit of vocalism, frequently settled down to a half-hour of aqua solo.

The crew I instructed to find that parrot and put it on the air thought I was crazy. This was understandable. When you haven't had a shave or a bath or a change of clothes for days, and have done very little eating or sleeping besides, you want to kill that clown in New York who ordered you out on a parrot hunt.

But special-events directors will continue to look for program brighteners in times of stress. It follows, of course, that emergency broadcasting crews will continue to want to throttle the men in the main office who suggest these things in the midst of a great disaster. That's the way we operate, with no one guilty of too much placidity. Our best men are experts at squawking and at handling headquarters belly-aching.

For the fact that these men work hard under trying conditions does not prevent us from hopping on them when we think they need it. In an effort to improve the 1937 flood broadcasts I did not hesitate to squawk to Crew A about a broadcast that was marred by an announcer's tantalizingly slow delivery, to Crew B for failure to identify its position, to the announcer with Crew C for giving himself too much introduction, to the announcer with Crew D for tiresomely bally-hooing the mayor of a certain town, etc.

The last-named was one of the commonest faults we had to correct. It was a perfectly human one, too. Obviously you got more local co-operation through public acknowledgment of the mayor's helpfulness, but when you forgot yourself and went into one of those eulogistic nominating speeches there was a chance of winding up on the silly side.

We also toned down silly effusions about Coast Guardsman Zilch who, unaided, saved enough lives to fill the Yankee Stadium. Just as practically every college town in the United States has at least one candidate for the All-America football team, so practically every community in the flooded area had a local Paul Bunyan whose life-saving feats set new records.

Actual feats of heroism, and the principals in important life-saving exploits, were featured, but the tendency to create a National Order of Flood Heroes had to be squelched. I never forgot what Don Marquis once told a friend of mine years ago as they were discussing a Carnegie Medal award for heroism that did not seem to be on a par with previous awards: "If they're going to make a practice of recognizing such feats I'll feel justified in recommending archy (Mr. Marquis' famous lower-case cockroach) who recently saved the life of another cockroach that was drowning in an Anne Street beef-stew by throwing it a toothpick, which served as a life-raft, just in the nick of time."

We also had to be careful to keep our own crews out on flood coverage from seeming too heroic. With less thought of making heroes of themselves than of lending drama and atmosphere to their broadcasts, our crews were talking too much about the hardships they were undergoing in covering the flood. My boss John Royal, sent for me one day and said: "I know our crews are being put to a lot of discomfort on this flood story but, for the love of common sense, tell 'em to stop talking about it. No matter what their hardships are they don't compare with those of the flood sufferers. They're out there to report the news. If there's any suffering to report, let 'em confine it to what the homeless in the flooded areas are going through."

Of course, Mr. Royal was right. I immediately communicated a terse version of his remarks to as many of our twenty-three flood crews as I could reach. Coming from that blankety-blank Schechter in his comfortable office in New York, it must have sounded a bit on the mean side, but it had to be done.

However, we're not extremists and, therefore, did not see

the need for hiding *all* our light. Sometimes one is justified in using a cellophane bushel. This we did when relief authorities and leading Southern newspapers credited Clyde Baker, chief engineer for WMC, the NBC station at Memphis, and announcer Bill Fielding, with saving a great many lives.

The radio operator of the Army engineering ship *Sequoia* picked up an S.O.S. short-waved by Baker and Fielding. It was an appeal for aid to be rushed to a party of 263 men, women and children who were stranded on a near-by shore and whose position was becoming more dangerous by the minute. The information given by Baker and Fielding was so explicit that the *Sequoia* was able to find these marooned unfortunates quickly and take them aboard.

I am not trying to create the impression that NBC alone co-operated with the authorities. The best way of telling the story is to quote from a statement made by the late Admiral Cary T. Grayson, then Chairman of the American Red Cross, at the height of the 1937 flood excitement. Admiral Grayson's statement (the italics are mine) said in part:

"We here at the Red Cross do not know what we should do without the radio. *Without an exception, the radio stations of this whole country* have thrown themselves into the emergency and have almost literally placed their entire facilities at the disposal of the Red Cross."

There it is! Now you know how noble we are!

To build up further the magnificent letdown that was in store for us, the late Anning S. Prall, then Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, added to Grayson's eulogy the opinion that radio had performed the greatest public service of its kind to be found in the tragic annals of American disaster.

The compliments were coming at us from all directions, like those leather balls heading for the baskets in a Coney Island skee-ball alley.

And then—the honeymoon over—we suddenly became aware of other aspects of our marriage to public service.

A citizen's committee representing a town which shall be

nameless wrote us saying they were "gravely concerned" over our "repeated exaggerations and misstatements" which they now realized for the first time would discourage manufacturers from locating plants in their territory. For some time they had been working on a "forward-looking program designed to get industry to recognize a progressive community" and now our "melodramatic distortion of a news story that need not have been nationalized on so big a scale" had probably ruined all that. As I read their letter I wondered whether there would be a final paragraph informing us we were being sued.

There is nothing to be gained by arguing with such people. We sent a tactful reply but we did not think tact precluded our mentioning the number of lives lost—the total was big enough to impress even the most hot-headed town-booster—as a reminder that the floods of 1937 were a big story. We also got in a polite dig in the form of a paragraph expressing the hope that their "forward-looking program" included vigorous activities in the field of flood control.

Not long before we got this squawk, a member of this same "citizen's committee" had thanked us for putting them "in touch with the outside world at a time when all local means of communication had failed."

Other communities that had previously expressed their appreciation of our help during the crisis had also thought the matter over and decided that, now it was all over and they had some perspective on things, they realized we had been too "hysterical"—a favorite word of our critics—and hoped we would learn our lesson and not needlessly give such splendid communities as theirs a black eye.

Most of our critics were milder than that "citizen's committee" and wound up with such lines as:

"However, we want you to know we appreciate your efforts to help out."

"Do not misinterpret our criticism. You radio people helped us put our house in order, at that."

There must be an appropriate comment on the foregoing. Until I think up something snappy, how about "Oh, well"?

I asked Jack Hartley, in charge of one of our news crews covering the Pennsylvania floods of 1936 that got Johnstown back in the news, to give me an account of his experiences. Here is a condensed version of what Jack dictated:

"We started out from New York at midnight on a special train provided by the Pennsylvania Railroad, with directions from their executives to do everything to expedite getting us through to Johnstown. We got as far as Harrisburg, and were met there by Norris Longacre, General Passenger Agent, who said it was impossible for us to go any farther, but he would do everything possible to get us through in the morning. We spent the evening with him, drinking his scotch, calling all airports, calling the Director of the State Police, checking private plane owners to see if their planes would carry our equipment—to no avail on any of it.

"Finally, a special freight train came through loaded with rock, which was to be dumped alongside the roadbed to protect it from the river. Mr. Longacre got permission for us to ride in the caboose of that train, provided we all signed waivers of any claim against the Pennsylvania Railroad.

"We started out from Harrisburg at about eleven o'clock that morning, and it took nine hours to do forty miles. During that trip, one of the members of the crew of the train was assigned to staying out on the cowcatcher of the engine and poking through the water with an ash rake to determine if the tracks were still there. It was the only way of finding out. For we couldn't see the tracks at all. Even though there was so much water around, we got a hot-box and had to stop for repairs en route.

"While we were stalled there on the tracks, Don Whittemore, one of our engineers, went roaming through the hills, and finally found a farmhouse and a farmer's daughter who was willing to make us fried-egg sandwiches, the first food we had had since we left New York. That is a fact. She *was* a

farmer's daughter. Previously I had known farmers' daughters merely as characters in barroom stories. Having seen one I was now in a position to vouch that they really exist.

"We finally got into Lewiston Junction. From Harrisburg on, the Pennsylvania Railroad assigned Andy Laurie to travel with us and make sure that their employees did everything possible to co-operate with us.

"During the trip Andy would stop the engine, get out at signal stations, and find out how things were ahead.

"We got into Lewiston Junction and learned we could not go any farther; in fact, it was impossible to get into Lewiston proper. So, we went into the station. There we found no lights, of course, and a lot of cold, wet people huddled together, and two coin-box telephone booths. One of them worked, the other didn't. We took over the line that worked, called New York, told them where we were and reported there was plenty of material for broadcasting.

"New York decided to take a broadcast as soon as we could set up the equipment. We found it impossible to get the normal radio lines used for such purposes, and got the permission of the telephone company to disconnect the coin-box and use the telephone line, which we connected up as a radio line.

"While I was taking the box apart, with a screwdriver, and nothing but a flashlight to see by, a little tot no higher than a standard office desk said to her father, 'Look, Daddy, the man is robbing all of the nickels out of the telephone booth.'

"We used that wire to feed the program into New York. We got our instructions by listening on a short-wave receiver to the short-wave transmitter that is on top of the RCA Building. When we were not on the air we were able to talk through the microphone over the telephone line to New York and they were able to answer us by short-wave. This means that the microphone was hooked on to an ordinary telephone line and transferred into a broadcast line.

"We managed to get three broadcasts out of there. During

the third broadcast, New York advised us over the short-wave circuit that the telephone wire line was breaking up. If you want to put this in your book in this form perhaps I should explain that 'breaking up' means getting fuzzy and inaudible.

"We terminated our broadcast sooner than expected. While we normally telephone New York, as we had promised we would, the telephone line did not work after the third broadcast, and we were out of contact with the News Department. There was some doubt as to our whereabouts, and that is how the story got around that George Hicks, Special Events announcer, was missing in the floods.

"That night we stayed at the local Station Master's home; some of us sleeping in chairs, others on blankets stretched out on tables, and a couple of us in beds.

"The only food we were able to get in Lewiston was ice cream that was partially melted, and saltines that were kind of dampish.

"The following day the railroad agreed to let us ride back on a pilot engine if we would again sign claim-waivers. The pilot engine pushed a caboose, and again, on the cowcatcher, one of the train crew kept checking to see that the rails were there. We weren't able to get back to Harrisburg. We could only get as far as Port Royal, where the water had reached so high a level it was feared the roadbed had been affected too much for safe travel, even at a slow pace.

"Getting back to Hicks, he was with us all the time, of course, and as safe and sound as anyone else, although he could boast a heavier beard than any of the rest of us.

"When we finally got in touch with NBC we were ordered back to New York. NBC in Pittsburgh, we were informed, had covered Johnstown and Pittsburgh, and we were no longer needed in that area.

"We were all still wearing the clothes in which we had left New York. We were dog tired, of course, but none the worse for our experience.

"The train could take us no further than Port Royal. We called on some farmers and made a deal for the use of three

cars. The farmers were to drive us to Newcastle, the nearest point south of the river, where we could get a train into Harrisburg. There were five of us and as we had over 750 pounds of equipment with us, the three cars—none of them big—just barely did the trick.

“We got to Newcastle, where we managed to get some coffee and real food, and then got the train to Harrisburg.

“We couldn’t get out of Harrisburg because the water had flooded a railroad bridge and it was not considered safe to go through even with the slowest-moving locomotive.

“At the Harrisburg station, there were many Coast Guard boats on flat cars ready to go out and do rescue work.

“The railroad officials had rigged up a shifting engine in the station waiting room, because the fires were all out in the basement, which was full of water, and they were providing steam from this engine to heat the rooms there and let people dry out their clothes.

“We had left on St. Patrick’s Day, and when we got back we were still wearing the green ties we all wore when we left. Of course by this time they were not so green. Travel had dimmed their brightness.

“We ran into a little difficulty on the train from Philadelphia to New York. This was our first opportunity in days to get some sleep. We told our story to the conductor, who was sympathetic, especially when we mentioned the names of some of our P.R.R. friends. In fact, he told us we could have the car to ourselves, and obligingly locked it. But commuters complained and it seems the conductor was compelled to open it up. They took our equipment and threw it off the seats onto the floor, which woke us up, and it all damn near wound up in a pitched battle.”

XII

Singing Mice

THE major news of recent years, on the domestic front, has been "problem news":— an endless succession of stories having to do with unemployment and depression questions, political animosities, sit-down strikes and other labor difficulties, a thousand and one reflections of the vast social and economic changes that have altered the face of America. On the foreign front, it has been largely the news of strife or impending strife:—stories of death and destruction in Spain, in China, in the countries ravaged by Hitler, with grim repercussions in the United States in the form of not too temperate discussions of the best plan for preparing to defend ourselves.

Radio, like the press, has tried to handle this news realistically. We do not sugarcoat the news or consciously give the impression that any particular situation is any better than it is. In retrospect we do not find it hard to see how our coverage of this or that story might have been improved, but it has never been our policy to make the listener feel any better about the facts of life by lulling him with Pollyanna postscripts to gloomy facts.

We have, however, frankly made an effort to develop frivolous types of news designed to give the radio audience a momentary vacation from the grimmer side of life.

It was in this spirit that I launched (not fully realizing what I was doing, I'll admit) the International Singing Mouse Contest.

What is a singing mouse? Search me! Even the experts seem to disagree. One so-called authority insists that mice have definite musical inclinations while another declares that what has come to be known as a singing mouse is merely a rodent suffer-

ing from some form of respiratory disease and that what passes for a "voice" is merely a falsetto wheeze or "trilling squeak" that is more in the province of veterinary science than in that of music. I dunno.

I knew nothing about the phenomenon until one day early in 1937 someone told me all about singing mice. Depressing news had left me limp and I was ripe for a sales talk on warbling rodents and their radio possibilities. In fact, I was a pushover, and before I or any member of my staff fully realized the international significance of our course, NBC announced a singing-mouse contest designed to enable us to tell the United States which of the country's mouse population was the best vocalist.

Our announcement had not been public information many days when we were informed that other countries had singing mice too and why were we discriminating against the rodent colony of these foreign lands? Although we were flattered by the international interest in our enterprise we decided it would not be practical to make an Olympic Games of our singing-mouse contest. We did, however, think it might be a good idea to open the field to most English-speaking countries, so we allowed the rodent songsters of Canada and Great Britain to enter.

It's good we did, too. The Dominion and the British Isles clamored so lustily for recognition that if we had ignored them a grave international situation might have resulted. The British were very much cheered up by our willingness to let the Union Jack compete with the Stars and Stripes in this new field. Like us, the British are pioneers and want to be let in on anything that is new.

Not until we made our first announcement—over the air and in the press—of the singing-mouse sweepstakes did I discover that there were more singing mice in the United States than I would have guessed there were rodents of all types, singers and non-singers. In fact, there seemed to be singing mice everywhere—except in New York City.

Some day a university student in search of a thesis may de-

cide to write one on "What Research Tells Us As to Why Singing Mice Abound Everywhere in the United States Except New York and What Can Be Done to Make the Great Metropolis a Center for the Musically Inclined Small Rodent." It is the only obscure theme that hasn't been tackled.

For a few days it seemed that every man, woman and child in most NBC cities in the land had a vocalizing mouse and wanted an audition for his pet. A few of the more waggish ones even suggested screen tests. People started shipping us singing mice in cages, with instructions as to feeding. It got to be pretty awful.

We received almost as many gags as offers of singing mice. There were three main classifications,—(1) references to our "mousical comedy," (2) requests for information as to how much cheese there was in it for the winner's mouse, and, (3) queries as to whether we had an office cat (based, in several instances, on our correspondent's desire to avoid a catastrophe, with heavy underscoring of the first three letters in guess what word in this sentence?)

Then there was a scattering of miscellaneous gags reminiscent of the technique if not the actual works of Joe Miller. For instance, we received a letter from a Montrealer who thanked us for opening the contest to Canadians but pointed out he had no singing mouse. However, he had a singing moose. Was the moose eligible?

Another correspondent wrote to say that he had a little singing rodent but as it was a Russian, born in Mousecow, it could produce no American, Canadian or British citizenship papers. Would we waive the point and let him enter his pet? It was a conservative mouse, he said, a slight case of pink-eye being the closest it had ever come to being a Red.

Audience participation is always heartening, even when the customers kid you. Our advance publicity on the event was not exactly of a solemn nature and it was pleasing to see the fans catch the spirit of the occasion.

One of our main problems was to keep our studios from being overrun by singing mice. It became a familiar sight in

our reception-rooms to see owners of singing mice waiting for auditions for their caged pets. Momentarily I expected the boss to tell me that the singing-mouse contingent was crowding more important business out of the office and would I mind doing something to slow up the rodent traffic? The distances some of these people traveled to bring their singing pets to our offices and those of affiliates! More than once I was terrified at the thought of what we had started.

As a first step toward easing the situation we sent this fervent wire to all our affiliated stations:

REGARDING SINGING MICE STOP PLEASE ROUND UP NO
MORE OF THESE VOCALISTS EVEN IF THEY ARE CHALIAPINS
SCHUMANN-HEINKS LAWRENCE TIBBETTS OR TETRAZZINIS-
STOP WE HAVE ENOUGH STOP WE HAVE MORE THAN
ENOUGH STOP IN FACT WE ARE LOUSY WITH SINGING MICE
STOP STOP STOP.

We also released to the press a story that carried this lead: "The National Broadcasting Company, which thought singing mice were rare, has found out differently." . . .

Which reminds me that one of the office scrapbooks reveals a news story which claims that we passed on 32,000 mice in selecting those sufficiently endowed with singing ability to qualify as title contenders. I hope not. That's a lot of mice and a statistician could do a devastating job of determining how much time it would take to audition and rate them.

The competition narrowed down to twenty-two talented rodents in as many NBC cities and then the finals got under way.

On the eve of the elimination-round to find the U.S. champ, New York was the only big city in the country that was not represented. This was awkward, as the British Broadcasting Corporation whom we had succeeded in interesting in singing mice and who were now having a lot of fun with the idea, had informed us that London would be liberally represented in the British finals.

In our efforts to find a trilling cheese-eater from Gotham,

we combed the city. Pet shops had plenty of mice but none that sang, so we assigned men to visit laboratories where mice are used in connection with scientific research.

We figured that mice employed in the labs at Columbia University, Rockefeller Institute, at Cornell Medical Center, and at the Breeder Company, which breeds and raises rodents for scientific purposes, might be found singing at their work on a sunny day. But one of the white-coated lab-workers explained that these mice were used largely to test the destructiveness of microbes and under the circumstances could hardly be expected to be cheerful enough to burst into song.

When the world of science could do nothing for us, several NBC men set traps in their homes, but nothing resulted. One was sure he had mice in his apartment but he doubted if they were the singing variety as they never joined in when his little boy played the harmonica.

From Boston, Thornton W. Burgess, well known as a naturalist and the author of many books, reported a crushing disappointment involving his own candidate for the honor, Tinkle, a singing mouse who had displayed real talent. It seems that "after having been in splendid voice for a week, singing blithely, Tinkle suddenly went on a sit-down strike and could not be induced to utter any audible sound. A romance was first thought to be the answer, but when it was discovered that Tinkle's love life was under control, another reason was sought."

A clipping in our scrapbook, from which I quote, may supply the answer. "I can ascribe it only to temperament," Mr. Burgess told NBC officials.

Radio World reported that Mitzi and Wink, both of Shelburne Falls, and accustomed to rendering duets, were hurriedly entered as Massachusetts representatives in place of the defaulting Tinkle.

Several mishaps occurred during the contest itself as some celebrated diminutive diva now and then deserted the microphone abruptly and had to be chased about studio floors.

"In Memphis, Tenn.," the magazine went on to report,

"Juliet of the singing team of Romeo and Juliet, dashed the hopes of her backers by leaving her partner to carry on unassisted." This, it seems, flustered Romeo, "who remained terribly embarrassed and almost silent on his owner's forefinger. The NBC announcer did his utmost in the emergency, saying: 'Hold everything, everywhere, everybody as we try to get you past this milestone on the path of civilization. Romeo is mad about what has happened. But be patient. He is gradually warming up. He is getting set. Pretty soon, I believe, some golden notes will pour from his throat. . . . Now, then, Romeo . . .'"

An impressive silence blanketed the networks. "H'm . . ." the announcer was next heard to say. "It is a beautiful day, I ought to tell you, here in Memphis. . . . Now, about our climate. . . ."

And then the broadcast was switched to Seattle for a continuation of what the next announcer called "a nationwide mouse-to-mouse canvass."

The show was switched from city to city, and the radio audience gathered considerable information on the singing-mouse situation, including the following Fourteen Points, which are considered an indispensable guide to present or future owners of singing mice:

1. Proper feeding and care will help further the professional career of a rodent virtuoso. Ask a good pet shop for expert information on how to look after your little warbler. And do not reward him with extra bits of cheese for a superlative performance. Some of the best of the tiny four-legged vocalizers ceased to be any good when their owners began over-feeding them.

2. Do not incorporate your singing mouse. One owner of a particularly promising diva actually had the little lady incorporated and started selling stock in her as the result of some early publicity and a successful radio *début*. He even printed a prospectus showing the earning outlook for the next few years. The mouse did not give a single satisfactory performance after the prospectus was printed. She may have read this

document, decided her owner was not cutting her in sufficiently, and decided to quit. No one can say for sure. All that is known is that this operatic mouse sang no more arias after her incorporation.

3. Do nothing to excite your mouse. A mouse breathes four times a second—about thirteen times as fast as a human being. When over-excited, it breathes so rapidly it almost chokes to death and song becomes impossible.

4. Do not take seriously the theory expressed in the *London Morning Post*, and widely quoted in the United States, that the singing mouse is merely an ordinary fieldmouse with bronchitis. This may tempt people who have made pets of mice that are non-singers to expose them to the elements until their bronchial tubes are inflamed. This is dangerous as pneumonia could result and you might lose your mouse before he could sing for some sulfapyridine.

5. Most mice are camera shy. Don't stunt the artistic growth of your future Lily Pons or Antonio Scotti by photographing it too frequently.

6. As there are times when even the sweetest-voiced mouse singer will not perform, be prepared with a good alibi. The best on record was the one offered by the Mid-Western gentleman who explained, when his little star went into a sudden decline and would utter not a note for the benefit of the expectant radio audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, my pet is showing the effects of his early surroundings. Originally I found him huddled up in a church pew and he is merely trying to be as quiet as a church mouse. I thank you."

7. Do not strive for perfection. Too many people give up in despair when they start consulting the literature of the subject and read descriptions of the ultimate in mouse voice-culture, such as the following by A. C. Hinton of London's Natural History Museum, who was asked to describe the efforts of a brilliantly endowed little rodent soloist: "Its voice ranged through two octaves, the notes partly resembling the high tones of the lark, partly the long-drawn flutelike tones of the nightingale, and partly the deep, liquid trilling of a canary."

Your pet can fall considerably short of that and still be a good singer.

8. Do not make your mouse self-conscious by giving it too great a feeling of responsibility. Many an accomplished singing mouse went to pieces when its name was changed from Susie or Steve to Miss Minneapolis or Mr. Milwaukee. It is asking too much to expect a tiny, timorous creature like a mouse to carry on its frail shoulders the burden of upholding the fair name of a whole community. Stronger creatures have cracked under the strain.

9. If you are training a mouse for public appearances do not overdo your publicity. One impressario made the newspapers by announcing that his mouse was the only one in captivity that wasn't afraid of cats,—that, in fact, his rodent chased cats up alleys and practically scared the fur off 'em. A literal-minded office boy in a station where this Paul Bunyan of a mouse was scheduled to broadcast brought a cat into the station just to see what would happen, and the owner of this over-publicized mouse almost lost his pet.

10. Singers have been found among mice of all kinds,—so-called pedigreed mice sold in pet shops, field mice, barn mice, cellar and attic mice, etc. If you are ambitious to own a singing mouse and you can't afford pet-shop prices, you'll have as much luck looking for one among those you can trap in your attic as you will any other way.

11. The theory that the phenomenon of "singing" in a mouse is a mating call has been exploded. Mice have an ingrained modesty and seldom indulge in any of the mating phenomena in the presence of strangers.

12. The Middle West, with perhaps Illinois in the lead, has produced more good singing mice than any other part of the United States. So if you live in that part of the country your chances of finding a talented mouse tenor, baritone, soprano, basso profundo, or what you will, are greater than an Easterner's, say, or a Southerner's.

13. Do not work yourself up into a patriotic lather over the invincibility of America's singing mice. To begin with,

international singing-mouse contests are usually decided by an audience vote. As America owns more radio sets than all other countries combined, and as most of their owners are now trained to vote in radio contests, and as they are bound to vote "regular" in an international competition in which the United States participates, one cannot assume too much from American victories.

These are parlous times, everywhere nerves are close to the surface, and a display of too much chauvinism by die-hard believers in the superiority of mice that sing under the Star Spangled Banner may only increase the number of problems the State Department is struggling with.

14. There is no future in the vocal talents of mice either for the owner or the mouse. If you decide to find yourself a singing mouse, do so because you think this might make an amusing hobby. And keep away from radio stations. The singing-mouse fad, which threatened to become a national craze, is as dead as peewee golf, *Yes, We Have No Bananas*, etc., and nowhere is it deader than in the radio world. In fact, it is now dangerous to bring a singing rodent into a radio station. A universal warning has been adopted by all stations—"cheesit, a mouse!"—and as this warning is uttered, mechanized units start fanning out, machine-gunners take their places, the heavy artillery is manned, and in no time at all the tiny creature and its sponsor are merely names on a rapidly mounting singing-mouse casualty list.

The singing-mouse contest proved to be a good thing for announcers all over the country. Too often we think of announcers as voices rather than as people. We made the discovery, for instance, that Mr. John Voice, whom we had always regarded as an Old Sobersides, had a swell sense of humor, and that Mr. Joe Voice, rated as a chap who had to have every syllable written out for him, could ad lib in an emergency.

We discourage ad libbing as a regular practice, but it is reassuring to know that when something goes wrong (like the sudden decision of a rodent songbird not to sing after all) re-

sourceful announcers know how to keep the audience amused.

In fact, one reason why the International Singing Mouse Contest was considered a success was that announcers in so many cities did a grand job of keeping the radio audience entertained. Their skilful kidding of all concerned, including the National Broadcasting Company, provided some of the best unplanned laughs of the year.

Now please don't ask me who won the International Singing Mouse Championship. As you know, the audience was to pick the champ by balloting. There was such a basic preponderance of American votes that a protest was filed with the League of Nations, even before the voting took place, by patriotic Britons who, in the name of international good-will, strove for the adoption of a different method of determining championship honors. The British press, on the other hand, conceded the superiority of the American songsters, and maybe those who claim the United States won are right.

On the eve of the title bout the British standard-bearers were Mickey of Devonport, and Chrissie, a Welsh mouse, who sang together. At first there was some discussion as to whether dual entries of this kind should be permitted, but it was finally allowed after an all-night session of the Committee on Entries. The United States was represented by Minnie of Woodstock, Ill., named U.S. champ by a committee of three of the country's outstanding musicians, Walter Damrosch, dean of American conductors, Frank Black, NBC General Musical Director, and Meredith Willson, our Western Division Musical Director.

Minnie, though she had demonstrated her superiority over other American singing mice by a wide margin, was known to be temperamental, so she was entered with the proviso that she was to have an alternate. Mikey, of Bloomington, Ill. (not to be confused with Mickey, the British entry) was selected for this role.

Johnny, a Toronto mouse, famed in the Dominion as a singer with a wide vocal range and an extraordinary repertoire, represented Canada. Canada, it developed, made a grave

mistake in not naming an alternate for Johnny, whose record was as erratic as it was brilliant.

The *London Times*, known to uninformed Americans as humorless, did a deft job of covering the contest. The following, from its issue of May 3, 1937, is a good example of what this newspaper can do when it has a subject worthy of its talents:

The Singing Mice have sung. All along, of course, as recent correspondence in *The Times* has shown, those acquainted with the accomplishments of mice have had no doubt that sing they would. Now even the unbelievers have heard and are convinced. Mice on both side of the Atlantic have burst forth, audibly, into song.

Well, perhaps it was not quite like that. The broadcast yesterday evening, which was to decide the claims of England, Canada, and the United States to possess the sweetest-voiced mouse in the English-speaking countries, found time for a flourish of trumpets, a song in honour of the contesting mice, and a good deal of chaff on the part of the announcers. Beside ourselves with pleasurable anticipation, we waited for the Canadian entrant to begin. But John, alias the 'Toronto Tornado,' was temperamental and refused all offers. Not a puff, not a peep out of him.

The English entry was a duet between Mickey, of Devonport, and Chrissie, a Welsh mouse, which goes to show that national talents are not confined to men. This would have been, in any case, a tour de force, since other countries were putting up only solo, or egotistical mice, mice unpractised in the niceties of teamwork. Safe in the knowledge of their unique position, Chrissie and Mickey might have given some mediocre performance and let it go at that. But did they twitter half-heartedly, like mice who know their name is made in advance? They did not. They were British mice, they were artistic mice, they were mice of sensibility. So they piped away merrily in the most subtle har-

monies, not a whit self-conscious. You just could not tell them apart, and that is saying a lot for duettists.

America had trouble, too. Minnie, from Illinois, had been a glutton for exercise lately, probably deliberately, like film stars in the bad old days when it was a convenient way of being hors de combat at the beginning of a picture they did not wish to make. Anyhow, she merely ran around and around and refused to open her mouth. Mikey, from the same State, made up for her. Here was mouse music at its gayest, with not a trace of those intimations of mortality one detects in the lower notes of crooners. All Mikey's notes were high ones, delivered with such virtuosity and vigour that one sees in him the coming mouse Caruso.

This is not, we may be sure, the last we shall hear of the singing mice. Mouse opera has been suggested already, and there is no reason why recitals by mice should not be popular. There will not be, one hopes, mouse crooners.

The *London Daily Express* seemed to enjoy the fun, too. On the same day they carried a story under the following four-column head:

SINGING MICE CONTEST
—AND ON SUNDAY, TOO!

—
THE B.B.C. GOES FRIVOLOUS

It was too early to know how the radio audience would vote on the finalists, but the *Express* eased the international situation with the prediction that Mikey of Bloomington, Ill., had won. "Our mice had class," their story said, but the British pair, they added, were not quite as wonderful as Mikey whose "rich, fruity tenor" they characterized in Americanese as "terrific."

The *London Daily Mail*, also on May 3rd, prepared the British public for an American landslide in the balloting. They considered it only fair to admit that Johnny of Toronto had been "too full of cheese to produce so much as a me-me-me,

and that Mickey of Devonport's duet with Welsh Chrissie could hardly be said to have saved Britain's prestige."

The *Mail* added that "mouse voice-culture is still in its infancy in England" and predicted that when Britons really went to work in earnest on the new fad anything might happen, including a music-hall turn "presenting fifty-seven tartan mice in straw hats singing the Eton Boating Song."

The great lesson the Empire had learned from our contest, this paper continued, was that "mice sing for their supper, and that once they get it it knocks all the bravura out of them." In rehearsal the British mice sang beautifully, it seems, were then mistakenly given their "suppers" and were not up to "Olympic Games form" for the big broadcast later in the day.

The *Mail* concluded by pointing out that Britain must study every phase of "this new musical development" if it hoped to prevail in such competitions. It was more than a question of when to feed the singing mice. What to feed them was perhaps even more important, this article said, concluding with these thoughtful paragraphs:

"It is more than possible that a mouse trained exclusively on Stilton would develop a voice of entirely different quality from that of a colleague reared on Gruyère.

"Future critics of mouse vocalists may speak of Signor Micki as having a 'rich, well-controlled Camembert' or Signorina Minni revealing 'a high Gorgonzola of lyric quality.'

"It is too early to prophesy the genre of singers produced by the various cheeses. Research alone can show that. Just as research will be of aid in determining whether mice suspected of having voices can sing or not. Science will perhaps decree that such mice be given the bathroom test. If they don't sing there, it is reasonable to assume they won't sing anywhere."

By and large, the British press gave our rodent radio idea a big hand and contributed choice bits of journalistic horse-play designed to improve future contests, one even suggesting that we had too narrowly restricted ourselves and that the next

competition should be interplanetary, not merely international. "Fair play for Martian mice" is one line I recall.

However, there were a few dissenting voices, too. A London writer of radio stories for the *Birmingham Gazette*, who signs himself "Turner," wired his paper about a third of a column on the rodent singing finals, which appeared under the head "SINGING MICE CONTEST TITLE," and after describing what took place wound up his story with this challenging sentence: "Thus ended what may be regarded by many listeners as an insult to their intelligence."

I figured that foreign comment on strictly American goofiness like a singing-mouse contest would be most interesting to Americans, for few of us ever see any but our own newspapers and have no idea of the foreign reaction to such American phenomena; which explains why I've concentrated on foreign comment. I'll add one more.

The *Dublin Herald* pointed out that the Irish viewed singing mice as the forerunner of a whole series of startling innovations on the air, and sent out a call in its columns for "a dog that can recite *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and a cat that can speak three languages." Owners of such pets were asked to communicate at once with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

After the international finals, by the way, Mikey was generally accepted as Mouse Musicker No. 1, and when NBC last had news about him he was living in retirement in a Bloomington cage and resting on laurels that included a talking picture and a phonograph recording. His is the story of the alternate that made good.

So much for singing mice.

And now for talking parrots and hawking newsboys.

XIII

Parrots, Newsboys, Soda Jerkers

WE HAD hardly got singing mice out of our hair when we found ourselves discussing an idea of equal social significance. It was another product of our Lighter-side-of-life Department. The world-shaking scheme was to decide a question which really needed no deciding because no one was thinking about it except us. But when you and your associates cogitate long enough about a little matter like a contest designed to find the champion talking parrot of the United States, and meetings take place that indicate amusing possibilities, you find yourself making plans to take the plunge.

Of course, you know in advance that when you announce a contest of this kind there will be those (in and out of radio) who will tell you publicly and privately that such a competition does not represent one of America's crying needs. Little do they realize that this is exactly the reason why such programs are scheduled.

Programs of a social, economic and political nature have their innings, and before the listener gets a chance to think we have become too "educational," we take off our collective coat and turn a few somersaults. There are those who think this is undignified—in fact, I am sure such solemn folk will always be with us—but radio is regarded primarily as an entertainment medium by a majority of our listeners. There is plenty of evidence to show that audiences get a lot of fun out of a type of slapstick that has angles of unpredictability.

The reason why our talking-parrot contest was sound from the radio standpoint was that it followed the definite trend toward programs that cannot be worked out in infinite detail in advance. The possibility of the unexpected happening dur-

ing shows of this kind is so great, with perhaps plenty of horse laughs at the expense of the holder of the contest, that the net result is good programming. It's questionable whether it isn't better radio if a fruit peddler's parrot that you've heard cry: "Apples, oranges, grapes—get 'em!" develops mike-fright and can't deliver his spiel, than if a show of this kind runs off smoothly. Sometimes there can be more fun in a resourceful announcer covering up than in a letter-perfect parrot.

Whenever we announce an event like the National Talking Parrot Contest we wait impatiently to see what the mail will produce in the way of claims. From past experience we guessed that there would be a great many letters and telephone calls, giving us the lowdown on hundreds of wonderful talking parrots. In fact, in any contest of this kind, the enthusiasm of your informants is such as to indicate that you will be faced by a problem involving the most staggering dead heat in history,—one in which thousands of wonderful contestants will be tied for first place.

Sometimes it is hard to sift the tongue-in-the-cheek claims from the real ones. For instance, I was the first to suspect the aforementioned fruit-hawking parrot as a hoax. And then I discovered that it was Robert ("Believe It or Not") Ripley, pockets bulging with documentary proof, who had turned up this remarkable avian fruit salesman. In fact, Mr. Ripley was even able to prove that this parrot had a larger vocabulary than its owner, known as "Mike the Banana King," a fruit peddler who plies his trade in lower Manhattan.

Perhaps it would be interesting to list some of the claims made for the parrots that our correspondents and phone-callers told us about. The reader will have to decide for himself which claims are based on fact and which on fancy. Except in certain obvious cases, I wouldn't know myself. Not all of the claimants gave us an opportunity to hear for ourselves. Of those that did and were unable to substantiate at audition time the claims they made for their birds, a fairly large percentage were able to produce newspaper clippings and other evidence in support of their claims.

Not long after our contest was announced we were informed that the following were among the world's blessings that we could put within our reach by just saying the word:

1. A parrot that could recite the Lord's Prayer.
2. About a dozen parrots that could imitate Charlie McCarthy.
3. Four or five that could imitate a train announcer.
4. A parrot that could imitate a baseball umpire. (His specialty was saying, "Strike tuh!")
5. One that could say, "Papa's home! Papa's home!"
6. One that could bark, mew, moan, crow, moo, and gurgle.
7. Several that could say, "Skoal!", "Bottoms up!", "Down the hatch!", etc.
8. A great many—I don't recall the number—that could whistle.
9. One that could hiccup.
10. One that could belch.
11. At least a score that could give the Bronx cheer.
12. One that could say, "Fish!—nice fresh fish!"
13. Five that could sing *The Sidewalks of New York*.
14. Three that could sing *Sweet Adeline*.
15. One that could sing *Frankie and Johnnie*.
16. One that could yell, "Down in front!"
17. One that knew most of the strange lingo of swing-music fans.
18. One that could say, "For further details, read your daily newspaper."
19. Two that said, "How do you get that way?"
20. Three that said, "Time please, Central."
21. One that said, "Your slip's showing, Mabel."
22. One that cried, "Nice fresh peanuts!"
23. One that talked Yiddish.
24. One that exclaimed, "Hooray for the Irish!"
25. One that recited, "We shot our youngster dead cause he wet the bed."
26. One that said, "There's a fly in my soup."

27. About three hundred that said, "Polly wants a cracker!"
28. One that could croak a French pun, to wit: "Polly vous Français?"
29. A half-dozen or more that could say, "Go jump in the lake!"
30. One that yelled, "God save the King!"
31. One that said, "Haul in the halyards!"

I've cited a few dozen—a meager sample at best—to give you an idea of what your mail will be like if you ever decide to stage a national parrot talking contest.

I warn you again, however, not to decide which of the claims are real and which aren't until you investigate. For instance, I was willing to bet ten to one that there was no parrot that could recite the Lord's Prayer, but I discovered that a Miss MacCleary, who lived near Springfield, Mass., had precisely such a bird.

I also was ready to dismiss as a rather feeble joke the claim of the correspondent who told us about the parrot that could bark, mew, moan, crow, moo, and gurgle, when John Gillan, Director of Radio Station WOW found near Omaha a parrot named Theodore Metcalfe (after a former Nebraska Lieutenant Governor) which could do all the things in that catalog and say "ouch" besides.

The problem, of course, was to weed out the inventions of practical jokers and find out what our list of real talking parrots consisted of. When you get down to the facts you find that genuine talking parrots are rare, especially ones that can be depended upon not to forget their lines. I knew all about the harrowing experiences of the Schenley Distillers Corporation in trying to teach six so-called talking parrots to chorus, "Drink Old Quaker," so I took nothing for granted.

We operated through the stations we owned and managed—there were sixteen at the time—and they were instructed to arrange auditions for all the wordy parrots they could round up. The plan was to choose the best seven or eight talkers and have each bird broadcast from its nearest key sta-

tion in a grand final contest. Entrants were to be judged on voice quality, diction, vocabulary and originality of expression by a competent board of judges—whatever that meant. All stations were warned that any birds addicted to profanity would be scratched. They were also warned to beware of other troublesome possibilities.

For instance, we were tipped off in the nick of time that a certain parrot that was entered as a Schnitzelbank singer was also skilled at crying, "Heil Hitler!" and when in high spirits would give vent to his Nazi leanings by repeating the exclamation over and over again.

If both proved genuine, we planned to use the Schnitzelbank singer to balance the British leanings of a God-save-the-king singer.

By the middle of December, 1937, we had auditioned enough parrots to convince ourselves that our contest would prove amusing to a big percentage of the radio audience that tuned in; and that was likely to be a large audience because of the perennial interest in pets.

What we now knew was that there were parrots that were able talkers but that they could not always be depended upon to talk. This gave the contest the same elements of uncertainty that had heightened the entertainment value of our singing mice.

If a certain number of our finalists performed acceptably, and our announcers did a nimble job of capitalizing with appropriate clowning the failure of the others, our program would prove a lively novelty.

We were nothing if not thorough in our efforts to get the best possible contestants. For instance, in New York an audition crew comprising a program director, a sound technician, and a photographer visited the storage plant of bird-dealer Louis Ruhe, on the Bowery in an effort to discover new talent among his five hundred parrots. As our technician set up his microphone our ears were assailed by explosive outbursts in a foreign tongue. It developed that the birds were swearing in

Spanish. They had just arrived from Nicaragua, where most of them had evidently majored in advanced profanity.

Regretfully we had to pass up the Ruhe contingent, even though we found some real prodigies among them. A solemn-visaged interpreter gave us a grave account of the meaning of those cuss words. They were even worse than they sounded; so we were compelled to pursue our talent hunt elsewhere.

Of the thousands of talking parrots that were called to our attention, about two hundred were auditioned. These were narrowed down to eight top-flight performers from eight different NBC cities. They were to fight it out for the title in the battle of words.

The finalists seemed to sense that something big was at stake, for they were tense with excitement. The one representing our Hollywood studio—a really talented bird—was awed into forgetting most of his lines by the momentousness of the pre-final audition. There must have been something about the way we handled this audition that gave the bird a feeling that history was being made. It is asking too much of a parrot to expect him to remain normal under such nerve-racking circumstances. To make matters worse the bird didn't like the studio's cooling system and indicated it by shivering. Peering out into the darkened audience chamber, which didn't seem to cheer him up a bit, he could achieve nothing beyond a few inadequate snatches of *Yankee Doodle*.

His alternate, entrusted with the task of saving the day if his superior had one of those days when even the best talking parrot can't or won't perform, wandered about the stage muttering, "Nuts!"

But the studio's cooling system presented the toughest problem. Parrots, of course, are tropical birds and prefer heating systems. The cold air, according to one of our Hollywood staff who enjoyed pulling NBC's collective leg, "had the birds screaming for foot-warmers and hot-water bottles, and one of the shivering pair had the spirit to turn gag-man and croak, 'Shiver my timbers!' The bird's early nautical associations—

it had shipped before the mast—made this an entirely logical thing for a frappéd parrot to do.”

The air-cooled birds were rushed out of the studio as soon as our West Coast parrot impresario realized what was wrong with them.

Meanwhile, in New York, we had struck a somewhat similar snag. Dr. W. Reed Blair, then Director of the Bronx Zoological Park, who had kindly agreed to let us consult him on our Parrot Epic, advised us that the winter was no time for our contest. Tropical birds, he pointed out, had a tendency to contract bad colds and even pneumonia when subjected to sudden changes of temperature, and some of our New York entrants, for instance, might develop illnesses when removed from warm houses and taken into the winter outdoors on the way to the studio. So we postponed the National Talking Parrot Contest until warmer weather could be counted upon. May 15th was the date finally fixed for the epoch-making event.

This gave us plenty of time to find the talking parrot we planned to rehearse until he was letter-perfect in saying, “This is the National Broadcasting Company.”

Came the night of May 15, 1938, and the radio audience heard the historic words: “Ladies and gentlemen, today the National Broadcasting Company is holding the finals of a series of auditions to discover America’s best talker among parrots. In NBC studios, from coast to coast, parrot finalists are awaiting their turns in this national contest.

“You’ll hear from them all—that is, if they’ll only talk. And after they’ve all been heard, our distinguished board of judges—Mr. Will Cuppy, author of ‘How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes,’ Mr. Carl Stryker, Director of the Staten Island Zoo, and Mr. Patrick Kelly, Supervisor of Announcers of the National Broadcasting Company—will present to the winner a handsome loving cup and two pounds of crackers.”

Boston, represented by a parrot named Lulu, took the air first. Lulu, having convinced us when she was auditioned that

she could sing *The Sidewalks of New York* was given that assignment. Candor compels the admission that we'll never know how well she sang it that night.

The bird at first failed to let out a peep. Her owner, to draw her out, started to sing the song, and this got Lulu going. But the owner's voice drowned out the parrot's and our judges, despite their eminence in this highly specialized field, found it difficult to figure out just how good Lulu was. All we could judge her on was her use of the word "what." Unmistakably she uttered this word two or three times when addressed by her owner and our announcer. In fact, she proved to be the most accomplished what-sayer entered in the contest.

When Lulu had done her stuff the announcer took the radio audience to Chicago, "where we will hear from Nicky Green of the Mid-West Association of Parrot-casters, Local No. 9."

Nicky, in addition to being quite a talker, was an acrobat. In the past he had amused his owner by both of his specialties and somehow he got his signals mixed. He seemed certain that acrobatics were indicated that night and performed some neat tricks of balancing on the microphone. The announcer strove vainly to save the situation by ad libbing about the bird that didn't know his acrobatic talents would not mean a thing to the radio audience until everyone had a television set.

Then Nicky was given the bum's rush and a parrot named Polly was given a chance.

Polly forgot all her lines except "Polly wants a cracker" and "Goodbye", but those she uttered with great clarity. It might be added that Polly's eagerness to say "goodbye" and give *us* the bum's rush contrasted amusingly with her predecessor's performance and made her work good theater.

The specialty of Georgie, next Chicago entrant, was "calling kitty." This Georgie did acceptably, the performance consisting of his saying two or three times, "Brrp, kitty, kitty, kitty, brrp." I don't know what the "brrps" represented but they were unmistakably there.

Philadelphia got away from the rules by introducing a talking crow. The crow did some talking, but our judges, with that sense of fair-play one comes to expect of a Supreme Court of Parrot-Speech Evaluators, ruled out the ringer.

Among the other contestants was a lovely yellow parrot named Goldie who would have had a better chance in a beauty contest; several that were good whistlers but couldn't or wouldn't talk; and one parrot with a hearty laugh that evidently started a lot of our listeners laughing. In fact, this laughing bird stimulated the most fan mail and as a pure entertainer probably excelled all his rivals.

But our judges, those men of sterling character who could not be budged from the path of pure justice by a mere hearty laugh, however attractive, adhered with legalistic severity to the letter of the rules. A strict interpretation of those rules, they announced, gave first prize to Polly of Chicago. She was eighteen years old and was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Adam Cook of 1226 Wenola Street.

Mr. Cuppy, Chairman of the Committee of Judges, made this momentous pronouncement with the comment: "I'm glad I'm on the judging end of this thing. I certainly wouldn't want any parrots judging *my* diction."

One particularly alert listener wrote us as follows: "I see you gave the prize to Polly of Chicago. All Polly said was, 'Polly wants a cracker' and 'Goodbye.' What about the conditions of the contest that referred to 'vocabulary and originality of expression'? Shucks, that bird has no vocabulary and no originality of expression. It sounds as if it was fixed for Polly to win. I'll bet if they had the opportunity, some of the other contestants would do some pretty plain talking, and mostly what they'd say would be, 'We wuz robbed!' What about that parrot that could recite the Lord's Prayer and those others that could say so many things more unusual than 'Goodbye' and 'Polly wants a cracker'?"

We explained to our correspondent, who sounded like a guy who didn't want an explanation as much as a chance to

kid us, that some of our best audition performers got mike-fright and were unable to do their best stuff in the finals.

One of the by-product benefits of the National Parrot Talking Contest was that it added to the nation's output of colorful headlines. Here are a few examples:

NBC DELOUSING LANGUAGE
OF PARROTS IN DAFT CONTEST

PARROTS HOLD
SECRET PRACTICE
IN NBC STUDIOS

FRUIT-SELLING PARROT
BIDS FOR GAB HONORS

NIPPED BY CUSSING PARROT,
RADIO MAN CUSSES TOO

FEATHERED BLABBER-MOUTHS
BATTLE FOR PRATTLE TITLE

And now I might as well tell you about the National News-hawking Contest. The idea was to find the newsboy who did the best job of hawking his wares.

Newsboys who expressed a desire to participate were auditioned. These preliminaries revealed that the best leather-lungers were to be found in New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and the finals were confined to those cities.

A big silver cup was to go to the newsboy "who best shouts his wares, with mere voice volume subordinated to clarity so that, in addition to other considerations, the judges may actually be able to tell what newspaper the contestant is selling."

Among the judges, by the way, were Arthur T. Robb, Executive Editor of *Editor and Publisher*, the late George Holmes, chief of the International News Service's Washington Bureau, and Charles Grindlay, President of the National Press Club.

One of my regrets in connection with this contest was that the newsboys weren't able to hawk their wares in the finals as

they did in their auditions. The boys, during their auditions, introduced some blood-curdling burlesques that sounded funnier in the studios than they would have over the air. In fact, because of the way the boys telescoped their words, these distortions would only have had the effect of confusing our listeners who had been told they would hear newsboys hawking the actual newspapers of the cities from which they were entered. However, it may be amusing to list a few of the studio burlesques:

“Extra! Extra! Five hundred die of shock as rich local tightwad puts ten bucks in church collection plate! Extra! Five hundred dead!”

“Extra! Big war extra! Germans sink British fleet! British kill all Germans with secret ray! Everybody dead! Extra!”

“Mussolini cracks three ribs while striking chest during big balcony speech! Extra! Extra!”

“Extra! U.S. enters war on Germany’s side! Raps British for resisting German progress!”

“Love nest wrecked as sugar daddy finds sweetie-pie entertaining strange eggs. Three shots fired! Twenty dead and casualty list rapidly mounting! Extra!”

“Russia attacks four more small nations! We’ll protect those little punks if it kills ’em, says Stalin. Extra!”

“Nazis seize Moscow to protect Russian interests! Extra! Got there just in time to forestall British, says Goebbels. Extra!”

Announcers and other members of our studio staffs had a lot of fun writing such sidewalk sales talks for audition purposes. But the boys sold actual headlines when the announcer who got the National News-hawking Contest started said to the first contestant, Max Kaplan, *New York Journal-American* specialist, in our New York studios, “You start yelling your wares when I give the signal with my hand like this and you stop when I hold my hand up so. Are you ready? Good! Get set, go!”

The radio audience that night got some good laughs, if I say so myself. Never was the word “Extra!” given so many

different interpretations by so many young voices. There was the dignified restraint of the representative of the *Christian Science Monitor*—Harding Sornavich of Boston—who didn't believe in shouting and who recited in a quiet monotone: "Read the Christian Science Monitor. Complete news of the world every day for three cents a copy." And then there were the boys who shouted till you were willing to bet none of them had ever heard of the Noise Abatement Commission.

From the practical standpoint, young Sornavich may have been the best salesman, but the judges awarded first prize to Philip Minsky, fourteen years old, who was the youngest contestant. Philip, also a Bostonian, sold the *Boston Traveller*.

To use a word I usually avoid, there was something "cute" about Philip's voice, and I guess that's why he won. By "cute" I mean his voice "cracked" amusingly and was an appealing combination of extreme youth and early manhood,—the "break" that has made young actors like Ezra Stone and Eddie Bracken so popular. There was in his news-calling a quaint mixture of laughter and tears. Newspaper people are supposed to be hardboiled—(see almost any movie portraying journalists)—but like most people they are really suckers for cuteness.

Another story that probably belongs in this chapter is our soda-jerker saga.

As is well known, soda jerkers have a lingo all their own. We had planned a contest designed to produce the champion user of this colorful terminology. But so many complications were involved that we abandoned the contest idea in favor of a single broadcast featuring the two most accomplished users of soda-fountain patois we could find,—a pair who could have written a whole new chapter for Mr. Mencken as a supplement to his lively book on the American language.

Some of the best Americanese in the vocabulary of our soda-jerker twain was too involved for use in a broadcast. You can't have footnotes on the air, so we were compelled to forego terms that required too much explanation.

Our broadcast confined itself to the more elementary ex-

amples of the highly professionalized patter of the soda fountain and the lunch counter. The radio audience learned, among other things, that when one soda jerker wants to tip off a frivolous co-worker that the boss is looking he says "99"; that a "billiard" means a bottle of beer; that "one chopped on, blond" means a minced ham sandwich on lightly done toast; that a "cabinet" is a frosted chocolate; a "black cow" is a glass of root beer; that "tally ho" means the boss is *not* looking; that when an experienced lunch-counter worker wants to tip off a new employée that Mr. Soandso is a good tipper and rates special service he merely says "86."

They learned that "one British down" is how a toasted English muffin is designated; that the weird vogue, in certain parts of the country, of the pineapple soda with chocolate ice cream has not caught the patois-inventors napping and has, in fact, been met with the term "Hoboken," now the official tag; that "shoot one with a squeeze" is the standard way of transmitting an order for a Coca-Cola with a dash of lemon juice; that an "AC and B on well" is an American cheese and bacon sandwich on well toasted bread; that "a pair of drawers, dark" is an order for two cups of coffee with no cream. Etcetera ad infinitum.

This broadcast, by the way, convinced me that our chronic head-shakers, professional custodians of the nation's morals, general viewers-with-alarm, grim-faced readers-of-something-sinful-into-what-have-you, and all their cousins and their sisters and their aunts are either becoming educated or just plain discouraged. For, among the many letters that came in as a result of this broadcast, only one objected to "a pair of drawers" on moral grounds. Although this is not proof positive, I cite it as an example of American progress.

The fact that broadcasts such as the ones described are possible, is evidence that radio, by and large, does not take itself too seriously. That is one reason for its vitality.

XIV

Fourteen Pounds of Paper

THE radio coverage of the Czechoslovakian crisis that precipitated the Munich agreement can be cited as the first complete play-by-play coverage of history-in-the-making in the brief annals of radio.

In our industry it is not necessary to do much checking before making a statement of this kind. It will be years before anyone refers to "the long annals of radio." The National Broadcasting Company itself was not organized until 1926.

In an industry so young the landmarks are easily spotted. Such a landmark was the world-shaking pre-Munich story. The memorable days from September 10 to September 30, 1938, are represented in my files by fourteen pounds of radiograms,—carbon copies of those sent and the replies.

Never before had the radio audience done such wholesale listening to a news story. Never before had a story so gripped the listening public. More radio sets were sold during those three weeks than had been sold previously in any similar period.

We thought we knew something about fan mail, but we learned brand-new things about listener response as the reactions—favorable, unfavorable and unclassifiable—poured in. By letter, telegram and telephone, people gave us their slants on our broadcasts. They had a lot to talk about, too, as we carried—from September 10th to 20th—117 broadcasts for a total of 20 hours and 32 minutes.

All of Europe was affected directly or indirectly and we brought in talks and bulletins from every point in Europe that had a stake in what was going on. This, in addition to our New York and Washington coverage, gave us by far the most

ambitious treatment of a major news event we had ever attempted. We believe—and not because the listener response was largely favorable—that ours was an outstanding coverage. So was Columbia's and Mutual's. From the standpoint of swift news coverage and thoughtful, interesting interpretation it was the best all-around job of posting the public on a major development that the industry had ever done.

H. V. Kaltenborn, then with Columbia, did a job people still talk about. Other commentators performed notably, too.

But the credit should not all go to the commentators. To Jack Hartley of our news staff belongs the credit for one of the most remarkable feats of this period which, from the news standpoint, can properly be called radio's coming of age.

Between September 15th and 30th frequent electrical storms and other atmospheric disturbances hit the Atlantic, and for four days broadcasting from Europe that relied on ordinary methods was at a standstill.

The ingenuity of Hartley is responsible for our dumbfounding the opposition for a few days by bringing over broadcasts from the scene of the Czechoslovakian drama at a time when Europe-to-United States broadcasting had practically been suspended.

When he saw that it was futile to try to bring programs from Prague, Berlin, London, Paris, etc., across the Atlantic in regulation fashion, Hartley shot them to Capetown, South Africa, whence they were relayed across the South Atlantic to Buenos Aires and from Buenos Aires by short-wave to New York. Inasmuch as we ordered up that circuit, it was our very own, and for several days we had the rival broadcasting systems mystified as to how we could get programs through from Europe when they couldn't.

CBS, NBC, and Mutual took turns at scooping one another. One of the best of our exclusives was Litvinoff's speech from Geneva outlining the Soviet attitude. Max Jordan, our Central European chief, hustled Litvinoff out of a League of Nations session into a suite in a hotel where we had set up a broadcasting unit. Litvinoff was worth tracking down, although

he finally decided against a broadcast from the suite. (The English version was to be given by someone else, even though Litvinoff could make himself understood in our language.)

Litvinoff finally decided to make a speech on the Czechoslovakian situation—which we broadcast—from the floor of the League of Nations Assembly. The English version was given by the accomplished linguist Paul Elbin of the French Chamber of Deputies.

Litvinoff said that in Czechoslovakia's hour of trial the sympathies of all the peoples represented in the Assembly were with the little Republic. He was out of favor shortly afterward, and as the friendship between the Nazis and the Soviets grew he was completely eclipsed.

It was also our turn to score the day President Roosevelt sent his newest plea for peace—a little after midnight on August 25, 1939—to Hitler and to President Benes of Czechoslovakia. This was on the morning of August 25th. We had been notified—as had all other news agencies—that a statement giving the text of the President's plea would be issued by the State Department.

At once men from our Washington office were dispatched to places where they could do the most good. It is against regulations to run lines for broadcasting into the State Department Building, so we had to protect ourselves in other ways.

I instructed one man to fill his pockets with nickels and take over one of the building's telephone pay-stations. His instructions were to stay in the booth and keep feeding nickels into the coin-box. He was to keep the line open so that if necessary we could jam the President's message through with no delays over that wire through the Washington office.

A second man was instructed to take up a position in a taxi as close as possible to a door leading from the State Department Building. The door of the cab was to be open and the motor running.

Two other men were instructed to attend the press conference at which the President's message was to be released. Each was to grab a handful of releases and run like hell. One

release was to be rushed to the man in the telephone booth, another to the man in the taxi.

As soon as Press Officer McDermott of the State Department appeared with an armful of releases, our men in the pressroom did their stuff. One sprinted with a copy to the man in the booth, another rushed the release to the man in the taxi. While the car headed for our Washington studios, the man in the booth said to the person at the other end of the phone in our capital newsroom, "I have the President's message." Whereupon Washington asked New York, over another telephone line that had been kept open so that a call could be put through immediately, "Give us the air."

I immediately ordered the air "thrown" to Washington.

Only five or six seconds elapsed between Washington's request for the air and the announcer's, "We now take you to Washington," followed by, "Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience, the President of the United States has just released a message he has sent to Chancellor Hitler and President Benes. We will now read the text of the message."

The man in the booth was told to "come in." He started reading the message, picking his pauses with great care so that the announcer in the studio, who was repeating his words, could do so with a minimum of raggedness. For the first few minutes the broadcast was slow. Then our man in the taxi arrived with a copy of the text and the announcer was able to take the occasional suggestion of jerkiness out of his delivery and speed up his reading job.

As a result of the arrangements we had made we were fourteen minutes ahead of the rest of the field in giving the full text of the President's message to the listening public.

On September 16th we got another important break. We picked up Chamberlain as he alighted from the plane that brought him back from his first trip to Munich. He gave us an interview, in which he sketched his first meeting with Hitler. It was in this interview that he announced his plan to return to Germany for a renewal of his discussions with the Reichsfuehrer.

One of the things that stand out in my recollection of the Czechoslovakian crisis is the unfailing cheerfulness and spirit of co-operation of the men who operated the Government radio station at Prague—even when things were going against them. They promptly complied with all our requests,—gave us all the transmission quality tests we wanted, set up the periods we requested, and even helped us line up our speakers. Once when we informed them that we were having difficulty in locating a certain newspaper correspondent we wanted to put on the air they put someone on his trail and located him in time for the program on which we wanted to use him.

One reason why the American radio audience was able to get an uninterrupted flow of news out of Prague was that the men who ran this Government-operated station stuck to their posts to the end,—until their country, in other words, had ceased to exist.

Even rival broadcasting systems admitted that the greatest radio feat of the Czech crisis was pulled by our man Max Jordan (whose forty-six-minute beat on the reading of the full text of the Munich pact is described by Jordan himself in Chapter XXII).

William L. Shirer, CBS man in Berlin, and an outstanding radio journalist in his own right, was good enough sport to pay tribute to Jordan's brilliant coverage in the September, 1940, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Shirer said: "The most important broadcast during this period was made by Max Jordan of the National Broadcasting Company. He was able to read to his listeners in America the text of the Munich agreement before it was known in official quarters in London, or Paris, or even in Berlin!"

When Lowell Thomas went to England to cover the coronation of George VI, his sponsors—the Sun Oil Company—expressed a desire to see Lowell do something spectacular. The coronation itself would be spectacular, and while Lowell's sponsors did not expect him to stage anything as

stirring as this they indicated it would please them no end if something on the breathtaking side were done.

Lowell was leaving well in advance of the coronation and planned to put on some prominent Europeans as guest speakers. This gave Lowell's sponsors an idea.

What would be more spectacular than to land the head of a nation as a guest speaker? That would be perfect—the head of a nation!

Everyone agreed it was a grand idea. All that remained to do was to get some European country's No. 1 man to agree to appear in a guest spot on the Blue Sunoco program.

Whom should we tackle first? Not King George. He would be busy getting ready for the coronation. There would be all those fittings of ceremonial robes at the draper's and fittings of crowns at the jeweler's and so many other things to attend to. No. It would be unfair to ask King George,—a downright imposition, in fact.

Next Hitler was considered. Obviously he would be an attraction but even the most casual student of the Fuehrer's oratorical style knows that a mere guest spot on a fifteen-minute program would not give him an adequate opportunity to express himself,—no, not even a chance to warm up.

The German Chancellor is an avowed believer in building up to a climax by slow and easy stages. The speeches he has made that have elicited the most thunderous *heils* have all had leisurely preambles. A master, also, of the peroration excitatory, some of his recapitulations following the climactic passages have required fifteen or twenty minutes alone.

The Hitler technique varies, of course. For instance, in one notable instance a speech was all climax,—about an hour of it. There was no preamble, no peroration.

But in one respect the Hitler speeches are alike. They are uniformly long. When an orator is used to plenty of time it cramps his style to ask him to do his stuff in a third—or, at best—two-thirds of a mere quarter-hour program.

So we decided not to approach Germany's No. 1 man.

Lowell Thomas, who tells this story on himself, says that

his thoughts next turned to Mussolini. His representative tackled Il Duce but was turned down—and perhaps with justice. Anyone who was ever seen and heard Il Duce in the newsreels knows that he is the world's greatest master of balcony oratory. When television becomes general, Mussolini will probably emerge as the greatest orator of them all for he can do more with a balcony, a defiant look and a cheering throng below than any man who ever lived. Ordinary radio does not offer a broad enough field for his skill as a Thespian, which must be seen to be fully appreciated. His advisers may have realized this and decided to wait until television became universal before permitting Benito Mussolini to help bolster the sales of Blue Sunoco.

Two other potentials on the list were Léon Blum, Premier of France, and Kemal Pasha, Turkish dictator. Mr. Thomas' representative decided to tackle M. Blum first and then to try Turkey's head man if he failed.

The French had been informed that Lowell Thomas was a very important man in the American radio world, and consequently a distinguished reception committee was on hand to receive him and his representative when they arrived. To make conversation, one member of the committee asked Lowell which of the American broadcasting systems he owned. None? *N'importe!*

But it was obvious that the committee was disappointed or puzzled or both. This M. Lowell was said to be important in American radio yet he did not own a broadcasting system, or even a single station. When the committee was informed that Mr. Thomas was a mere recounter of the news and was yet famous they simply took on a composite bewildered look. It just didn't make sense. In France there was no personal journalism of the air; the voices that announced the news had no identity and it was hard for these Frenchmen to believe that this man they were honoring merely gave a recital of the news.

There was a Frenchman who ran an antique shop on the Place Vendôme whose knowledge of Americans and their

ways exceeded that of any member of the reception committee. One member reminded the others of this and they all agreed that it would be wise to send for the worldly antique dealer and learn from him what the particular significance of this M. Thomas was. *Chaque pays à sa guise*—and if it was true that in America a man who did not own a broadcasting system or even a single station and who merely read the news nightly from slips of paper could be an important radio figure, that was America's business. Every country to its own way of doing things.

A member of the committee telephoned the well-informed antique dealer, who expressed astonishment that they did not know that M. Thomas was a famous American singer. He was sure they must have the first name wrong. There was only one famous Thomas, the antique dealer insisted—John Charles—and if M. Thomas really planned to sing over the French radio France was being honored even more than the committee realized.

The spokesman for the committee apologized for getting things mixed up. The antique dealer had clarified everything and he, as the representative of the group, wanted M. Thomas to know that nothing could give the French the spinal tingle they would get out of hearing the American sing both *The Star Spangled Banner* and *La Marseillaise*.

M. Thomas sat *muet comme un poisson* during all this confusion. This was smart of Lowell, whose calm in the presence of the incomprehensible is one of his greatest assets. It is his practice in situations of this kind to sit, arms akimbo, and wait for things to right themselves.

Inevitably it was discovered that M. Thomas *was* a news voice after all and an important one because he reached so large an audience. In fact, he was so important that he had broadcast daily from his ship en route to France for the benefit of this vast audience and he would broadcast daily from Paris until the coronation and then he would broadcast from London; it sounded incredible but it was true.

M. Thomas expressed a desire to meet M. Blum. He had

an important proposal to make to the French premier. He, M. Thomas, desired to honor France by giving M. Blum an opportunity to address the American people briefly on his program.

It was explained to M. Thomas and his representative that M. Blum spoke no English. "But he speaks beautiful French,—French which is so musical it delights even those who do not know the language," said M. Thomas' representative. "And we can translate what he says when he finishes,—although that is really superfluous. Truly mellifluous French carries with it a message that all can understand,—a message as universal as that of the birds."

Aussitot dit, aussitot fait! No sooner said than done. The wheels of the machinery by means of which it was hoped to produce a date with M. Blum were set in motion. Meanwhile M. Thomas astonished the reception committee by broadcasting to the United States that day and continuing to do so daily.

A man important enough to have his words daily flung across the Atlantic for the edification of the American public *must* be important. An engagement with the Premier would have to be made. It *was* made.

M. Blum and M. Thomas met. It was a great day for France and for the United States.

M. Blum agreed to broadcast on M. Thomas' program. It proved the soundness of the Thomas philosophy: *aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera*. God helps those who help themselves.

Those who were horrified when before leaving for Europe M. Thomas mentioned his plan to secure a major nation's No. 1 man as a guest speaker would now realize that his plan had not been too ambitious. The head of a nation—the premier of France—had agreed to fill a guest spot on his program!

What did M. Blum say? That, of course, did not matter. When you land the head of a nation you must not question what he says. And you must not object if while you are selling gasoline he is selling hotels. For M. Blum went on and delivered a perfect commercial for the hotels of France! With

the Paris Exposition about to open, this proved M. Blum to be as good a business man as M. Thomas.

M. Thomas' listeners heard this translation of the eloquent commercial delivered by the Premier of *la republique Francaise*:

“. . . Our American guests can come with every confidence. They will receive here a most affectionate welcome. And, too, they should not be influenced by evil reports which seek to discourage them by announcing that there have been monstrous increases in prices at our hotels and restaurants. The Government has taken all the necessary measures to prevent anything like that from happening. No abuses need be feared. The Government is armed to check any attempts at ruthless profiteering.

“Those of you in the United States who decide to cross the ocean to visit our country and the new Exhibition City we have built on the winding banks of the Seine in the very heart of Paris will find here a happy people to welcome you to as gay and beautiful a spectacle as the capital of France has ever offered. You may count upon the hospitality of the French.”

Vive la France!

Vive l'Amérique!

Vive le Blum Sunoco!

Vive la bagatelle! For Lowell Thomas, in recognition of his services to France in giving the Premier a chance to do a rousing commercial on French hotels, the Paris Exposition and the Government's anti-gouge policy, was made a chevalier of the Legion of Honor! *Vive Léon Blum! Vive Lowell Thomas!*

Late in June 1940 Helen Hiett, then of our Paris staff, now in Madrid for us, wrote me a long letter describing her trip to Bordeaux with Paul Archinard, also of our Paris office, when they both had cleared out of the French capital as the Germans advanced. In this letter her principal concern was whether certain of her broadcasts—and Archinard's—had got

through to New York—broadcasts delivered under conditions that made transmission most uncertain.

I quote in part from Miss Hiatt's letter:

". . . Deprived of the pleasure of talking to the Company every day, I seek a new outlet to say some of the unradioable things that have popped up since Monday. . . . We wonder so much if our broadcasts yesterday and today have come through. . . . The impossibility for timing exactly is giving us a headache. In the new set-up there are NO clocks—even the operators have only wristwatches to go by. I started exactly on time this morning but had been talking two minutes before the light in the improvised studio signaled that I was on the air. . . .

". . . I slept in a field Monday night—quite comfortably really; except that the early morning dew wreaked havoc with the coiffure—while Paul got rheumatism trying to sleep with his feet hanging over the end of the front car seat. The back seat was piled high with typewriter, office files, blankets, and what clothes we salvaged from Paris.

"Last night I managed a few hours' sleep in a borrowed bed, with bombs dropping uncomfortably near for a cradle song. Paul got none at all. I last saw him a few hours ago, still sleepless but purring (he says he'll purr still more when he once gets to take his socks off) over the luxury of a shave. I think he's got a bed for tonight. I'm hesitating between the offer of a straw pile at the studio and a third of a bed with two English women correspondents. Heigh ho!

"Work? Well, the town is so crowded with refugees, et cetera, to say nothing of all the Ministers and their little lip-sticked *fr-r-iends* that we couldn't even find a spot in the public square to set up NBC headquarters on a soap box. But this morning a nice smile to a nice censor netted our present GHQ—a shanty (next to the villa that lodges the censors) that seems to have served until recently as a combined coal bin and chicken coop with odoriferous vestiges of the stable it was in its prime.

"The desk is a dirt-encrusted board that sagged precari-

ously under the typewriter's weight until a kind captain drove a reinforcing nail under it. I share the board with two cans of paint, a half-bald brush, an assortment of screws and nails, three paint cans, an incongruous copper candelabrum, and a shaving kit and some man's rumpled pajamas. He seems to be sleeping next door.

"I've managed to squeeze a disequilibrated chair between the desk and the wall behind, where my bicycle (yesterday's urgent NBC purchase) leans against an antiquated iron bedstead, a section of sooty stove-pipe, and some workmen's ladders. Woe to my nice white American shoes! For a footstool I've a pile of cinders and broken glass. Heigh ho again! But there is ATMOSPHERE! I've lettered N B C on a piece of writing paper and applied it with a rusty nail to the shanty wall. O Tempora! O prestige of the Radio Corporation of America!

"The trip here was epic. To you with your sleek motor cars and express highways the most conservative description would be unbelievable. Every car almost invisible under outside padding of mattresses, bags and bundles, creeping along fender to fender with overloaded bicycles, coughing motorcycles, bandy-wheeled horse-drawn peasant carts in which children and grandmothers lay sleeping between chickens and dishpans with, inevitably, a perambulator dragging along behind. In one pram there were two baby lambs hanging their heads over the side. Sagging trucks moved hastily assembled office equipment while employees sat majestically atop the baggage on swivel chairs.

"Every few minutes there was a bad jam before part of the road could be cleared for motorcycle caravans and troop trucks moving in the opposite direction up to the lines. There were clouds of dust, and the sun beat down unmercifully.

"Peasant women rushed up with tin pails to give the troops drinking water when they stopped long enough.

"Hastily constructed barricades of felled trees and stone paving blocks here and there narrowed traffic to a single line.

"The peaceful green landscape and picturesque village

church towers were in discord with the rumbling tanks and khaki troops, while everywhere those red rambler roses that have made Touraine known as the Garden of France added riotous color.

"I'm still not sure it was right for me to leave Paris. However I did because:

"(1) When the transmitter went out I didn't think I should hang around Paris for days, perhaps weeks, without being able to broadcast. Now it occurs to me that I might have stayed there and brought the story out later—if I could have gotten out, that is—or sent you things by press wireless, but we're sure that is no longer working in Paris.

"(2) Because I'm not at all certain of my *persona grata*ness in German eyes.

"(3) Because once Paul's car was gone I had no possible ways of getting out, not having a car of my own.

"(4) Because I've heard too many first-hand accounts of the siege of Warsaw—water mains and sewers broken, disease, food shortage, destruction by bombs—and I reason with perhaps unjustifiable egotism that I'm less use to you dead than alive.

"However I fully realize that there's the story of the century there for anyone who can get it and get it out, so if the front should by chance stabilize outside of Paris in the next day or two, I'll try to get back in. Reports today, now confirmed, are that it is impossible to get in or out of Paris at the moment. Wish I knew what you wanted me to do. In the meantime, there's plenty to keep us both busy here. But are you hearing us? . . ."

One of the most thrilling broadcasts that got through—shortly before Archinard and Miss Hiett were forced to clear out of Paris—was Archinard's stirring description of the bombing of the building next to the NBC office in Paris. Flying wreckage almost destroyed our office but miraculously did not destroy our files.

Miss Hiett's letter went on to speculate as to whether her broadcast from Bordeaux on June 19th, the day the Germans

bombed the city, had got through. It did, Helen, and it was a honey. No radio history of the period would be complete without it. Here are some excerpts:

“This is Helen Hiatt broadcasting from Bordeaux, taking over from Bill Humphries, who has just given you the latest Associated Press dispatch. At the very minute I went off the air after my last broadcast to you at 12:30 A.M. Bordeaux time, the air raid sirens started screaming, just too late to broadcast it. . . .

“I went down to the coal bin with Bill Humphries of the Associated Press, who was here at the studio at the time. The coal bin is the emergency air raid shelter of this studio. I stayed there an hour and fifty minutes.

“There are strict and very sensible rules against being in the street during an air raid, and that will explain why the news that should have gone into this broadcast is lacking. In any case, ever since the Paris air raid on June 3rd, which left the NBC office there without doors or windows, we have decided that when bombs start dropping, prudence is the better part of valor. . . .

“People in the Paris radio stations who had passed through all of the bombing in Madrid gave us elementary instructions in distinguishing between the different kinds of noises that the planes made. The difference between the steady hum of French airplane motors and the characteristic up-and-down modulations of the German motors is easy to distinguish.

“Four times we distinctly heard the latter come back over, much too low for comfort, and each time with the fatal explosions that came progressively closer. The distinction is easy to make because of the dry explosion of bombs dropping and the cough that precedes the boom of the anti-aircraft cannon. There is no mistaking it, particularly because the one is the sound you want to hear and the other is the sound you don't. . . .

“First there was one crash, followed by another, and then a third. They started all of a sudden. There has been a steady chatter, with a whistle in between times. When you hear the

whistle that precedes the bomb, it means it's pretty close, too close to make light of it.

"Then came the machine-guns, a sound impossible to confuse with anything else. The roaring planes then were low—very low—but the close-range bursts of fire made it difficult for us to tell whether the tumult was being made by German planes machine-gunning the streets, or whether French fighter planes and German bombers, locked in battle, combined to make the din. Nobody seems to know just how many civilians were killed.

"When we came back upstairs after an hour and a half, the sound of the planes had died away. We were surprised to find our studio still intact, the nearest bombs having apparently gone across the street.

"But a freak no one has yet found an explanation for here in the studio is the fire extinguisher. The pressure evidently had made it explode in the corner where it was hung. It had jumped up the staircase wildly, about twenty feet away, after bouncing several places before that, and come to repose where it is resting now, in a corner on the floor. . . .

"We never found out just what this raid was about or how much damage was done. It came as somewhat of a surprise because yesterday Bordeaux was declared an open city by the French Government, of no military significance. . . ."

From the standpoint of suspense, drama, and all those elements which go to make up a good newspaper or radio story, the broadcast of Supreme Court Justice Black in October, 1937, is outstanding.

It will be recalled that Black was accused by certain newspapers of having been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, and of having taken an oath contradictory to the oath he would have to take to become a member of the Supreme Court. He was in England at the time the accusations were published. There he was besieged by reporters for a statement. Fred Bate, our London representative, whom we peppered with radiograms, was also on his trail. But Black refused to

talk, sailing for the United States aboard a slow vessel which was to put in at Norfolk.

At Norfolk Black was besieged by the press, and once more refused to comment on the charges, except to say that when he made an answer "it would be made in such a way that it could not be misconstrued."

NBC officials immediately swung into action. How could he possibly mean anything by that, since nothing that is broadcast can ever be misconstrued—that is, hardly ever—except that he would make a statement over the air?

The Supreme Court Justice designate refused to talk with anyone by telephone and would not be interviewed. Our Washington office sent messengers to his office and his home with letters offering time over both our networks, but no reply was forthcoming.

Then it was learned that Black's brother-in-law, a government attorney, was meeting the press for the former Senator. K. H. Berkeley, our general manager in the capital, called the brother-in-law by telephone asking if any decision had been reached on the NBC offer.

An hour later Berkeley received a call saying Mr. Black would speak on the night of October 1, at nine-thirty. Time was immediately cleared on both NBC networks and then began the first in a series of frenzied happenings which had radio executives in Washington tearing their hair. Berkeley quickly confirmed the arrangements and then obtained permission to make the announcement to the press.

The newspapers and press associations were informed, and Berkeley held a press conference for the first time in his life. Naturally, the flash of the press associations read: "NBC announces Black will speak." Then the other chains began to complain,—and loudly. Hours later they completed arrangements to be in on the broadcast, too.

The home of another lawyer, a friend of Black's, was chosen as the site for the broadcast. No one was admitted except broadcasting company employees and friends of Black. The police scrutinized each person as he entered. Cameramen

begged, threatened and cajoled radio men to sneak a camera in for a picture, though the Justice had warned that anyone caught with a camera would be ejected. Later he got tougher and exacted a promise that no cameras would be smuggled into the house.

This didn't phase one chain employee. While Black spoke from a porcelain-topped kitchen table, the man in question managed to snap one picture of him, which later appeared in several papers. How he managed to get the camera past the prying eyes of the police no one knows.

The photo episode brought to a close one of the most turbulent broadcast situations in the history of Washington radio.

How would you like to have to be funny about the Second World War,—or any war? What would you do if you worked for the British or the Axis propaganda office and one day the boss said to you, "A little more gaiety, please, about the Battle of Doverheim. . . . A lot of people were killed? What of it? There's humor in casualty lists if you only look for it. Spoof the enemy's claim that he lost only 7800 dead and wounded. Point out his inadequate schooling and his consequent inability to add after he has reached a certain figure. If you do it right it will lay 'em in the aisles. We've got to keep our people laughing. It helps morale."

The idea of being funny about the War might crumple you, or if you happened to be a hilarious extrovert you might do your job so well you'd be fired for over-thoroughness,—for making people die laughing, in other words. That would entail a special propaganda-office casualty list announcing the demise of those who choked to death chortling, those who had dislocated a jawbone while laughing, shaken a vertebra loose, or split a side, and who would have to be listed merely as *hors de combat* in the battle of words, with all the attendant complications.

In the next chapter, WAR OF WORDS, which deals with propaganda's relation to radio, I wanted to include a few para-

graphs about the Comic Relief Corps of the Germans and the British. There are references to Lord Haw-Haw's efforts on behalf of Germany, but beyond that the phenomenon of humorous propaganda is not discussed. Somehow it did not fit into the framework of that chapter, so I left it out.

Racial differences between the Germans and the British are interestingly exemplified by the efforts of the funny men in the rival propaganda camps.

I have been keeping a separate file of these efforts at humor as picked up by the NBC Short-Wave Monitoring Service and I am submitting a few examples. What they prove I'm not sure, but they represent an interesting sidelight on the war. Some future chronicler of these times may want to devote a few paragraphs to appraising the phenomenon for the benefit of the generations to come.

His work will be made easier if I dig into my War-is-Hellishly-Funny File and give him a few clues to what he can find if he decides years hence to ransack all the old cobwebby radio files that will be moldering in warehouses by the time he tackles his task.

My records show that the month of September, 1940, was a particularly active period for the war wits; so I might as well dig into that file for a few examples of German and British propagandists adapting the familiar Shakespearean technique of lightening tragedy by invoking the comic muse.

Ladies and gentlemen, meet William Joyce, better known as Lord Haw-Haw, who greeted short-wave listeners on the third day of the month just mentioned with the following:

"President Roosevelt's bias against Germany has ceased to be a mystery to the people of Germany. . . . His most trusted adviser is a New York Jew, Judge Rosenman. . . . Back in 1914 another American president leaned heavily on the advice of a trusted friend. So it is only natural that the following joke is making the rounds: 'Wilson has his House, Roosevelt has his synagogue.'"

In a discussion of Dorothy Thompson a few days later Kaltenbach said: "It is evident that she does not like Hitler, that

he is not her type. It is quite possible that, contrary to the opinion of thousands of other women, she does not consider him handsome. Unfortunately everyone cannot look like La-Guardia."

Having pulled an epigrammatical sally and a good-looks gag in the two efforts just cited Joyce demonstrated his versatility only two or three days later by using a pugilistic symbol in his invocation to the comic spirit. I quote:

"In this corner, Battling Berlin. In the far corner, Kid London. The Kid is groggy. Wonder whether he will be able to come out for the next round. His seconds are working over him feverishly. His eyes are puffy, his face has been beaten to a pulp. His body is covered with red welts where Battling Berlin has been punishing him unmercifully for thirteen rounds. . . . Kid London's followers are going through all the motions of a successful rear-guard action. . . . Once it looked as though the Kid's seconds were going to throw in the towel. . . . Only the members of his immediate family—and Uncle Sam—still yell for him to fight on. . . . There goes the bell for the fourteenth—or next to the last—round. All the fighting is now taking place in Kid London's corner. Wham, biff, wham. Kid London reels under Battling Berlin's blows. His knees buckle under him. But there goes the bell. Drunkenly the Kid staggers back to his corner and all the world wonders whether he will be able to come out for the fifteenth and last round."

That same month of September, 1940, witnessed capacity production by Leonard Ingram, and other members of the Wit and Humor Section of the British Propaganda Ministry. Here are some typical examples:

"On Wednesday I listened to Mr. Hitler, as I have often listened to him before. He reminds me of a character in a play by Maeterlinck. The story is about a young man who sets out into the world with his companions to choose a wife. They find themselves accompanied by a gigantic personage made apparently of granite, who calls himself 'Destiny,' and who proclaims in a voice of thunder that it is he who gives orders, he

who directs everything, he that is the only master. He is insuperable, invulnerable, impregnable, and all the rest of it.

"As the play proceeds, and the characters in it lead their own lives, this figure, who is always to be found with them, grows smaller and smaller until at last he is the size of a child that has to be carried. But in spite of its shrunken size the figure is still upright, and still insists that he is unshakable, immutable, indefatigable, invincible, and he still proclaims that everything that happens is ordained by him."

". . . The Ark Royal was sunk for the fourth time yesterday, this time by Italians. . . ."

"The other day an American was driving through an industrial quarter of London when Nazi planes appeared overhead. Soon bombs began to fall. One of them landed in the roadway, some seventy-five yards behind the taxi in which the American was riding. The driver of the cab was a gray-haired cockney. The American tapped on the glass. 'Look here, cabby,' he suggested, 'if you want to stop and get into an air raid shelter, you go right ahead. I'll pay you off and try to find another taxi.'

"The cabby wheeled around in his seat. 'Governor,' he said, raising a finger in the direction of the planes, 'e's up there doing three hundred miles an hour; I'm down here doing twenty; if 'e can 'it me, he's entitled to it.'"

". . . Wrecked German planes are becoming landmarks of the English countryside. The thing has gone so far that people in towns and villages are using the wrecks as landmarks in order to point out the way to strangers. A visitor asking for directions may be told: Walk straight ahead until you come to a Messerschmidt, turn left and keep walking till you reach a pile of Junkers, and from there you take the narrow road at the right until you see a Dornier—and there you are."

The reader can decide for himself which side, if any, won the exchange. I'm supposed to be objective about such things.

XV

War of Words

THE Second World War is more than a war of tanks, bombers, anti-aircraft batteries, submarines, and the other familiars of modern land and naval operations.

It is also a war of words. Radio is one of the principal battlefields. It is a worldwide battlefield, for radio reaches practically everywhere. Word-loaded shells are the long-range artillery of what might be called the Propaganda Corps. Verbal poison gas instantaneously reaches destinations thousands of miles away. No projectile released from the rack of British or German bomber reaches its target with the speed of words shot round the world. The speed of falling missiles is slow motion compared with the speed of radio transmission.

It is because we realize these things that we cannot exercise too much caution in dealing with this problem. Various ways of handling the propaganda received at NBC by short-wave have been suggested. The most familiar suggestion,—one that has been made repeatedly since the outbreak of the Second World War—is that we schedule regular programs presenting the propaganda of the different nations directly and indirectly involved and let the public decide who is telling the truth.

I am opposed to this method. While in some instances I believe in presenting on what we call a “claim and counter-claim” basis the special pleading of the combatant word-mongers, I have never been able to see the soundness of letting the different Propaganda Corps make a regular practice of fighting out the War on “our air.”

This, I have always felt, amounts to an invitation. If you

establish a regular program for presenting the product of the rival propagandists, these makers of verbal munitions will start manufacturing a special type of word-shell aimed at your program.

Even when frankly labeled as such, a regular program of rival propaganda claims is dangerous. Psychologically a program that becomes a fixed feature in the news category gets a certain amount of acceptance from the listener. The occasional qualifying phrase, designed to make him wary, loses its effect after a while and the radio listener who is the equivalent of the newspaper reader who reads little more than the headlines—and the type is legion—can easily pick up wrong impressions. If there were fewer superficial people in the world, fewer busy people, if more people listened to radio with the thoroughness of a jury weighing evidence in a court-room, the problem would be different.

I have had many experiences involving people discussing, as "news," propaganda that was frankly branded as propaganda in conscientious broadcasts. My associates have had similar experiences. This is one of many reasons why NBC has no regular clearing-house of the air for the outpourings of the rival verbal blitzkriegers.

Our feeling is that the best way to treat most propaganda is not to use it. The propagandist thrives on having his stuff used, with or without a label telling what it is. The best way to defeat his purpose is to keep him off the air.

We find it useful to keep a record of all the propaganda received through our Short-Wave Monitoring Service. We frequently find it helpful to consult this file to see how many times Nation A has previously given us entirely different versions of an "explanation" we have just received from them.

The monitoring (or listening) service is itself an outgrowth of the War and of the word battles which preceded it. The department is on duty twenty-four hours a day, recording and translating the short-wave propaganda with which this country is continually bombarded.

The monitors, or listeners, cover broadcasts from foreign

countries in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Japanese, Dutch, and Afrikaans. They record the propaganda by shorthand or direct on typewriters. Or if too many programs are on the air at once, the overflow is recorded by members of the engineering staff on discs which the monitors can play back and translate at their leisure.

There are five monitors and four engineers in the short-wave monitoring service, and most of the monitors know at least four languages. All have lived in Europe for years, and the majority are trained news men. Necessarily, all too are familiar with world geography, international affairs, political personalities of all major countries, and with the various idioms, colloquialisms and dialects of the languages in which

ork.
eir equipment consists of high-powered RCA short-receivers with special antennæ on the roof of our build-venty stories above the street, and of course with ear-rather than loudspeakers.

used propaganda material picked up by our short-wave ment falls into many categories. There is one type is so obviously at variance with established facts that most automatically rejected. There is another kind represents mere wishful thinking and contains no in-on of any character whatsoever, true or untrue. There another variety which amounts to sticking out the at the rival camp. This stuff sounds pretty silly as set n paper by our Monitoring Service, and it would ven sillier over the air.

re is another type of propaganda that can best be de-as meaningless,—incoherent effusions that start and here. All that they ever convey is that Nation A does Nation B, something we already knew.

there is the type that is childishly mysterious; as well pe that is designed to overawe us with an array of im-pressive-sounding figures and "analyses" by so-called experts.

Then there is a kind that might be described as subtlety in leaden shoes. One of the forms that this brand of propa-

ganda takes is the handing of obvious compliments to certain neutral nations who are supposed to be won over by such master strokes. Then there is the plain unvarnished threat aimed, also with dubious subtlety, at other neutrals.

There is also a species of propaganda which is not all lie but which is characterized by an overconfidence not justified by the known facts. One of the purposes of this kind of propaganda is to make certain neutrals think twice before joining the other fellow's bandwagon.

Among the varieties of ultimately rejected propaganda picked up by our alert short-wave department are even items whose truth we do not challenge. Sometimes an item of this kind is like a sentence lifted out of its context. It is true as far as it goes but does not give a completely accurate picture. It might be called truth used to deceive.

It is unnecessary to list all the reasons why an overwhelming percentage of the propaganda which we receive is never broadcast by us. In some instances there are reasons which we prefer not to divulge.

There are types of claims and counter-claims which I think can usefully be presented to the public. In some instances, both the claim and the counter-claim sound plausible, and where the issue involved is of sufficient importance we think it is up to us to let the public hear both sides and decide for themselves. There are other instances where the contrast between claim and counter-claim is so illuminating that it becomes essential the information be given to the public. I recall one instance where the very nature of a denial made it perfectly plain what the facts were.

I have no intention of writing a chapter designed to tell the whole story of propaganda. A whole book could be devoted to this one subject.

What I propose to do in this chapter is to give the reader samples of propaganda that we did not put on the air for a variety of reasons. This is a good way of answering the question I am most frequently asked regarding propaganda: How do you decide what to use and what not to use?

I cannot give you a direct answer to that question, but I can give the reader a peek into our files and let him see for himself what we turn down. I cannot attempt to particularize and say why we turned down this or that item. On the strength of what I have already said, the reader will have to try to figure out for himself why the examples of propaganda that follow this introduction did not make the grade.

Much of what has been said on the subject of why propaganda is or is not used is on the fantastic side. Unnecessarily involved reasons are invented to explain the failure of a particular item to get past the copy desk. Sometimes all you have to do to find out the reason is to get hold of a copy of the rejected item and read it. The reason then becomes something simple and obvious.

I doubt if there is a single file in our office that is more interesting than the file of rejected propaganda. This material could be published in book form without a word of comment and emerge as one of the most important documents of the War.

Here, then, without any comment, are samples of propaganda that emanated from the countries involved in the Second World War. The items were selected at random and cover a period of four months, from April 4, 1940, to August 5 of the same year, a long enough period to give a typical picture of the war of words.

Germany, by a wide margin the most active nation in the field of propaganda, will be more liberally represented in the anthology that follows than other nations. Thus the reader gets some idea of the German output, quantitatively, as compared, say, with the British. Propaganda, at the beginning of the War a more highly developed weapon in Germany than anywhere else, became increasingly important in the Nazi scheme of things as Germany took over more and more stations of conquered nations and developed a bigger and bigger chain of propaganda outlets.

In presenting examples of the propaganda of different nations brief excerpts are given except in instances where fuller

text is necessary to convey the meaning obviously intended.

To make it easier for the reader to visualize these records, it might be interesting to mention that they are recorded on sheets headed as follows:

COUNTRY _____ DATE _____ STATION _____
 LANGUAGE _____ N. Y. TIME _____ FREQUENCY _____

Each report bears the signature of the "monitor" who received it.

From Germany, in German, April 4: "Germany has occupied Norway and Denmark solely to protect them against English subjugation. Ceaseless reports from Denmark show that the Danish population realizes overwhelmingly that Germany has in fact liberated them and saved them from a disaster worse than death. Such a disaster would be the domination of Denmark by the Allies."

From Germany, in German, April 8: "British laying of mines in Norwegian territorial waters is an eloquent sign of weakness, nervousness, and disregard of neutral rights. The Scandinavian countries have long known England's intention to establish a Scandinavian battlefront. This mine-laying is another attempt toward achieving this aim. This latest English outrage has caused a near panic and deep resentment among the Norwegian population. The Norwegian Government reserves the right to take whatever counter measures it deems advisable in retaliation. . . . English prestige among neutrals has dropped to an all-time low."

From England, in German, April 8: "Yesterday a guard of honor was formed by members of the British Royal Air Force during the burial of a number of German airmen whose bodies had been washed ashore."

From Germany, in German, April 9: "In order to acquaint its German listeners with the manner in which the German troops were received by the Danish population, the German radio station DJB has had a number of Danish people speak over the radio. Most of them said the lack of Danish

resistance to the advancing German military units was entirely natural, as part of Denmark had always belonged to the Reich, and as a large percentage of the population belongs to the Greater German racial unity. For both these reasons resistance would have been utterly unthinkable. In one case, German and Danish commanders of the retreating and advancing units met face to face. The Danish commander's demeanor was extremely truculent until the German commander suddenly recognized him as a former comrade of the World War, with whom he had fought side by side. This illustrates the sound moral basis of German claims."

From Germany, in German, April 11: "In Bergen life goes on as usual. The population admires the big cannons of the German Army. Many express indignation over the false Reuter report that their city has been taken by the English."

From Germany, in German, April 11: "Great resentment is being shown in many parts of the world over the tendency of British propaganda to undermine the feeling of security existing among the Norwegian people since the German Army entered their country."

From Germany, in German, April 13: "The British air attack on the open city of Bergen is further proof that Britain, cornered as she is, has resorted to her ancient weapons of brutality and disregard for human rights."

From Germany, in German, April 13: "As new proof that the English prepared for months the occupation of Norway, English sailors who were questioned in Bergen said that their ship had been waiting in an east English harbor for months prepared for mine-laying to cover land operations. They were astonished to find that the Germans had been quicker to act."

From Germany, in German, April 15: "German ship captains have reported that British destroyers machine-gunned helpless German soldiers from torpedoed German boats who were swimming away from their sinking craft."

From Germany, in German, April 16: "We fight against the same forces that once kept down the American people in their economic development."

From England, in English and German, April 18: "Major Quisling, temporary head of the German-sponsored interim government in Norway, may never have done much for his country at any time; and toward the end he even went so far as to betray it. Nevertheless, he has done something for the English language. He has enriched our language by a new word, because henceforth the word 'Quisling'—his own name—will always stand for treachery."

From Germany, in German, April 18: "Dr. Goebbels, on the 51st birthday of Chancellor Adolph Hitler, said: 'To Germans everywhere in the world: I am addressing you in honor of our Fuehrer. What can we do to show him our loyalty? Is there any greater way than to affirm once again that we love him?'"

"The English are beginning to realize their helplessness in this conflict. It is for this reason that they are using the weapons of lying, deceit and distrust."

From England, in English, April 18: "The phrase 'Fifth Column,' which has become widely accepted, is used to describe any body of traitors who work from the inside in support of military forces attacking from outside. The term originated in Spain during the civil war, when the commander of the rebel forces attacking Madrid had four military columns poised on the outskirts of the city ready for attack. In a statement, this commander spoke of the valuable assistance he expected from his 'fifth column' in capturing Madrid. The term might have remained obscure were it not for the Nazi methods demonstrated so strikingly in the recent betrayal of Norway. In spite of the much-boasted perfection of the Nazi war machine it would have been utterly impossible for the Germans to capture Norwegian coastal defenses in so short a time had it not been for the assistance rendered them by the 'fifth column' of Norwegian traitors."

From England, in English, April 23: "Today is St. George's Day. St. George, were he to come back, would be glad to see Englishmen still fighting the Dragon with a clear conscience following the battle-cry of their ancestors."

From Germany, in English, May 2: "In their first engagement with German Alpine troops, British officers induced the Norwegians to attack alone, on the pretext that their own troops were not sufficiently acquainted with the Norwegian terrain. While the Norwegians suffered heavy losses, the British 'deliverers' remained in the background, and this finally led to arguments between British and Norwegian officers. After the second engagement, in which Norwegians attacked and again suffered heavy losses, Norwegian officers categorically refused to co-operate any further with the British. Tension reached a dramatic climax when the Norwegians became so infuriated that they opened fire on their hesitant British allies."

From London, in English, May 5: "Germans in Oslo are threatening to take their Norwegian prisoners to Germany unless the civil population of Norway helps to build camps for the imprisonment of their own countrymen."

From France, in English, May 6: "News from Poland confirms the sad reports published by Cardinal Hlond in Rome that the Germans carry out planned kidnappings of Polish girls. In Poznan, for example, several hundred girls were arrested and then sent away to be 'employed in public houses.' In Warsaw, girls were forced by officers of the 228th regiment to follow them, and were raped several times. On March 22, a seventeen-year-old girl was seized in Warsaw and taken to a house where she found other girls in new dresses who were being sent to Germany. The girl saved herself by jumping out of a window. Such reports are confirmed by neutral sources."

From England, in German, May 10: "The International Transport Workers Union in an appeal to the affiliated German workers urges them to sabotage all German attempts to advance. It declares: 'Hitler leads to an abyss. The moment for a complete sabotage has come.'"

From Berlin, in German, May 15: "General Smuts accomplished a masterpiece of hypocrisy in declaring that the Dutch Queen was welcome to take refuge in South Africa. General

Smuts fought against the British in South Africa until he turned traitor to his country. But the German people have always sympathized with the South African people."

From France, in English, May 16: "Fishing boats in the North Sea were attacked by German planes which, in addition to incendiary bombs and machine-guns, fired small steel arrows three inches long. This is a new weapon used by these barbarians."

From Germany, in German, May 16: "Foreign correspondents keep on speculating about Germany's 'secret weapon.' Well, it has not yet been used. In due course, it will be revealed to those who come in contact with it. But then, of course, it will be too late."

From England, in English, May 16: "Another German attack on civilians was reported by the head of an American volunteer ambulance corps in France. He announced that four ambulances belonging to the corps have been damaged by German gunfire. A German plane directed artillery fire on these ambulances. It was not an accident, he declared."

From England, in German, May 17: "In a report published in London the following statements are made on the subject of tanks: 'The ratio of German losses to Allied losses in tanks is five to one. The reason for this startling fact is that tanks used in defense can choose their positions and open fire from relatively secure points with a crew that has not been exhausted in the preparations for attack. The German tanks can be destroyed easily and the fuel transports that follow them can be destroyed by planes without much trouble. Superiority of Allied tanks in construction, arrangement of guns, and armor, has definitely been established.' "

From Germany, in German, May 17: "On the fifth day Holland capitulated. The government which so needlessly and so culpably led the Dutch into the war has sought safety in flight. It is left for a man of courage and honor, General Winkelman, to save his people from further suffering."

From Germany, in German, May 21: "The Allies are using dum-dum bullets in their campaign in Belgium. It can

be stated positively that these bullets are being used systematically. In the German capture of war materials, thousands of these bullets have been found."

From Germany, in English, May 22: "French workmen of Dieppe factories have been court martialed and sentenced to death. They were accused of deserting their jobs at the approach of German troops and leaving for home to look after their families. Within two hours they were shot by a firing squad."

From Germany, in English, May 23: "Enemy aircraft shot down by German anti-aircraft guns between May 10 and 16 amount to 342."

From Germany, in German, May 25: "The monstrous slander against the German Reich by King George VI during his Empire Day address has been answered by the Chief of the German Press, Dr. Dietrich. He writes: 'You, George VI, in a moment when you are trembling at the prospect of having the crimes of your government punished by the German sword, have delivered the most fantastic speech that was ever heard from any King. Your address, George of England, was not royal, but miserable. If you were a real man, you would now be at the battlefield. You inform the world that your aim has always been peace, that your conscience is clear. You miserable hypocrite! Who was it that drove Poland into the War and then betrayed it? England! Who is guilty of having unscrupulously sacrificed Norway, Holland and Belgium to its own interest? England! On whose conscience will the responsibility rest for the War and its horrors? We are not the guilty ones but you, George VI of England. You who have the audacity to tell your people that it was Germany who robbed you of your peace. You, a King, are lowering yourself by threatening the German people. You are threatening a people who have always been ready for continuing friendship with the British people. What a terrible spectacle you present.'"

From Germany, in German, May 27: "In connection with the British plot to torpedo the American steamship, *President Roosevelt*, on its return voyage to America, New York circles

are displaying increasing anxiety. The original story concerning the British plot was given out in Berlin, where the warning had been received from certain sources in Boston who pointed out that the *President Roosevelt*, on her return voyage from Galway, would be loaded with American women and children, and that the sinking of the ship would be the surest way for England to arouse American sentiment to declare war on Germany. Today New York editors recalled a feature article by the London correspondent of the *New York Post*, Mr. Stoneman, who declared that a sensational development might soon be expected, one which would arouse horror and indignation throughout the world. This probably referred to the English plot to torpedo the *President Roosevelt*."

From France, in English, May 28: "What shocked the French people most is that Leopold should be the son of the mighty King of the Belgians of 1914. He has knifed in the back everyone who has a son, a husband or a brother in the army."

From Germany, in English, May 29: "The Belgians fought much more bravely than the British and French."

From France, in French, May 29: "The Belgian Foreign Minister says: 'Our King has abandoned us. He has made terms with the enemy, regardless of our distress. He has gone over to the invader.' The fight goes on. The Belgian Government which has in France important military reserves is going to raise a new army to fight side by side with the Allies. All our Colonies and financial resources will be put to work."

From Germany, in Flemish, May 30: "It has been learned that the cowardly members of the old Belgian cabinet are about to form a new emigrant parliament in exile for the purpose of sitting in judgment over King Leopold, and to continue the War against Germany alongside the Allies. A large dance-hall has been selected in which to conduct the meetings of the emigrant parliament. All the members of parliament have to sleep on the floor of this hall, which is covered with mattresses. Every time a meeting is held, the mattresses will be removed. This farce of an assembly dares to voice its inten-

tion to represent a people whom they have abandoned in the darkest hour of the history of that country. And above all, they dare to sit in judgment of the King,—our King who was the only one to stay with his troops and fight to the very end.”

From London, in English, May 31: “Men of the BEF returning to England from the battlefield in Flanders encountered members of the ‘fifth column’ even in their areas of operation. They sniped from behind hotels and lorries and many wore French uniforms.”

From Germany, in German, June 2: “Near Valenciennes, a corporal of the Foreign Legion, a Danish citizen, came over to the German troops. Questioned as to the reason of his desertion, he said he resented the way the French were treating their prisoners of war. He said that one German soldier was maltreated by a captain of the French Army and a Moroccan, until finally the French captain killed the wounded German with his gun. These despicable deeds of the French and English soldiers will receive the answer they have asked for.”

From France, in English, June 2: “Emile Risarger, French General, addressing his Colonial troops said: ‘Terrifying as they may be, German air attacks are not so destructive as we thought at first, and tank attacks are not effective against infantry, if our men conceal themselves and pick off the guides that accompany the tanks. Without those guides, the tanks are blind. The enemy counts on terrorizing us, but he is not as dangerous as he seems.’ ”

From Berlin, in English, June 4: “The German Government has informed the governments of the United States and Mexico of reliable reports that the British Secret Service has sent a great number of agents to Central America, particularly Mexico and Panama, to prepare incidents intended to arouse animosity against Germany in the United States. There are two plans: first, an attempt to compromise Germany by fabricating disclosures of alleged German plots in Mexico; second, acts of sabotage against the Panama Canal, which are to be blamed on Germany.”

From France, in French, June 9: “The French Govern-

ment emphatically denies German assertions that Parisians are throwing up barricades in the streets of Paris in preparation for German invasion. Paris is ready to meet any possible danger from parachutists or fifth columnists. However, the Germans are as far away from Paris as ever."

From London, in English, June 10: "The reaction of the Allies and of the New World to Signor Mussolini's declaration of war is one of wholehearted contempt that he should have chosen such a moment as this to attack the Allies. Both the dictators who have embarked on this struggle against the free people of Europe may now digest at their leisure the news of where the United States stands in the fight."

From Italy, in French, June 13: "Premier Reynaud has directed an appeal to President Roosevelt, asking for active aid to France on the part of America. Italy warns its French listeners that it would be foolish to expect the United States to assist a nation which must already be considered as drowning."

From France, in French, June 15: "Paris was not defended because it was not vital to the French line of defense, and the surrender of Paris does not constitute a German victory."

From France, in French, June 16: "The French Government denies formally all the rumors which have been published in the United States about France making a separate peace with Germany. These rumors are false and are based on information received from London."

From England, in German, June 28: "If German workers in factories were killed during air raids it is the fault of the Nazis who do not sound air raid alarms and who keep the factories working during these air raids."

From Russia, in French, July 1: "During the entry of Russian troops in Bessarabia and Bucovina, the mayor of one of the occupied towns exclaimed: 'Long live our great friends, long live the Soviets!' and again 'Thanks for your occupation!' The troops were received everywhere with cheers and the joy of the population was great."

From Italy, in English, July 4: "Italians did not enter into the activities of the sea battle at Oran between the French and

British fleets because they had no time to reach the spot. If Mr. Churchill wishes a battle with the Italian fleet, he has only to attack an Italian base, as he did Oran."

From Berlin, in German, July 7: "In reference to the recent sinking of the French luxury liner *Champlain*, it is known that the French authorities blame England for this incident. It is stated in official French circles that England laid mines without warning or notice to the French Government in the harbor and coast surrounding La Rochelle. One of these mines caught the vessel on its way out of the harbor of La Rochelle."

From Berlin, in English, July 11: "In Great Britain civilian guards have been ordered to fire at night on any passerby who does not happen to hear their panicky command and halt at once. A great number of people have been arrested in England because they wore a fifth-column look. People who ask questions such as how to get to Buckingham Palace or to Downing Street are arrested and then later on in the police station turn out to be visiting Canadian, Australian or New Zealand soldiers who are out to see London in civilian dress."

From Germany, in English, July 11: "We take occasion to refer to an example from early American history. In the year 1755 a British Expeditionary Force attacked the French and their Indian allies in the upper Ohio Valley. A small detachment of Virginia militia was attached to this B.E.F. under the command of one George Washington. When the British dropped their guns in panic, George Washington threw his Virginians into the breach. The Virginians acted like men and soldiers. The conduct of the regular British forces was cowardly. They ran away like sheep before dogs. The source of this information is a report by George Washington to the Governor of Virginia. This estimate of the British by the most famous soldier President of the United States does not need further comment."

From England, in French, July 11: "Somerset Maugham told tonight of his harrowing experiences during his trip in a small boat from France to England, together with five hun-

dred other refugees. He spoke of the horror he felt at the conquest of France, and added: 'I also cannot shut my eyes to the fact that the present government of France is wholly subject to the wishes of the German tyrant. But I have found in England the means, the will, the power and the determination to carry this battle to liberate France to a victorious conclusion.' "

From Germany, in English, July 15: "Germany is convinced that the elimination of hatreds constitutes fundamental ideas on which the twentieth century should be built."

From Budapest, Hungary, in English, July 16: "An order has been issued in Rumania forbidding all persons to keep or train homing pigeons. Anybody caught disobeying this new regulation will be liable to five years imprisonment. The object of this new measure is to prevent any Rumanian internal news from reaching the outside world."

From Germany, in German, July 20: "The retreating French Army cleaned villages and farms completely of food-stuffs, probably to prevent such provisions from falling into the hands of the enemy. Thus they left the countryside in dire need of food. German authorities organized a relief program which has met the immediate need."

From Italy, in English, July 20: "The Canadian Government has decided not to break off her diplomatic relations with France in view of the traditional friendship between the two countries. It will be remembered that the British-French diplomatic relations have been severed."

From England, in English, July 20: "Hitler's speech caused disappointment. What surprised us was that Mr. Hitler entirely disregarded the recent strong speech of Mr. Roosevelt."

From Germany, in English, July 21: "A group of Britishers are evidently in deadly fear that Max Schmeling, former boxing champion, may descend upon them out of the clear sky and deliver the final blow to John Bull. There is no other explanation of the anxiety about the whereabouts of the former champion, shown by British broadcasting stations."

From Germany, in English, July 21: "Germany does not

believe Churchill's statement that 'London will be defended street by street.' Paris also was to be defended 'street by street.' until the Germans were at the city's gates. London's defense will be similar."

From England, in French, July 23: "The Dutch people are growing more antagonistic toward the Germans. Last night the German-controlled Dutch radio had to make special broadcasts to the Dutch people asking them not to be so hostile toward the Germans."

From England, in English, July 25: "This year's German crops have suffered greatly. The Colorado beetle, which was brought into Germany from France in railroad cars, has done considerable damage in Germany. The hoof and mouth sickness is ravaging cattle throughout the Reich."

From Germany, in English, July 27: "Secretary Morgenthau stopped a tanker in Texas from going to Spain. Why? Because it was called *The Aryan* and Morgenthau could not possibly let an Aryan go. Had the ship been called *The Non-Aryan*, Morgenthau would not have objected."

From England, in English, July 28: "While everybody is speaking about Germany's preparations on the other side of the Channel, do they think that we are playing cricket over here?"

From France, via the German-controlled radio, in German, July 28: "England has ridiculed Germany for preferring cannon to butter, but today she realizes that cannon and butter can't always go together. Her people, therefore, must today eat dry bread, and she is short of cannon at that. Germany has now enough cannon, and also enough butter to spread on her bread."

From Germany, in German, July 28: "This is a special program for German sailors, wherever they may be. The motto of this broadcast is, 'Cling to the fatherland.' We appeal to German sailors not to forget the Fatherland. And now we will listen to different members of families in Germany calling through the air to their friends on German boats at sea. Here is Fritz Keller, calling Norman Weber on the SS *Leipzig*

and sending best regards. Later we shall send messages to German sailors in the U.S.A., Argentina, Africa, and to men in German submarines on patrol."

From Germany, in English, August 2: "Britain's war policy is idiotic. After the retreat from Belgium, Britain had to do something to save her face. Therefore, she attacked the unprepared French fleet, thinking that it would be easier to kill Frenchmen than Germans. . . . Suicide academies are the British home guard and various auxiliary services. What chance have these people against those who successfully attacked the French Maginot Line? Two shilling home-made bombs are to be used against German dive Stukas. It is clear that England will not defend herself any better than she defended her allies."

From France, in German, over the German-controlled radio, August 4: "The Alsatians now have but one wish, and that is to forget that they ever were under French rule."

From London, in English, August 5: "Another example of the Goebbel's propaganda has been revealed by a Danish citizen now in London. This man went to see a film in Denmark, supposedly describing the tremendous ovation and reception given the German soldiers in Denmark. In this film he noticed, among others, the picture of his wife who was cheering the marching German soldiers and waving her umbrella madly. He was very much surprised at this action taken by his wife and then went home and asked her about it. She told him that she had not even been out of the house on that particular day, so the following day they both went to see the film together. His wife then admitted that it was her picture, but recognized the hat she was wearing in the picture as one she had not worn for two years. She then remembered that she had worn it on the occasion of the King of Denmark's birthday in 1937."

And so it goes. For the Propaganda Front is one of the main theaters of war.

William Hillman, *Collier's* war correspondent and one of

our London broadcasters, reports that in England a jury of eminent psychiatrists regularly places under the microscope of psychology all German propaganda plucked out of the air. Just as munitions experts examine in laboratories fragments of shells and bombs dropped by the enemy so are the foe's words picked up and analyzed.

These Freudian dissectors, seeking the true chemistry of Nazi words, believe that the key to Hitler is the line from *Mein Kampf* in which the German Chancellor says: "In war words are acts."

Certain successes are claimed—privately, as the British Government has been quiet about the activities of its propaganda analysts—for these diagnosticians of the spoken word. It is alleged that they have been able to fathom Hitler's real intentions as to invasion and other questions by studying the output of his verbal blitzkriegers.

Operating on the theory that more frequently than not words are used by the foe to conceal rather than to reveal intentions these British psychoanalysts work away far, far into the night in their word-lab at medical science's newest form of vivisection,—the cutting up of sentences to see what makes 'em tick.

There is no evidence of similar German analysis of British propaganda. The Germans are contemptuous of the British efforts in a field in which they consider themselves supreme. They are confident that their propaganda army has shown up the British in the eyes of the world and that they are winning the war of words.

XVI

Blow by Blow

MY FORMER boss, John Royal, engineered one of the biggest sports deals in recent years when he landed the exclusive rights to all the fights staged by Mike Jacobs, the country's outstanding fight promoter since the death of Tex Rickard.

Mike is one of the most unusual characters I have met in connection with my activities in the radio business.

After Royal completed the deal with Jacobs he turned Mike over to me. I see a good deal of the promoter, as part of my job is to handle the individual contracts for the different Jacobs fights that we broadcast, and to be general liaison officer between Mike's office and NBC.

One day I dropped on Mike's desk a contract for the broadcasting rights for one of the Joe Louis fights. Offhand, I don't recall which one.

Mike pointed to the contract and said, "Is it O.K.?" That query was Mike's way of asking whether the different stipulations he had made had been met.

"Yes," I replied. "It's O.K." Whereupon Mike signed the contract without reading it.

I told Mike that I should prefer to have him read the document. Laconically he replied, "You said it's O.K., didn't you?" handed me my copy and put his in the top drawer of his desk.

Mike has since handled several other contracts in the same way. We have never had any trouble, so I guess it's a good system.

I have had some amusing times helping Mike fix the dates of big fights. One day we were trying to fix the date of a heavy-weight championship fight at the Yankee Stadium. Mike

named a tentative date and I told him that would not do, as there was no time available on either NBC network.

Mike said, "All right, let's see what we can get."

Then he asked his secretary to call the Stadium so that he could find out what open dates there were about three months hence.

Mike discussed the matter in detail over the telephone and jotted down three or four dates that sounded like possibilities. Then he opened a drawer of his desk and pulled out a Jewish Almanac. He said he never finally fixed the date of a fight without first consulting this almanac.

"I must be careful in scheduling a fight in New York," said Mike, "not to pick a date that would conflict with a Jewish holiday."

Having satisfied himself on this point, Mike turned to another section of the almanac and said, "Now I have got to get the lowdown on the weather."

The almanac looked as if it might have been five or six years old. On the other hand, Mike may use his almanacs so roughly that they get old before their time. I would hardly call even a new almanac an accurate source of weather information, so it doesn't make much difference whether Mike consulted a vintage almanac that day or not.

I mention the incident merely to give you a picture of how Mike's mind works.

He seemed a bit surprised that I should question the reliability of his almanac as a weather prognosticator. "If you want to know about weather," said Mike, "get a good Jewish Almanac. There was a fellow in here trying to tell me that the Farmer's Almanac is better, but I will stick with the Jewish Almanac."

The date of a big fight can be a big factor in its success or failure. Mike never fixes upon a date for a fight without consulting the little almanac in his desk. If you kid him about it, he good-naturedly kids you back. If he has a certain date in mind, and the almanac predicts good weather for that night, he will try to stage the fight that night, unless radio time is un-

available. So you can see what a potent force in the fight world Mike's little Jewish Almanac is.

A few days before Joe Louis fought Max Baer in New York, Joe announced that immediately after the fight he would marry Miss Marva Trotter, a Chicago stenographer.

In the course of the broadcast that followed Joe's defeat of Max, we mentioned the marriage that was about to take place and announced that Mr. and Mrs. Louis planned to live in Detroit.

That night and the next day we received a number of telegrams from the South giving us hell for referring to Joe and his bride as "Mr. and Mrs."

Billy Conn had just defeated Melio Bettina for the light heavyweight championship. After the fight, which took place at Madison Square Garden in New York, both fighters said a few words over the radio.

A telephone had been rigged up in Conn's dressing-room. Billy was under the shower when the telephone rang. Then someone yelled, "It's a long distance call for Billy—from Pittsburgh, I guess."

"I guess it's from your mother, Billy," someone else said.

Drying himself with a towel, the light heavyweight champion dashed to the telephone. He had fought a great fight and had won. Everyone in the dressing-room—and it was pretty crowded—suddenly was reminded that Billy looked pretty battered and that there must be some pretty sore places on his face and body.

If Conn was in any discomfort he certainly didn't show it. There was only one thing on his mind, and what that was became apparent in the first words that he said to his mother. "How did I sound, Ma?"

Conn fired the same question at several of his visitors in the dressing-room. He was fascinated with radio and momentarily the fact that he had addressed the radio audience

seemed more important than his having won an important fight.

The Louis-Baer fight, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, yielded another good story.

Sponsors of previous big fights had expressed dissatisfaction with the descriptions of the battles. Several sports announcers were asked to take a crack at qualifying for the round-by-round story of the Louis-Baer scrap.

Among those invited to try for the assignment was Clem McCarthy, whose descriptions of horse races won him fame as a sports announcer. Each candidate was asked to prepare an imaginary script and to be ready to give an audition a few days hence.

At two o'clock one morning Clem finished writing the script which, together with his voice and delivery, he counted upon to land him the job. He tried it out on his wife, who predicted it would do the trick. But he was not satisfied. He said to her, "I must get someone else to hear this,—someone who knows the fight game."

And out they went, hunting for someone to listen to Clem's broadcast of the fight that he had visioned.

They finally wound up in Jack Dempsey's restaurant. A few people were there, including Jack himself.

The McCarthys pounced upon Jack and dragged him to a table. Clem pulled out his script and explained to the half-protesting, puzzled Dempsey what it was all about.

Dempsey was now keenly interested. "Sure," he said, "try it out on me. I used to be a fighter once myself."

Dempsey okayed the script and the delivery that was to earn Clem McCarthy the right to broadcast the Louis-Baer fight.

"Swell work," said Jack. "But there is one thing you have got to watch. In your description you said something about a foul punch. You said flatly 'it's a foul.' You can't do that. The smart way to handle a situation like that in a fight is to say, 'It looks like a foul.' If you say it's a foul and the referee

doesn't agree with you, you put him on the spot. And when you put the referee on the spot, you put yourself on the spot."

Clem won the assignment hands down. On the day of the fight, Merlin H. Aylesworth, then President of the National Broadcasting Company, sent for McCarthy. Aylesworth, always a red-hot fight fan, was eager to see McCarthy do a good job, so he gave him some friendly advice. He pointed out that no one could talk fast enough to cover every detail when the fight was at its height and there was a furious exchange of blows. He urged Clem to concentrate on the high spots. He concluded his advice by saying, "Remember, it's just another Kentucky Derby."

McCarthy admits that he was nervous that night as the hour of the fight approached.

A few seats away sat Damon Runyon, one of the greatest of all sports writers, who for years had covered all the big fights.

Something McCarthy said made it obvious to Runyon that Clem was worried about his broadcast. Runyon leaned over to say something to him. Clem listened eagerly, for here was someone who knew all the answers. "Listen, fellah, don't overreach yourself. No one can catch all the details. Concentrate on the high spots. Remember, this is just another Kentucky Derby."

For a moment, the coincidence was almost too much for McCarthy. But two important persons had remembered his Kentucky Derby broadcasts, and that was a thrill,—the thrill which he claims made him forget his nervousness.

McCarthy did a swell job.

Joe Louis is a great fighter, but I wish he were a little less efficient.

I have always thought that one of the best radio buys is the sponsorship of a heavyweight championship fight. Dependable research shows that there is always a tremendous audience.

When Mike Jacobs matched Joe Louis and John Henry Lewis, Buick "bought the show."

Joe Louis knocked out his near-namesake in the first round.

A journalistic fifth columnist in an intimate description of the ringside scene recounted how as the fight broke up suddenly the Buick man told how the commercial announcer looked sadly at his six pages of unspoken commercials.

The story then went on to say, "Schechter of NBC laughed and said, with no great concern, 'That's two one-round fights Buick has bought in a row.'"

No great concern? Some people don't recognize perspiration even when it oozes out of a man's pores by the gallon.

Efficiency is a great thing, but sometimes a man can have too much of it for comfort. Why does Joe Louis have to be so letter-perfect?

On the eve of the second Louis-Schmeling fight we put on one of the most spectacular sports broadcasts in the history of radio. We brought to the microphone in a single program a parade of former heavyweight champions—Jim Jeffries, Tommy Burns, Jack Johnson, Jess Willard, Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Jack Sharkey and Max Baer—in a series of interviews. Each man discussed the coming title bout, ventured a prediction as to the winner, and, digging into pugilistic history, discussed the dramatic highlights of his own career.

We wound up the program by interviewing the men who were about to meet in the ring for the heavyweight title,—Champion Joe Louis and former Champion Max Schmeling.

Jim Jeffries told how, somewhere around the turn of the century, a fight in which he participated started the country singing "Up Again, Down Again Finnegan," which parodied a well-known song.

"I was scheduled to meet a guy named Finnegan in Detroit," said Jim. "I was used to wearing eight-ounce gloves. Finnegan used four-ounce gloves and insisted that I use the four-ouncers, too. He said the fight was off if I didn't."

"So I said, 'All right, Finnegan, I'll wear the four-ouncers but you'll suffer for this.'

"I had to split those gloves in a few places to get 'em on my hands.

"But once I had 'em on I started splitting Finnegan, too. He was split in several places when the fight was over.

"But he was game. I'd knock him down but he kept getting up. This up-and-down business started in the very first round. A thing like that can get monotonous. So I decided to end the fight early. Even though it was a short fight, Finnegan was on his bottom and on his feet alternately about a dozen times and that started the crowd singing 'Up Again, Down Again Finnegan.' "

One of the highlights of the broadcast was the way Jim put us in our collective place when we asked him to predict the winner of the Louis-Schmeling fight. The only one of the ex-champs unwilling to try to pick the winner, he reminded us that he was in California, "too far from the scene of action." He would have to look over the contestants and study their form before he could afford to hazard a guess. It was all right for the ex-champs who had done this to attempt to name the winner.

He wound up by asking, "What right have I got to make any prediction?" Under the circumstances he thought our asking him to name the winner was "foolish."

Jeffries' delivery was so forthright and his criticism so naturally and unpeevishly offered that it helped "build" the broadcast.

Two of the ex-champions proved themselves good business men. Jack Sharkey agreed to broadcast if we would allow him to mention his restaurant in Boston, and Jack Johnson if he could put in a good word for a gadget he was selling,—a special nursing-bottle thermometer by means of which the mothers of America would be able to solve one of the oldest problems in connection with rearing children, the business of seeing that bottle-fed babies got their milk at the right temperature. Of course, we allowed Johnson to plug his boon

to the mothers of America after he had finished discussing the coming big fight and highlights of his own career. Poor Jack, by the way, didn't increase his popularity with his own people by picking Schmeling to win. "Schmeling," he said, "knows how to think. He knows how to judge distance, how to time punches."

Joe Louis won in the first round.

Most of the others picked Joe Louis. Gene Tunney came the closest to calling the turn. He said, "If Louis gets the jump at the beginning of the fight, he'll win quickly." That's exactly what happened.

When Joe Louis and Max Schmeling stepped into the ring for that second fight, the most extensive coverage of any boxing match in the history of radio brought the bout to countless millions of listeners. The broadcast was carried throughout the United States over 146 stations of the combined NBC-Blue and NBC-Red Networks, and over five of America's most powerful short-wave stations to virtually every corner of the world. The Crossley rating broke all previous records for a single broadcast,—which is another way of saying this was probably the biggest radio audience up to that time.

Little did Joe Louis realize how much confusion he was causing by making short work of Schmeling. A number of newspapermen picked Schmeling to repeat his first triumph; a big percentage of those who picked Louis predicted the fight would last at least ten rounds.

A Louis victory in the first round was so unexpected that it resulted in a series of chaotic happenings that has never been equalled at or near the ringside.

A German announcer named Helmus was doing the short-wave broadcast to Germany. Helmus, normally a man of poise, lost his head that night, and momentarily forgetting he was on the air, cried in hysterical German when Louis sent Schmeling crashing to the canvas, "Get up, Maxie! No, Max! Get up, Max! It can't be true!"

General Electric's short-wave station at Schenectady

picked up the fight for rebroadcast to foreign lands but instead of using the NBC opening as it originated at the ringside, they decided to do an elaborate institutional opening on the glories of Schenectady and the G-E products which are sold internationally. Plugging in from Schenectady their man talked and talked about G-E, finally saying, "And now we take you to the ringside at Yankee Stadium." When they reached the ringside the fight was over. We immediately re-broadcast a recording of the fight from our New York Studios so that their short-wave listeners would know what had happened.

There were some laughs at our expense, too. Our crews assigned to handling the pick-ups from the dressing-rooms after the fight left their posts to watch the contest "for a few rounds." They were caught in the jam of departing spectators and by the time they got back to the dressing-rooms the doors were locked and they couldn't get in. All kinds of nuts try to crash these dressing-rooms after a big fight and our frantic crews were mistaken for gate-crashers and denied admittance.

This made it necessary for me to turn the mike back to the studio for a musical fill-in. The orchestra rounded out the night's madness by playing, with goofy appropriateness immediately after the account of how Louis had won, a number called *You Went to My Head*.

One of the best announcers in the business was assigned to read the commercials for Buick which had "bought" the fight. In the excitement over the bout's sudden termination the announcer re-read his first commercial, completely forgetting his second one, which carried a message the sponsor considered vitally important.

Buick raised hell and got a rebate. The announcer was so upset he resigned and left the country. He wound up covering a much bigger fight, without commercials—the War.

Henry Armstrong got the decision in his fight in Madison Square Garden with Lou Ambers during the summer of 1938. Henry, then the holder of three boxing titles, was a happy battler and so was his manager Eddie Mead.

And then—the day after the fight—Eddie got several long-distance phone calls from excitable friends in California. The calls informed Eddie that Clem McCarthy, who had broadcast the round-by-round description of the fight for us, had favored Ambers and had in general been unfair to Armstrong.

Mead complained to Mike Jacobs, promoter of the fight, and told Mike he would demand a retraction over the air. The story got into the newspapers and there was quite a stir about the alleged discrimination against the clever colored boxer.

Mike Jacobs got in touch with me and suggested that I arrange for a play-back of the disc recording we always make of a show of this kind.

“What was it Al Smith used to say?” said Mike. “Let’s look at the record, or listen to the record, or something like that.”

“All right, Mike,” I said, “let’s listen to the record.”

So Mike Jacobs, Clem McCarthy, Eddie Mead, and a jury of New York sports writers and prize-ring characters foregathered at NBC to decide whether Clem McCarthy had been unfair to Henry Armstrong. The parade to the studio assigned to this play-back was something to behold, with two tough-looking coatless gents bringing up the rear.

When Mead heard the play-back he was profuse in his apologies to McCarthy. Then he walked over to where Mike Jacobs sat to apologize to the promoter for having stirred up this controversy as to whether or not his champ had been fairly treated on the air.

Mead had to shake Mike before he could tell him how sorry he felt. He was fast asleep in his chair!

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” said Mike. “I was dreaming I had just matched Joe Louis to fight Tunney or Dempsey. Or was it John L. Sullivan? That’s the trouble with dreams. It’s hard to remember ’em. Anyhow, it was the first billion-dollar gate in history. Seats were selling at a thousand bucks apiece.”

“I’m sorry I squawked Mike,” said Eddie. “Clem treated my boy okay. We just heard it off records. Sorry you missed it, Mike.”

"I'd have missed a good dream," said Mike, "if I'd stayed awake. Glad everything is jake."

The jury of sports writers agreed with Mead. They found nothing unfair in Clem McCarthy's broadcast. They criticized him on only one count,—for referring to the Black Plague (Henry Armstrong) as the Brown Bomber (Joe Louis).

After the meeting broke up Mike Jacobs explained to me the wisdom of sleeping through a session of this kind. "I always fall asleep during meetings that might result in trouble," said Mike, wisely nodding his head. "Either the thing blows over or I get up refreshed and ready to take on anybody in a fifteen-round word battle for the title."

The first Louis-Galento fight was sponsored by the Schick Razor Company. We had arranged to have a microphone installed in both dressing-rooms so that after the fight each of the contestants could say a few words about his victory or defeat.

As part of his "commercial" the sponsor had arranged to present both Louis and Galento with a Schick razor.

It is customary to visit the loser's dressing-room first and to save the visit to the winner's room as the climax. There was a brief interview with Galento, and then the radio audience heard this: "Well, thanks very much, Tony Galento. And here is your Schick razor."

Then the announcer said:

"And now we take you to Joe Louis' dressing-room."

It was easier to say that than to do it. A big mob was milling around in the champion's quarters. Someone had evidently stepped on the microphone cord and put it out of commission. Anyhow, we couldn't carry out our promise to take the radio audience to Joe Louis' dressing-room. Regretfully we were compelled to sign off without giving Joe Louis a chance to say a few words to the millions who were listening to the broadcast.

The next day there was hell to pay. Letters, telegrams and telephone calls all wanted an answer to the same questions:

Why had we discriminated against Joe Louis? Why had we given the loser a razor when we had failed to give one to the winner?

Eventually we explained the matter to everyone's satisfaction. The person who seemed the least disturbed was Joe Louis, who couldn't figure out why folks were fussing so much over a trifle.

Sam Taub, veteran NBC fight announcer, was sitting around telling how certain unexpected things that happen at the ringside "make a guy live a lifetime in a minute or less."

One of Sam's favorite stories has to do with two likable Italian lads who were fighting at the Hippodrome in New York. One of them was a jaunty, wisecracking kid who prided himself on the possession of what was evidently regarded by his admirers as an uproarious sense of humor. He kidded members of his family and friends at the ringside, and judging by their response they loved it. He also joshed his manager and practically everyone within earshot. To make it as nearly unanimous as possible, he even spoofed the referee, reversing the normal process by giving the referee *his* instructions.

When the fight was over the jaunty one got the decision. In fact, he was jauntier than ever as Sam Taub asked him to make one of those half-minute "Hello, Mom, glad I won" talks into the microphone.

The jaunty one was an individualist, and, besides, Mom was probably at the ringside, making it unnecessary to greet her over the air. So, instead, this is what he said: "I guess the Jews had a lot of fun tonight watching two Wops murder each other."

Taub said all he could do was say "Ouch!" with more feeling than had ever before been put into the word, and pray for the ground to open up in proverbial fashion so that he, his microphone and the jaunty one might suddenly be swallowed up.

Sam had even a worse moment when a beaten fighter was asked to say a few words after the referee had stopped the fight. "The referee shouldn't have stopped it!" he blurted.

"He gave me a lousy deal, the dirty—— —— —— ——!"

The mike was hurriedly yanked away from the indignant fighter but the radio audience heard the first few oaths.

Ringside indiscretions are not confined to the boxers, Taub points out. Sam tells a good story about an announcer who had a "piece" of a fighter who was taking a terrible beating. The announcer was at the ringside describing the fight. Forgetting himself as his boy kissed the canvas for the third or fourth time, the announcer expressed his disappointment in a phrase that is not exactly good radio usage. A few seconds later, realizing what he had done, he interrupted his account of the fight to say, "An uncouth person just passed behind me. I hope none of his remarks got into the microphone."

A number of radio journalists have pointed out that boners lend color to radio.

In line with this thought it is interesting to note these headlines in our scrapbooks:

RADIO FIGHT BLUNDERS
PUT LIFE IN NETWORKS
YUSSEL'S "WE WUZ ROBBED!"
ALREADY RADIO CLASSIC

The second of those headlines refers to a history-making protest registered by the late Joe (Yussel) Jacobs, for years Max Schmeling's manager. Max had just lost the title to Jack Sharkey on a decision, the first time in pugilistic history that the heavyweight title had changed hands in this fashion. Joe Jacobs, enraged by the decision, jumped in the ring, berated the referee, and screamed for all to hear that this was the greatest outrage in boxing history.

When a radio announcer approached the disheartened Schmeling with a microphone and asked him if he'd like to say something, Joe Jacobs saw an opportunity to tell his story to millions of people in a few well chosen words. Stepping up to the microphone Joe said, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Joe Jacobs speaking, Max Schmeling's manager. We wuz robbed here tonight!"

XVII

The Fourth Chime

RESOURCEFULNESS and planning have been responsible for most of the important NBC beats, but not even the staunchest partisans of our News Department would have the hardihood to say that without the fortuitous co-operation of Lady Luck we would have had our electrifying "exclusive" on the *Hindenburg* disaster. At that time, because the *Hindenburg's* regular schedule had ceased to be news, no radio news department was bothering to cover her arrival.

Herbert Morrison, announcer for WLS of Chicago, an NBC affiliate, was at Lakehurst to make a recording of the arrival of the dirigible for the sound-effects and electrical transcription "library." He was doing a routine job of telling how the great silver ship looked as he spotted her in the rain and she approached and he became more and more conscious of her size—when, all of a sudden, as she neared her moorings, the explosion came. His complete description of the entire scene was automatically transcribed by the recording apparatus.

Beginning with a calm description of the grace and beauty of the *Hindenburg* as she settled down to earth, the voice of Morrison continued:

"She is practically standing still now. The ropes have been dropped and they have been taken hold of by a number of men on the field. It is starting to rain again. The rain has slacked up a little bit. The back motors of the ship are holding her just enough to keep her. . . . She burst into flame!

"Get out of the way! Get this, Charley. Get out of the way, please! She is bursting into flames! This is terrible! This is one of the worst catastrophes in the world. The flames are

shooting five hundred feet up into the sky. It is a terrific crash, ladies and gentlemen. It is in smoke and flames now. Oh, the humanity! Those passengers! I can't talk, ladies and gentlemen. Honest, it is a mass of smoking wreckage. Lady, I am sorry. Honestly, I can hardly—. I am going to step inside where I cannot see it. Charley, that is terrible. Listen, folks, I am going to have to stop for a minute because I have lost my voice."

Shocked by the horror of the tragedy, yet sustained by his announcer's habit of recording what he saw, Morrison went on:

"Coming back again, I have sort of recovered from the terrific explosion and the terrific crash that occurred just before it was pulled down to the mooring mast. I don't know how many of the ground crew were under it when it fell. There is not a possible chance for anyone to be saved.

"The relatives of the people who were here ready to welcome their loved ones as they came off the ship are broken up. They are carrying them, to give them first aid and to restore them. Some of them have fainted. The people are rushing down to the burning ship with fire extinguishers to see if they can extinguish any of the blaze. The blaze is terrific, because of the terrible amount of hydrogen gas in it."

The Chicago announcer kept pouring his running account of the disaster into the microphone, even to brief interviews with the first of the survivors. In his explanation of a sudden break in the recording just as he announced that the ship had burst into flame, Morrison said that the terrific blast of the explosion had knocked the tone arm of the recording instrument clear off the disc and that Charlie—Charles Nelson, the Chicago radio engineer who operated the machine—replaced it almost instantly.

That evening—May 7, 1937—NBC's rigid network rule against broadcasting recorded programs was broken for the first time in the history of the company so that the radio audience could hear one of the most dramatic eye-witness broadcasts ever presented, a "wax show" that was in process of being recorded at the exact second that the famous "Zep" blew up.

Before we knew anything about the tremendously important from-the-scene program that Morrison was recording we were on the air with the first news of the disaster heard by radio listeners in the United States and Germany. Whether we got the flash first I don't know, but we broke it first. Only a few minutes after the tragedy—at 7:45 P.M., EDST—NBC flashed a press radio bulletin over both the Blue and Red networks.

Meanwhile NBC crews were on their way to the scene, telephone lines were being installed and short-wave equipment was on the way to Lakehurst. One crew left KYW, NBC station at Philadelphia, while another, aboard Mobile Unit No. 1, set out from Radio City. Announcers took off by airplane.

Mobile Unit No. 1, and the staff cars that accompanied it, reached Lakehurst in two hours and forty minutes. Jack Hartley of our news staff who headed this unit, was convincing enough about the importance of his assignment to be able to secure a motorcycle escort provided by the New Jersey State Police.

Here is Jack Hartley's own account of this trip to Lakehurst, which radio professionals like to cite as an example of resourcefulness under difficult circumstances:

"We rolled along behind the motorcycle cops at a lively clip. We must have been going pretty fast, because one of the motorcycles got so hot that the officer who was riding it had to stop and drop out.

"We lost some time when we caught up with an ambulance that was stranded because of a flat tire. We helped the driver remove the damaged tire and replace it with a new one, and then we sped for Lakehurst right behind the ambulance until we reached a point about two miles from our destination where State Troopers barred the road.

"I did my best to explain that arrangements had been made through Inspector King of the New Jersey State Police to let us through, but apparently these instructions had not reached the Troopers, who would let us go no further. I pleaded with the Troopers to let our party proceed, but they had strict or-

ders to let no cars of any kind or description go beyond this point.

"My press card enabled me to talk my way past the point barred by the cops, but I was told I would have to make it on foot. It was easily the fastest two miles I ever made on foot in my life. I started out by walking feverishly and wound up trotting and running the rest of the distance. I reached the gate of Lakehurst Reservation only to be told that I could get no farther.

"I begged the naval officer in charge, a junior lieutenant, for permission to get our party in. I told him that our crew was two miles down the road and that we had a tremendously important assignment on which we could not fail.

"He was adamant. He said that his orders were to let nobody in, and he stuck to his story.

"I had lots of company in my efforts to crash through. A small army of newspapermen, newsreel men, newspaper photographers, and others, were trying to do the same thing.

"I was badly stumped. I started away from the gate and down the road in the direction whence I had come. Frankly, I didn't know what the hell to do.

"I had not walked very far when I saw a Government truck coming toward me. In it were marines. I signaled to them and got them to stop. Quickly I explained my predicament and told them what it would mean to me to get inside the Reservation.

"The marines were good sports. They did not like the idea of breaking the rules, but I convinced them that the instructions to the State Troopers had missed fire and that I really had permission to get to the scene of the disaster, which was their own destination, too.

"While, of course, this was the fact, it did not give them the authority to get me through the lines. They finally agreed to take a chance and see if they could get me through. One of them suggested that I crawl under a heavy tarpaulin on the truck and see if I could escape notice that way. If I got past

the gate, I would be safe. I hopped aboard the truck, got under the tarpaulin, and we got going.

Soon I was back to the point I had been unable to pass a little while before, although those in charge of the gate did not know that they again had the pleasure of my company.

“The guards were checking the truck, and it looked as if everything would be all right, when the junior lieutenant who had barred my way the first time—(I recognized his voice)—said, ‘Just a minute. See what is under that tarpaulin.’

“Well, they soon saw what was under the tarpaulin, and I came out in record time.

“I was beginning to feel discouraged, but I had no intention of giving up. I started down the road again in the direction of the roadside tavern, when I ran into a young sailor. It developed that he was having a night off and he was trying to figure out where he could have the most fun. I got busy selling him the idea that he could have a better time if he had ten dollars more to spend. I told him he could earn this ten-spot without doing much work. He wanted to know what he would have to do.

“I gave him one of my cards and asked him to take it to Commander Rosendahl or Lieutenant Watson. ‘Tell either of them,’ I said, ‘that I am stalled two miles from the field; that the New Jersey State Police will not allow me to go any farther, and that I have simply got to get in. Come back here and tell me that you have delivered the message, and the ten-dollar bill is yours.’

“His uniform was the only pass the gob needed. Not many minutes elapsed before the sailor emerged with Lieutenant George Watson, a favorite of the press, who was as helpful as he could be. He got his car, asked me to hop in, and in no time at all I was back at the roadside grill where the NBC cavalcade had grown considerably since I had left.

“There were about a dozen of us in the original party that left with Mobile Unit No. 1. Shortly before we started, we broadcast an emergency signal to all those attached to the News and Special Events Department in the New York Office.

This was done by means of 'the fourth chime.' (Our regular program sign-off signal consists of three chimes. In those days when a fourth chime was added, it meant that members of our Department who were listening in, also engineers and a few other specialists, were required to phone the office for instructions. Both WJZ and WEAF, the Blue and Red network stations in New York, sounded the emergency signal.)

"By the time Lieutenant Watson and I returned to the point where private vehicular travel was barred, a total of forty-three members of the New York NBC office—members of the News Department, announcers, commentators, engineers, etc.—had assembled near the little roadside grill. I don't recall how many cars there were, but the incident furnished impressive proof that our people listened for and responded to that confidential 'fourth chime.'

"Lieutenant Watson snapped out businesslike instructions to our group. He suggested that we line up all the NBC cars, with the Mobile Unit bringing up the rear, and then suggested that we drive in close formation so that as we started off no ambitious car could sneak in and make itself a part of the NBC group.

"This time the junior lieutenant who had twice barred my passage through the gate had to let me by. His face took on an expression of surprise, which soon became one of complete astonishment, as he observed the motor train that followed me in.

"I don't mind admitting that I gave the Bronx cheer to the newspapermen, still stuck at the gate, who had given me a similar salute when I had tried to crash through a little earlier.

"One of them yelled, 'Whom did you bribe?' And he seemed a little puzzled when I replied, 'A sailor.' Another one yelled 'Vested interests,' and added a threat about writing an exposé of the sinister 'pull' of radio. As I recalled my two miles on foot I decided I had not made very good use of our 'influence.'

"Once we were inside the grounds we discovered that tele-

phones were at a premium. The Navy had commandeered all but a few of the lines. Those that weren't being used by the Navy had been seized by newspapermen who were on the scene when the *Hindenburg* arrived. They were there to cover the arrival of celebrities on the dirigible, and their role was comparable to that of ship news reporters. (The reporters and others outside the gate had made their appearance after the catastrophe.)

"The newspapermen gave me the bum's rush when I tried to grab one of the telephones. I was up against it, especially as we had been unsuccessful in contacting New York when directly after our arrival on the scene we set up a transmitter and tried to reach the office.

"Then I remembered that when I had covered the first arrival of the *Hindenburg* in the United States there was a heavier-than-air hangar on the field that had a coin-box in it. In fact, we had once been compelled to originate a broadcast from that telephone booth.

"I got back into my car and drove to this hangar. Sure enough there was the telephone booth. Nobody was in it. I said to Tommy McFadden (of our news staff), 'Your job is to keep that booth tied up. Start 'phoning the office whenever anyone tries to dislodge you. I will dig up all the coins you need.' We used that telephone booth all night. There was no battle for its possession for apparently no one else seemed to be aware of its existence.

"Once we were in touch with the New York office and gave them the picture, we were able to get started on an organized plan for broadcasting from the scene of the disaster.

"Our engineers placed a pack transmitter close to the wreckage, and we broadcast from that pack transmitter to the roof of the lighter-than-air hangar. There a receiver caught the pack transmitter and we relayed the signals through another transmitter to the mobile unit. The mobile unit, which we stationed at a point on the Reservation about a mile away, received it there and relayed it again by another transmitter to

the telephone company's station at Forked River. That was how we got the signals through to New York.

"The only way we could tell that our broadcast was getting through to New York properly was to listen to it come back over one of the network stations on a broadcast receiver which we had with us."

About three hours after we broadcast the first flash of the tragedy we were on the air with a series of broadcasts covering every phase of one of the biggest stories of modern times. As a matter of public service, NBC held both networks open for more than two hours beyond the normal closing time of 1:00 A.M. EDT, so listeners could follow the latest news of the disaster. More than fifty bulletins from the Press Radio Bureau giving the latest figures on the number of survivors and injured, and their identity, and all developments of the story, were broadcast.

Among other first-hand reports NBC presented a broadcast of newspapermen, photographers, aviation officers, and others who had seen the famous Zep go up in flame and smoke. These accounts were brought to a spectacular climax by the dramatic description of Announcer Morrison in the electrical transcription, which has since been used by psychologists as a study of human reaction to sudden calamity.

The German authorities pleaded with us to get hold of F. W. von Meister, Vice-President of the American Zeppelin Transport Company stationed at Lakehurst. We finally located him in the quarters of the non-commissioned officers, where he had a room. We picked him up right in his room with shaving soap on his face and with no clothes on except his pajama pants. Von Meister's voice was relayed through the four transmitters to Forked River, where it went by wire line to NBC in New York. From NBC in New York it went by wire line to RCA's transmitters at Rocky Point and was short-waved across the Atlantic to Berlin.

This is how Germany got a broadcast direct from the scene.

This broadcast was in German and was not carried in the United States.

Survivors at the Paul Kimball Hospital in Lakewood told the American radio audience their harrowing experiences, relating in detail just what happened to them as the giant airship seemed to break in half in mid-air less than 150 yards from her mooring mast.

Dr. Hans Luther, German Ambassador to the United States, broadcast over our networks as he left the hospital at Lakewood, expressing his appreciation of the efforts to help the victims. His remarks in English were broadcast throughout the United States and later repeated in German for rebroadcasting in Europe.

Dr. Hugo Eckener, designer and builder of the *Hindenburg*, was heard the following afternoon from Berlin in an exclusive NBC broadcast, and Commander Charles E. Rosendahl, U.S.N., in command of the naval air station at Lakewood, went on the air shortly afterwards.

It was a thorough coverage of one of the saddest events we have ever been called upon to report.

"There's a big hole in the bottom. . . . I don't know how long it will hold together. . . . I don't know what to expect. . . . Now she's going back down again. . . . We're coming down four hundred feet a minute." . . .

Those words, spoken on July 27, 1934, from the badly damaged stratosphere balloon *Explorer* as it headed earthward, are still remembered by those who have followed the development of radio news. One of the most dramatic broadcasts of the fourth-chime era was the program from the *Explorer*.

From the time the great bag took off near Rapid City, S.D., and ripped at an altitude of 60,000 feet, until the last balloonist parachuted to safety, the radio audience heard a breathtaking two-way conversation with the occupants of the gondola in a nationwide broadcast made possible by the fine co-oper-

ation we got from the National Geographic Society, which sponsored the flight, and the Army Air Corps.

From the War Department Building in Washington, chiefs of the Air Corps gave the strato-flyers advice and encouragement. Their voices flashed over NBC network wires to short-wave transmitters, which in turn shot them out into the air to be picked up in the stratosphere, where they echoed through the airtight metal ball in which three intrepid explorers were sealed,—Major William E. Kepner, commander, and Captain Albert W. Stevens and Captain Orvil A. Anderson, observers and general aides.

Special radio equipment was installed by fourteen co-operating stations at strategic points outside the cities in which they are located in order that messages from the balloon might be picked up with maximum strength and relayed to NBC networks in the event that the big bag drifted toward the station's particular area or landed near its city.

Every day during the five weeks of preparation for the flight the fourteen stations conducted tests with the NBC camp at the stratosphere bowl near Rapid City, S.D. Here equipment identical with that used in the balloon was set up under William Burke Miller, who directed the job, and George McElrath, our supervising engineer. The stations, through the tests, were able to adjust their receiving equipment so that messages from the strato-flyers could be brought in clearly and completely.

The bulky typewritten transcript of the playback of the permanent recording of the memorable broadcast of July 27, 1934, cannot be reproduced in its entirety. We were on the air almost continuously from three to 6:55 P.M. However, since none will dispute that this spectacular program has taken its place in radio news history, I feel that I ought to give the reader a liberal sample of what radio listeners heard that day. To round out the picture I have included a few of the conversations between NBC units while the broadcast was in progress,—conversations which, of course, did not go out on the broadcast band.

A description of what took place in a dramatic situation of this kind is never as effective as the drama itself, presented in the actual words of the participants, so I am appending excerpts from the broadcast itself:

(3:15 p.m.)

CAPTAIN STEVENS: The temperature outside is minus 69.9. The sky brightness is 1150 candles per square foot, while on the ground it is four or five hundred.

NBC, N.Y. Give your station.

CAPTAIN STEVENS: This is Station W 10 XCW . . . (clanging noise) . . . That was our appendix rope banging down on top of the gondola. . . . Hello, NBC. The balloon is torn in two places.

NBC, N.Y. (*addressing NBC, Chicago*): Did Major Kepner say he was starting down?

NBC, CHICAGO: He said he was starting down. They have got to start the descent because the balloon is torn.

(3:25 p.m.)

MAJOR KEPNER: We are going down.

NBC, N.Y. Captain Stevens and Major Kepner have reached the ceiling and they are starting down.

MAJOR KEPNER: Rapid City, were you calling me?

NBC, RAPID CITY: Yes, we want you to go on the air in just a moment, Major. . . . Calling Major Kepner in the stratosphere balloon. We want to put you on for a short broadcast.

MAJOR KEPNER: First we have got to get down a little lower.

NBC, CHICAGO: Major Kepner, Captain Stevens, Captain Anderson! Chicago calling. The National Broadcasting Company in Chicago calling Major Kepner, Captain Stevens and Captain Anderson. Can you hear us?

- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes, what is it?
- CHICAGO: Who is this?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: This is Captain Stevens.
- CHICAGO: Major Kepner!
- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes.
- CHICAGO: Are you on your way down?
- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes, I am. The balloon bag ripped underneath, below the catenary, but it will probably hold for awhile.
- CHICAGO: Is your descent very rapid?
- MAJOR KEPNER: No.
- CHICAGO: Your descent is slow?
- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes. We started down but now the thing is hanging here. We are trying to start down again.
- CHICAGO: What is your present altitude?
- MAJOR KEPNER: 57,000 feet.
- CHICAGO: Hello, Major. Have you anything for us? . . .
- MAJOR KEPNER (*forgetting he was on a coast-to-coast hook-up*): The Goddamn thing burst in the middle.
- CHICAGO: Major Kepner, we are on the air with both networks from Chicago through both stations, do you understand that? Can you hear me now? I am talking to you over KYW, WENR and WMAQ and the Blue network. Hello, Major. Contacting Major Kepner. Can you hear us now, Major? Can you spare us just a little time?
- MAJOR KEPNER: What for? I'm in trouble here. We are busy.
- CHICAGO: We just wondered what the trouble was, if we could get some word for our listeners

and the Army officers connected up in Washington who will be able to advise you better if they have all the dope. We understand the bag is ripped at the bottom and that you are rather stationary at about 57,000 feet. Is that right?

MAJOR KEPNER:

Yes.

CHICAGO:

Do you think you can repair it or are you going to have to come down?

MAJOR KEPNER:

We are going to have to come down. The bottom of the bag is ripped in several places, and underneath the catenary.

CHICAGO:

I see. Do you know your position?

MAJOR KEPNER:

The balloon is rather difficult to manage.

CHICAGO:

Do you expect any serious trouble?

MAJOR KEPNER:

What? I can't hear.

CHICAGO:

Do you expect any very serious trouble?

MAJOR KEPNER:

I don't know what to expect. . . . You will probably hear all about it afterwards.

CHICAGO:

Can you give us an approximate position, Major?

MAJOR KEPNER:

What? . . . We are dropping at about 400 feet a minute.

CHICAGO (*addressing radio audience*):

We are in contact with the balloon, but, as you know, Major Kepner and his two companions are in trouble and we think we ought not to bother them at this time. . . . They are going to have to come down. . . . We are going to stand by.

Their last position was twenty miles east of North Platte, Nebraska. The balloon is in trouble, that we know, and again we appeal to your sportsmanship, you people who are in the vicinity of twenty miles east of North Platte, Nebraska. If this balloon comes down, please don't do any souvenir

hunting. Frankly, what we mean by that is, don't rush this huge bag that cost many thousands of dollars and attempt to strip it just to satisfy your desire for souvenirs. This is a very important thing that these gentlemen are doing and it is unfortunate that they are having trouble. Please do your share by not touching any part of this balloon should it come down in the neighborhood of your home, and do all you can to assist these gentlemen who are trying to assist science.

We leave at this time and ask you to keep tuned in. We may be able to contact them again and hope their trouble is not as serious as it might seem.

- RAPID CITY: Major, I hope you will keep in touch with us as to your altitude as you come down. Your wife is somewhat worried.
- MAJOR KEPNER: Well, I think we are right near North Platte.
- RAPID CITY: What is your altitude now? Can you tell roughly?
- MAJOR KEPNER: Why, we are about 55,000 feet now, and the balloon doesn't want to come down.
- RAPID CITY: O.K., let it stand there then.
- MAJOR KEPNER: Well, we want to get it down if we can, because in this condition it is apt to do a lot of things.
- RAPID CITY: You are going to start down as soon as you can?
- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes.
- RAPID CITY
(to New York): Do you think we should send units to North Platte?
- NEW YORK: Yes, as quickly as you can get them there.

- RAPID CITY: Mobile Units No. 1 and 2, proceed to a point approximately twenty miles east of North Platte, Nebraska. . . .
- MAJOR KEPNER: Hello, Rapid City!
- RAPID CITY: Yes.
- MAJOR KEPNER: What's the ground wind at North Platte?
- RAPID CITY: West northwest, seven miles.
- MAJOR KEPNER: Seven miles?
- RAPID CITY: Yes.
- MAJOR KEPNER: Oke.
- RAPID CITY: If you want a later wind-report we'll get it to you.
- MAJOR KEPNER: Thanks.
- RAPID CITY: Major!
- MAJOR KEPNER: Hello.
- RAPID CITY: When you get to the point where you feel a little easier in your mind about the balloon coming down, New York is anxious to get a short broadcast that will set everyone at ease as to your welfare.
- MAJOR KEPNER: All right. O.K.
- RAPID CITY: Thanks.
- NEW YORK
(to Rapid City): Have you got someone who can announce calmly that they are attempting a landing somewhere in the vicinity of North Platte because at 55,000 feet it was discovered that there was a rip in the balloon?
- RAPID CITY: I think we can get the Major to do it himself soon. . . .
- NEW YORK: Get someone to do it who can do it quietly. When Major Kepner talked to you he talked calmly, but when he talked to Chicago he was irritated, and I don't blame him. Can you get the Goodyear man there

to explain what might have caused such a rip?

- CHICAGO: Hello, Major Kepner!
- RAPID CITY: Hello, Major Kepner!
- MAJOR KEPNER: Yes.
- RAPID CITY: Coming down O.K.?
- MAJOR KEPNER: I don't know. It is a pretty hard fight.
- RAPID CITY: You don't know for sure?
- MAJOR KEPNER: We are trying to.
- RAPID CITY: Major Kepner! Weather report. Ground wind northwest 6.
- NEW YORK: The next time you talk to Major Kepner find out if he is going to release the large parachute to help him to come down gently.
- RAPID CITY: I don't think they will do that while the balloon is still coming down slowly. That was a sort of last expedient. Hello, Captain Stevens!
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Stevens talking.
- RAPID CITY: Captain Stevens!
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Wait a minute.
- RAPID CITY: Captain Stevens!
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Yes.
- RAPID CITY: Everything going O.K.?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: How's that?
- RAPID CITY: Are you coming down O.K.?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Well, we don't know yet. We are bringing her down as easy as we can.
- RAPID CITY: What is the altitude now?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: About 53,000 feet. This thing happened to us at approximately 60,000 feet.

- RAPID CITY: You are coming down slowly, then. Your descent is very slow then?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Yes.
- RAPID CITY: O.K. The last position we have is twenty miles east of North Platte. Is there any change in the latest position?
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: We are down to 52,000 feet now.
- RAPID CITY: O.K., we got your altitude, 52,000.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: We are going down slowly now. The reading is now about 52,000. We have dropped 8000 feet.
- RAPID CITY: Captain Stevens, New York would like to get a brief explanation for the public of what has happened and be able to allay the fears which may have been created by your difficulties.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Captain Anderson is working as fast as he can. We still have the instruments running so we can get whatever we can out of the trip.
- RAPID CITY: You won't forget that the transmitter is still working and if you hold the antenna up when you get down there, if everything is in good order when you have landed we will still be able to hear you.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: If everything is what?
- RAPID CITY: If everything is in good order on landing you can hold the antenna out and we can still get you and get an O.K. that you are down safe.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: I just got the last of that.
- RAPID CITY: If everything is in good order on landing you can hold the antenna, the transmitter, off the ground and we can still hear you.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: I get you. I see. O.K. All right.

NEW YORK
(to *Rapid City*):

The next time you talk to him ask him also to keep us informed as closely as possible as to position, so we can reach them as quickly as possible once they are down.

RAPID CITY:

You have lots of time yet. Apparently they are coming down slowly.

(4:28 p.m.)

CAPTAIN STEVENS:

We are down to about 47,000 feet. The temperature is minus 58. . . .

(4:30 p.m.)

CAPTAIN STEVENS:

We are now down to 45,000 feet. We are still holding together, but don't know how long it will last.

RAPID CITY:

I understand the lower you get the less risk of anything ripping further.

CAPTAIN STEVENS:

What did you say? Hot biscuits for supper? I don't get you. What did you say?

RAPID CITY:

I said the lower you get, Captain, the less danger you have of anything ripping, isn't that true? . . .

(4:47 p.m.)

ANNOUNCER:

We are talking to you from the office of the Chief of Staff of the Army Air Corps. Seated beside us is Brigadier General Oscar Westover, Assistant Chief of the Army Air Corps, waiting to talk to either Captain Stevens or Major Kepner. We are calling the stratosphere balloon. This is Washington calling the stratosphere balloon. Major Kepner!

MAJOR KEPNER:

Hello; yes.

ANNOUNCER:

Are you there, sir? We have here General Westover in Washington who wishes to speak to you.

GENERAL WESTOVER:

Oh, Major Kepner. I purposely refrained from calling you sooner even though I knew you were having your difficulties. I

now understand that you have expressed a desire to talk to me and to make some report.

MAJOR KEPNER: Yes.

GENERAL WESTOVER: About your descent. Can you give me some pointer on how fast you are coming down and what your present altitude is?

MAJOR KEPNER: My present altitude is 37,000 feet, and we are having a great deal of difficulty coming down. For some reason or other this balloon doesn't act as other balloons have. The bottom of this balloon is pretty well torn out, and it is just a big hole in the bottom here. I don't know just how long she is going to hold together, but there is nothing to do about it but to come on down as low as we can and come down as easy as we can.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I think you are very wise to make your rate of descent very slowly and keep it under control.

MAJOR KEPNER: We are doing that as much as we can. It is pretty hard to figure out how to control it.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I understand.

MAJOR KEPNER: It seems to hit areas of cold air and bounces back up.

GENERAL WESTOVER: What is your rate of descent right now?

MAJOR KEPNER: It averages about 500 feet a minute. Occasionally it goes faster and occasionally it stops the descent all together and goes back up in the air a little piece.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I see.

MAJOR KEPNER: It is a very discouraging sort of business.

GENERAL WESTOVER: Yes, I am sure you are handling it in the best shape possible and that you will watch it very carefully with a view to using any

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emergency measures that may be necessary. How much is your balloon filled out?

MAJOR KEPNER: How much is it torn out?

GENERAL WESTOVER: How much is it filled out? Is the upper half of it pretty well filled out?

MAJOR KEPNER: At the present time it is probably about not quite half full, and this fabric, there is so much of it and partly torn and coming down it acts as a parachute and then it lets go and it occasionally tears an extra chunk out and the thing is getting to look pretty much like a huge sieve, on the underneath side. One hole there is probably fifty feet, a yard wide.

GENERAL WESTOVER: You have no idea as to what caused this, whether it was due to expansion or whipping of the fabric?

MAJOR KEPNER: I don't know. This balloon was going up very slowly at the time that this happened, and it didn't make any particular noise. We just happened to hear something fall on top of the gondola and looked out and saw a big hole there.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I see. I know you have many things to do there and I don't want to take too much of your time. Unless you have something further to report, I will sign off. Have you anything further to report?

MAJOR KEPNER: No, I haven't, General. We are going to go ahead and do the best we can, and when there is nothing else to do we will do the best thing to be done under such circumstances.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I know you are going to do that and we are all pulling for you for a happy, safe landing, old man.

MAJOR KEPNER: If they give us a break for a few minutes longer we will be all right.

GENERAL WESTOVER: Goodbye.

MAJOR KEPNER: Goodbye. . . .

RAPID CITY: Unit No. 1 reports its position at Harris, Iowa, and it is now headed for St. Joseph, Missouri. They will call in from there. Major Kepner!

MAJOR KEPNER: Yes.

RAPID CITY: The wind at North Platte is north six.

MAJOR KEPNER: North six?

RAPID CITY: Yes. Cozad, Nebraska, southeast camp, at Grand Island, north northwest six. . . . You have been cited at both those points. . . . What's your altitude now?

MAJOR KEPNER: 25,000 feet. We can't estimate the time it is going to take to come down.

(5:09 p.m.)

CHICAGO: Major Kepner!

MAJOR KEPNER: Hello.

CHICAGO: This is NBC, Chicago. Here is a message, Department of Commerce teletype station at North Platte, that reads as follows: "Stratosphere balloon crew ready now for you to land."

MAJOR KEPNER: What is that?

CHICAGO: They said they were ready down there. It came from the teletype station at North Platte. They apparently are following you, Major.

MAJOR KEPNER: All right. We have made up our mind that we will do the best we can with it. It is pretty bad here now and I don't know yet what I am going to do about it. Thanks.

RAPID CITY: Major Kepner! Major Kepner! Major Kepner! Hello, Major Kepner!

- NEW YORK: Leave them alone for a minute, Rapid City. They've got their hands full.
- RAPID CITY: Why don't you put some big names on the network?
- NEW YORK: The point isn't names but to get somebody who is not panicky. If we are still hearing the open microphone as they begin to settle, you can have somebody say, "The balloon is nearing the ground." Get away from that scarehead stuff we started earlier in the afternoon.
- CHICAGO: Can't you do that from New York?
- NEW YORK: No, because the line comes through you. This thing has to be monitored closely. When they begin talking we have to take too much time explaining what it is all about. They may quit talking. In other words, we have got to be on the alert out there and quietly say, "Ladies and gentlemen, we take you once again to the stratosphere balloon."
- RAPID CITY: O.K. I will use my own judgment on that.
- NEW YORK: Please use somebody who will not get panicky if things look black for a moment.
- RAPID CITY: O.K.
- (5:15 p.m.)
- MAJOR KEPNER: Hello, NBC. Hello, Bowl. We have opened the gondola at 20,000.
- CAPTAIN STEVENS: Major Kepner would like to get in touch with General Westover. We are down to 13,000 now.
- GENERAL WESTOVER: This is General Westover.
- MAJOR KEPNER: I just wanted to relieve your mind that we are down from high altitude to 13,000 and we are settling. The bag is pretty badly torn up. Can you hear me?

GENERAL WESTOVER: Yes, I can hear you.

MAJOR KEPNER: It is pretty badly torn up, with large corners open in the bottom. . . . I'm going to try to clear out by throwing out ballast.

GENERAL WESTOVER: How much ballast have you left?

MAJOR KEPNER: About 3000 pounds. That's plenty ballast if it isn't so rotten that it won't respond. You know how these bags get when they are flown two or three days. I imagine with the air churned up through those big holes fifty feet long in the bottom our ballast is pretty rotten.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I can't hear you very plainly now, you are fading away. . . .

MAJOR KEPNER: I imagine this gas is pretty rotten.

GENERAL WESTOVER: You feel that the fabric is pretty rotten?

MAJOR KEPNER: The gas in the bag. The gas is contaminated, by two or three holes about fifty feet across in the bottom of the balloon that have been opened on the way down.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I see.

MAJOR KEPNER: Undoubtedly there has been a good deal of stirring up in there and I don't know whether we are going to try to land it or not. I am sure we will try and see how it acts statically. It is settling now at about 500 feet a minute.

GENERAL WESTOVER: What is your present altitude?

MAJOR KEPNER: We have a few minutes longer to take a look at it and try to bring it in at a reasonable rate of speed. I don't think we will take much chance on it but I will go head and do the best I can.

GENERAL WESTOVER: I am sure you will. What is your altitude?

MAJOR KEPNER: It's now 11,000.

GENERAL WESTOVER: We are all pulling for you, old man. Take any emergency measures necessary.

MAJOR KEPNER: I will get back to work here.

GENERAL WESTOVER: O.K. Happy landing and good luck to you, old man.

(5:32 p.m.)

RAPID CITY: Hello, Major Kepner! Hello, Major Kepner!

MAJOR KEPNER: She is falling at— (rest of sentence faded out.)

RAPID CITY: Hello, Captain Stevens. Hello, Major Kepner.

(5:43 p.m.)

RAPID CITY
(repeating): Hello, Captain Stevens! Hello, Major Kepner! Hello, Captain Stevens!
(No answer.)

(5:45 p.m.)

RAPID CITY: We have a report the balloon is down. We are trying to confirm it.

NEW YORK: Where did it come from?

RAPID CITY: From Grand Island. As soon as we get confirmation we will let you know.

NEW YORK: O.K.

CHICAGO: New York!

NEW YORK: Go ahead, Chicago.

CHICAGO: We have a report from the telephone company that the balloon is down three miles west and five miles north of Holdrege, Nebraska. Did you get that?

NEW YORK: Yes.

CHICAGO: Five miles north and three miles west of Holdrege, Nebraska.

NEW YORK: That is confirmed?

CHICAGO: That is from the telephone company, and we are going back for confirmation now. I

will confirm it when I get back. Grand Island advises that the telephone company at Holdrege confirms that report. Here comes another official report.

(6:00 p.m.)

CHICAGO:

Mobile Units No. 1 and 2, attention: Go to Omaha, take route 6 to Holdrege. The balloon is down five miles north and three miles west of that spot.

Here is the dope on the three officers. Three miles north of Loomis, Nebraska, Anderson bailed out at 5,000 feet; Stevens bailed out at 3,000 feet; Major Kepner jumped at 500 feet, and all are alive and well.

(Applause and cheers)

NEW YORK:

Was that last report confirmed?

CHICAGO:

Confirmed through the telephone company. . . .

(6:10 p.m.)

RAPID CITY:

Unit No. 2 is at Omaha and they are going on to Holdrege.

According to a farmer the balloon is on the H. John Robinson farm, four miles north of Loomis, Nebraska, and he says the bag is badly torn up and as far as he could tell the gondola is wrecked.

(6:30 p.m.)

NEW YORK:

Tell Mobile Unit No. 1 to stop at the nearest town and go home and go to bed. They have been driving about twenty-six hours.

CHICAGO:

Calling Mobile Unit No. 1. There will be no need for you continuing on. Put up at a hotel and get yourselves some rest.

Mobile Unit No. 2 blew a rear tire just outside of Omaha. Part went ahead with a police escort. Do you want them to go ahead or remain at Omaha?

NEW YORK:

Remain at Omaha.

(One-way conversation—the Major speaking over an old crank-handle farm telephone which had hastily been hooked into the coast-to-coast networks):

MAJOR KEPNER:

It just so happens that the fellow who invented the parachute is a good friend of mine and I am glad he invented one. We were up about 60,000 feet at 1:30 Mountain Standard Time, and the fabric in this bag apparently gave way, either from strains induced by inflation or from some other cause. We were able to look through a window in the top of the gondola and see a hole in there about fifty feet long in the balloon. We were somewhat concerned, of course, because you can't get out of anything at 60,000 feet. You know the human being dies at about 52,000, even though he has pure oxygen. We sat there sort of waiting, wondering whether we were going to come hurtling down through the skies at about a mile a minute or a little faster in this gondola, and then try to step out of it after it got down far enough, and we sort of felt we needed a few horseshoes around us and a few good angels guarding over us and our mothers' prayers as well. We were able to get down to jumping distance. At 20,000 feet we opened up the gondola, got out and took a look at things and thought possibly we might be able to land it. We had a lot of valuable instruments and some good records. We made a pretty good flight; we felt it was well worth taking a long chance to bring home the records we had obtained up to that time. With that idea in mind we decided we would try to land it as a balloon even though the whole bottom was virtually torn away. We got down to

about 5000 feet from the ground and the parachute effect of the fall of this balloon even at 500 feet, 400 and 500 feet a minute, and sometimes as low as 300 feet a minute, tended to clear out all the lower fabric in the balloon. It left the great gaping upper half of this monster balloon up there with just some hydrogen in the top holding it up and temporarily forming a sort of giant parachute. The combination of the two was more than the poor old balloon could stand. At about 5000 feet it just suddenly split wide open and everything started toward the earth. Well, there were three of us, and we went out, one at a time, and we all landed in some of this good Nebraska dirt. Now we are going to get washed off and try to get something to eat.

All of you that have been anxious about the thing, I hope you are relieved for the safety of the personnel. It was a most unfortunate end to a very fine expedition, one that has probably employed more talent and more scientists than any other expedition of its kind in history. It was succeeding, but some little thing interfered. We stayed in there until the gondola was actually in the act of falling and was free in the air. As a matter of fact, Captain Stevens had a good deal of trouble getting himself free from the gondola. I managed to get off just after he did. I saw the other two out of the way and then took off myself. We had just about time enough to get our chutes open and start for the earth.

Broadcasting equipment of every description—from the earliest to the very latest—is on display in NBC's "radio museum" in Radio City. Thousands of people are annually

attracted to these exhibits, which someone has aptly described as a "gadget history of American broadcasting."

One of the most prized displays in this comprehensive collection is NBC's stratosphere transmitter, battered and bent from its crash in the gondola of the ill-fated balloon.

The tiny specially constructed eight-watt transmitter, which for hours kept the world informed of the progress of Major Kepner and his companions in the upper air, is sadly flattened out, as was all the other scientific equipment in the gondola. However, its brief career was more than justified by its having made available to millions one of the most thrilling broadcasts in the short annals of radio.

XVIII

Convention Blues

THERE has been a certain amount of progress in dealing with politicians on convention broadcasts. Both the Republicans and Democrats now have a policy of not holding meetings to make arrangements for the broadcasting of a nominating convention until they have decided on the city where the convention will be held. This is a great improvement over trying to work out broadcasting plans before the convention city has been picked.

Not long after the Republican Party selected Philadelphia as the city where it would pick its 1940 presidential standard-bearer I was invited to a luncheon to discuss the matter of installing in the convention hall NBC's facilities that would enable the whole country to be in on the naming of a possible President of the United States.

I thought this would be a small luncheon group. In addition to such National Committee figures as the director of publicity, the director of radio, the Committee's counsel, and a few other G.O.P. figures, I expected to find representatives of the Columbia Broadcasting System, the Mutual Broadcasting System, and perhaps a few other people connected with radio. The CBS and MBS men, plus your correspondent, would be the three most necessary people there from the standpoint of the Republican Party. A handful of other radio people would have legitimate business there, too. In all, a luncheon for fifteen people would have been most adequate. A group of this size always gets more done and operates more swiftly than a big unwieldy gathering.

When the luncheon meeting got going, some fifty-five or sixty people were eating. I found myself at the tail-end of a long table.

In a memo I jotted down at the time I find this note: "The guys who have business to do are in the bleachers and the guys who came to visit are sitting with the chairman." This was all right with me, but I couldn't help wondering why some of the people present would want to attend such a session. Some of them were local radio people who were members of radio chains and would get the convention broadcasts from a network.

The picture can best be given by one of these men, an old friend, who said to me, "What am I doing here?"

"Search me!" I replied. "I was about to ask you the same question."

"I was invited," said the bewildered guest. "So I came." Then he added hopefully, "Won't I hear anything interesting or useful?"

"No," I said. "But you'll get good drinks and a good lunch. The Republicans know how to do these things."

"Well, that's something," he added.

The luncheon proceeded, with a good deal of talk about co-operation. It was agreed that this was a good thing.

In fact, the word "co-operation" kept recurring as frequently as one hears Abraham Lincoln mentioned at Republican conventions and Thomas Jefferson at similar Democratic gatherings.

Co-operation was what was necessary if people expected to accomplish anything. The Republican National Committee would co-operate to the fullest. . . . We radio people, by the way, had co-operated beautifully four years ago. In fact, we had done an indescribably wonderful job. It was hoped the Committee had proved co-operative, too. . . . Oh, sure! . . . Some of us nodded, I recall.

A man who sat near me—(he was not in radio, it developed, but his invitation to the lunch had been arranged by a friend who was)—was the only one who supplemented his nod with a remark. "Everything was swell," he said with a wink.

We might as well give this man a name, as he afterwards adopted me. Let's call him Mr. Inlaw. He was a brother-in-

law or a son-in-law of someone important in politics who knew a somebody in the radio business back home. The somebody had been induced to get Mr. Inlaw invited to the luncheon at which arrangements for broadcasting the proceedings of the 1940 Republican National Convention were to be made.

The most appropriate remark at the luncheon was made by Henry P. Fletcher, counsel to the Republican National Committee. Mr. Fletcher observed that the radio broadcasting industry was getting bigger and bigger. Counting the Philadelphia politicians who were present, he was certainly right. The industry *is* growing rapidly and if you add to those engaged in it those who adopt it, the growth is simply phenomenal. Maybe Mr. Fletcher was taking a subtle poke at those who had no business at the luncheon and contrived to get themselves invited. I'll never know.

After lunch someone produced blueprints of the 1936 Republican convention hall and informed us that this time our facilities would be even better. The reference seemed to be to the broadcasting facilities of the three big chains.

No doubt the 1936 blueprints had some bearing on the meeting or they would not have been produced, but the man who produced them did not get around to discussing their relationship to 1940. No one expects too much to happen at a session of this kind, and if a man wants to dig up some old blueprints he should be allowed to do so. After all, the holders of a session of this kind are mainly trying to be nice, and it is up to the guests to be nice, too, this early in the game. One way of being nice is not to question the different motions your hosts seem to find it necessary to go through.

Later on when we all knew one another better it would be time enough to point out that the NBC broadcasting booth had proven too small in 1936, and that when we got around to staffing the booth we found ourselves thinking in terms of displacement as well as ability. Such considerations could be introduced more effectively when the luncheon group had been shrunk down to a basic minimum of those who actually had business to transact with the Committee.

Someone got up and said it was hoped we all understood how many problems there were in connection with organizing a nominating convention. Some of the guests, including Mr. Inlaw, nodded again. There was no need for outlining all these problems as it was obvious we were men of experience and understanding. Radio was only one of many problems, but was there anything more important that the Republican National Committee had to attend to?

I found myself mentally saying Yes to this question. The more important something, I thought, was nominating a good candidate.

The radio broadcasting industry then came in for an assortment of verbal floral tributes. Transmission of news by radio was one of the marvels of the age. We radio people had a great responsibility. Millions of people relied on us to present the news over the air in the best possible manner. This, of course, we would do. For we were equal to our responsibility. We had proved this in the past.

After lunch a fleet of taxis took us to the convention hall, which was then being rigged up for the University of Pennsylvania Commencement Exercises. The stage, we were told, would be at "the other end" for the convention. And please forget those tiers of seats on the stage for the graduates. Everything would be different. We were asked, therefore, to forget how it looked now and to try to visualize what it would look like when the convention was on. I promised to try.

Because of certain engineering problems it was a bit difficult to think in terms of an auditorium that had been temporarily rearranged for graduation exercises and would have to be switched back to normalcy before it could be completely rearranged again—and, in places, rebuilt—for a nominating convention.

But we were all in there trying and we at least deserved "A" for effort. I even suppressed a few caustic questions that took shape in my mind. It was a bit too early for that. The temptation arose after someone who joined us at the auditorium said that there wasn't much space—(space for broad-

casting facilities, I assumed he meant)—but he'd do his best. I never did learn who he was. On assignments of this kind you run into so many officials—city, state, national, some self-appointed—that sometimes you find yourself wasting your best verbal Bronx cheers on the wrong guys.

The gent who said there wasn't much space available pointed out that many more seats on the floor of the convention would have to be provided than ever before at such a gathering. I wondered what this had to do with space for broadcasting booths which were not to be on the floor. I also wondered, apropos his problem of seating so many more people on the floor, how many new states had joined the Union since 1936.

At this juncture Mr. Inlaw appeared out of nowhere to express his sympathy with the problems of the man who said there wasn't much space. "I don't know," said Mr. Inlaw by way of being helpful, "how you find room for *anybody*. Everybody wants to attend these conventions. And you can't blame 'em. They're so much fun."

I temporarily disposed of Mr. Inlaw by giving him something to do.

I got the idea from one of my confrères, who was complaining that there was a bad smell in the auditorium. "It still stinks of the horse show," he said bitterly. "Can't we get someone to do something about it?"

This resulted in an impious crack by another member of the party who observed: "A horse show, then commencement exercises, then a nominating convention! Can you imagine what the joint will smell like when the politicians get through?"

I assigned Mr. Inlaw to hunting up someone who would open some windows. I'll say this for Mr. Inlaw: he was eager to be of help. In fact, he almost kissed me for giving him something useful to do. In no time at all he qualified as a good executive by getting some windows opened.

Having done something for me, Mr. Inlaw thought it was time I did something for him; so he started telling me about

a nephew of his who had the makings of a perfect radio announcer. This kid had had a college education, had made the debating team, had a good voice, came from a good family—

I had to tune out on Mr. Inlaw to get an earful of what several people were saying, all talking at once. It was a lot of involved stuff about AC and DC current, electrical unions, wires, etc., etc.

What I wanted to know was where the NBC booth would be. This elicited the information that the three big chains would be placed in adjoining booths on an improvised balcony overlooking the convention floor. Now we were getting somewhere. The location was good and the three chains expressed their approval.

NBC, CBS and Mutual had developed the practice of deciding for themselves which of three given broadcasting booths each would take. We would reach this weighty decision by the process of tossing a coin.

When there's a difference in booths the toss means something. It meant nothing in Philadelphia. But tossing gave us something to do.

Next in the order of business came the battle for office space in the convention hall. As the NBC convention staff—our regular and special commentators, announcers, technicians, secretarial and clerical help, etc.—would total about forty people, we needed a fair amount of space.

We got less than we needed because I made the mistake of asking for only twice as much as we required. The handling of several conventions has educated me to the fact that it is soundest to request three times as much as you need. Then you have a good chance of getting enough space. This piece of wisdom I have carefully tucked away in my 1944 file and I just can't wait for those 1944 conventions to roll around.

I horrified one member of the Committee by making a request that seemed to him to be positively sacrilegious,—no, obscene. I had asked that a certain big room be assigned to us as the NBC room. "Do you realize," he said, astonishment

written all over him, "that you are asking for the room that has been set aside for our own Committee meetings?"

This was no time to say, "So what?" The Committee, after all, was doing its best and had already met some of my squawks. This was the time for a gracious gesture. So I withdrew my request and agreed to let Chairman Hamilton and his associates use as their very own the room I wanted to grab off.

I could tell by the cordial manner in which Hamilton greeted me whenever we met during the convention that my thoughtfulness had not gone unnoticed.

In the men's room I bumped into some newsreel people. They had been "going over the ground" too. I asked them how they were making out. "Lousy," they exclaimed, practically in chorus. And how were things with me? The same, thanks, I assured them.

Pre-convention confusion is practically a part of the presidential nominating system. Things always look lousy as radio and other groups settle down to the job of getting what they want out of the Republican and Democratic National Committees. Both Committees, rusty because they haven't had any of these things to take care of since the last convention, stumble around, make mistakes, irritate a lot of people, including themselves, and finally right themselves and function as smoothly as can be expected under the circumstances.

There are times when everyone connected with radio is positive everything has gone to hell and that there won't be any broadcasts. But somehow things get straightened out and you get your job done. The convention system was devised long before anyone ever dreamed of radio. It has come down the years unchanged. If you suggested streamlining it you would be shot. Considering the job radio must get done, and that this must be done without disturbing any of the sacred traditions, we get along very well indeed with the conventioners.

Mr. Inlaw, who had left us to inspect the arrangements for the commencement exercises, joined us as we were about

to leave the auditorium for a bout on hotel accommodations with Senator Hastings, Chairman of the Committee that handled such matters.

Inlaw said he wouldn't mind coming along just to see how such things were handled, although he would have no hotel problem himself. He planned to stay with friends who had a ducky little home on the outskirts of Philadelphia. He mentioned their name. Did I know them? . . . No? Well, that was too bad. He'd see that we met when the convention was on. And if things got too strenuous and I wanted to get away from it all, I could stay with his friends for a night and pull myself together.

I finally got rid of Mr. Inlaw. "See you at the convention," he shouted. "And see what you can do for my nephew." Over the cocktails we had made one of those dreary swaps of addresses.

We couldn't locate Senator Hastings, but someone was on hand to represent him. It developed that no one had thought about hotel accommodations for the networks. The man we consulted said he would see that the oversight was reported at once.

We thought he ought to do more than that. Why didn't he get the rooms for the networks himself? He couldn't do that. No, no, no. He just simply couldn't. That would be going over Senator Hastings' head.

I began to lose some of my philosophic calm. In fact, I got riled and put in a call for Chairman Hamilton. Hamilton doubtless knew this was a bad time to answer his telephone. . . . We couldn't raise him.

By now everybody was on edge.

Someone got our minds off hotel accommodations by suggesting that we toss coins to determine the positions of the NBC, CBS, and Mutual parabolic microphones and to decide the number of signs we should each have in the convention hall.

Someone also suggested flipping a coin to determine whose

job it would be to give Senator Hastings and/or his assistant a hot-foot. We decided to have a drink instead.

There were, of course, other trips to Philadelphia. You can't get everything done—including all that coin-tossing—in one trip.

On my second trip, things were only semi-chaotic. There was plenty of confusion, but less out-and-out goofiness.

This might be called the Blue-Print Phase. I had seen blueprints of the 1936 convention hall, but now I was being shown new blueprints. At least they were 1940 blueprints and that sounded like progress.

Our broadcasting booth—like CBS's and Mutual's—was small. As many as six of us would be working in the booth at a time.

Entire control of our networks would shift to Philadelphia and that booth—not much bigger than a train vestibule—would be an important place while the convention was on. It would have to be air-conditioned and sound-proofed.

All over the convention hall carpenters were hammering, and maybe that's why the people I consulted about air-conditioning and sound-proofing merely stared at me blankly. They probably never heard me above the din of the hammers.

Well, we finally got the booth sound-proofed and air-conditioned, though I'd hate to be required to give an accurate account of how it was accomplished. Various people were involved—my secretary, city officials, engineers, architects and everyone but the Mayor of Philadelphia. But we got what we wanted.

When I got back to my hotel I found a message saying, "Call New York operator No. Umphsteen." I did. It developed that Whiffletree 8764 was trying to reach me. Had tried three times, in fact. Sounded urgent. So I called the Whiffletree number and learned all about the emergency. Someone wanted tickets for the convention. As long as he had me on the telephone, Mr. Someone added, would I mind telling him "who was going to get it?"

"Get what?" I asked.

"The nomination," he replied.

I had momentarily forgotten that there was to be a nomination: I had been seeing more of carpenters, electricians and engineers, etc., than I had of politicians.

Mr. Someone thought I was being coy when I told him I hadn't the faintest idea "who was going to get it." He wanted an answer. So I gave him one. "The electricians think it looks like Dewey," I said, "but the carpenters think Taft has a better chance."

The next crisis developed when I tried to find out where the chairmen of the different delegations would sit. Nobody knew. Nobody even wanted to discuss the matter.

A great many additional sets of blueprints were produced and I was given an opportunity to figure this out for myself. In fact, before long the blueprint gag got to be the standard run-around. When you raised a question that involved the convention hall, someone would thrust a blueprint under your nose and run like hell.

I wanted some idea as to where the chairmen of the different delegations would sit so that we could work out a plan for placing the fifty-three floor microphones that we planned to use—forty-eight for the heads of the different state delegations, and five to take care of the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Canal Zone.

After a dozen appeals to the Committee, I was told that no one would know where the different delegations would sit until the delegates arrived. I pointed out that our engineers would have to know in advance because they would have to run eight or nine miles of wiring to connect up with those fifty-three microphones. In order to cover the convention properly, we would have to be in a position to pick up the chairman of any delegation on a second's notice.

Obviously the information about the seating of the delegations would not be available that day. It is practically standard practice that these matters should not be settled until there has been a voluminous exchange of letters and telegrams, and

until a lot of people have talked themselves hoarse over the telephones.

About seven pounds of documents were accumulated in our files in connection with the arrangements for broadcasting the 1940 Republican National Convention. Offhand, I can't attempt to say what percentage represented efforts to find out where the delegations would sit, but I would say it was a sizable one.

When the convention was only a few weeks off we still didn't know what time the keynote speaker would make his address, and approximately how long it would run. Information of this kind is essential, so that we can be in a position to know what programs will have to be canceled.

The Democratic procedure does not vary much from the Republican. The headaches sometimes are of a different type, but they are there.

The Democratic National Committee wisely refrained from staging a luncheon as part of its conference in Chicago to work out plans for broadcasting the 1940 nominating convention. This resulted in a much smaller gathering than the similar one held by the Republicans in Philadelphia. A few local politicians and other members of the idly curious hung around, but when they discovered that there was to be no luncheon and no drinking they quickly dispersed.

Our first problem in connection with the 1940 Democratic National Convention was getting into the Chicago Stadium where it was to be held. I'll never know why so much caution was observed; but it seems that we had not been properly identified to the local political machine as important enough people to look over the scene where the Democratic Party was to nominate its candidate.

First, we were told flatly that we could not get in. Naturally, we raised hell. The man to whom we protested did not seem impressed by the argument that we hadn't come all the way to Chicago to be told that we couldn't get into the audi-

torium. Perhaps we'd better take that up with the fellow who invited us, he thought.

It developed that the problem was one of red tape more than anything else. This red tape was snipped when I outdid all my past records for being insulting. We got in.

But some members of our party wondered whether it was worth the effort. Not to be outdone by the smells in the Republican convention hall, the Democrats allowed the circus to precede their convention; and it is generally conceded that a circus can do a better job in this direction than a mere horse-show. At any rate, an unventilated auditorium which has housed a circus for a few weeks is no place to be for any length of time; so, as a concession to the more easily offended nostrils among us, we rushed through our business.

In no time at all I was back in the blueprint business. A blueprint was thrust under my nose showing where the network broadcasting booths would be. Then I looked over the actual location in the hall. One look at the space assigned the networks made it obvious that it would not do. The CBS and Mutual representatives joined me in protesting. A noisy row resulted.

The representative of the Democratic National Committee finally asked us what would be acceptable. When we indicated the location we wanted he told us that we could not have it. "Do you realize," he said, "that if we give you that spot we'll be taking seats away from four hundred people who would like to see this convention?" I asked him which he considered more important,—those four hundred spectators or forty million radio listeners.

It would have been impossible to work out adequate broadcasting facilities in the location that had been offered. I kept saying this in as many different ways as I could think of, and so did the CBS and Mutual men. In fact, there was so much noise in the auditorium by now that you would almost have thought that the convention was on.

The Committee's spokesman started about half a dozen sentences designed to convey the impression that the space

offered us was adequate. But we did some pretty neat interrupting. Despairing of finishing a sentence, he dashed over for a consultation with Charlie Michelson, publicity director for the Democratic National Committee. Michelson effected a compromise. He gave us the location we wanted and suggested that we modify our request for space. The location was ideal, even though we knew that we would be a bit crowded for space when the convention was on.

Once our space was officially allocated it was time again for NBC, CBS, and Mutual to toss a coin to determine which of the three booths that would be built in the designated spaces each of the broadcasting systems would occupy. It was decided that the chain that was eliminated first was to get the center booth, with the other two chains tossing for the end booths, which for no convincing reasons were considered the more desirable. NBC got the center booth.

The best proof of how little this coin-tossing can mean is that weeks later when the convention was on a newspaper friend congratulated me on winning the toss. "What did you do," he chuckled, "use your own private coin?" He was sure I had won, because with NBC in the center booth our banner was in the middle where, in his opinion, it had more display value than the ones on the ends.

In all I made three trips to Chicago. My second trip was featured by a pretty good tiff about the allocation of space to be used as an office for our convention staff. The space they offered us was much too small. So the war of words started all over again. There was insufficient room for the number of desks and chairs we needed, and there was no place to put our teletype news machines. So we wrangled back and forth, and even did a little name-calling.

It was all good, clean fun. Politicians are so used to having verbal brickbats tossed at them that sometimes they are puzzled by the man who wants something badly and is unwilling to kick up a fuss in order to get it.

But even the amount of noise I made—and I made plenty—was not sufficient to do the trick. Some of the credit must be

given to a new miniature portable radio set that RCA had just put out. This was one of the most effective small radios that had yet been marketed,—all metal, attractive and unusually compact. Only a small number had been put on sale and these had been quickly snapped up.

While many people had heard about this radio set, very few people had seen it. It was quite a novelty; and it struck me before leaving New York that it wouldn't be a bad idea to get hold of as many of these sets as I could and put them in my luggage.

The idea proved to be an inspiration. I gave one of the sets to the stubbornest man I had to deal with in making my convention hall arrangements. He showed it to one of his associates, who lost no time in telling me how much he admired it. So I gave him one, too. The interest was now pretty general in the group with which I had to deal. Soon I had no more radio sets and no more difficulties.

Things were now running so smoothly I was beginning to miss the fights.

I asked Jim Farley to make a brief talk over the air on the eve of the convention, and he promptly accepted. In fact, he thanked me for inviting him. But that is not news. Jim was always easy to get along with. If some of the lesser lights connected with political organizations conducted themselves as Jim does, there would be fewer pointless arguments.

Some people, by the way, have an idea that Jim gets along so well because he always agrees with everything. This is not so. Jim's policy is never to make an issue out of a minor matter. He would not have battled with us about the details of locating our broadcasting booth, but he might have raised the devil over some major matter if he thought circumstances justified his doing so.

Farley, by the way, before going on the air, said to me, "Do you really think the world is waiting for these words?"

The Wednesday night following the opening of the Democratic National Convention may not have been an historic

night politically—in fact, I'm sure it wasn't, because nothing very exciting happened—but it did become an historic radio night. It was the night of one of the biggest mass protests radio has ever known.

We had planned to broadcast a round-by-round description of the Armstrong-Jenkins fight that was taking place in New York. The broadcast had originally been scheduled for 10 P.M., Eastern Daylight Time. Senator Wagner was scheduled to make the important platform speech at 9:35 Chicago time, 10:35 New York time. This would have allowed only thirty-five minutes for the broadcast of the fight.

I got in touch with Mike Jacobs, the promoter of the match, and got him to agree to move the fight up fifteen minutes—in other words, to start it at 9:45 P.M., New York time—which meant that we would have fifty minutes in which to tell the round-by-round story of the contest. This would give us enough time to broadcast a twelve-round fight, even if it went the limit.

Events conspired to change the whole Democratic schedule. Senator Wagner instead of going on after the Armstrong-Jenkins fight was compelled to go on about thirty minutes before the fight was scheduled to start. There was no way of changing the new plan that had been arrived at by the Democratic National Committee for the starting time of the Senator's speech. It was one of the important speeches at one of the most significant nominating conventions in modern political history and I could not very well cancel it in favor of a broadcast of a boxing match which was not even a title bout.

The country was waiting to hear Senator Wagner tell, among other things, what the Democrats' war plank would be. Prominent Republicans were branding the Democratic Party as the war party; therefore, the plank which the Democrats had written to indicate their position in regard to possible war situations was a matter of vital concern to the whole country. It was news. Moreover, we had broadcast the entire Republican platform speech and had we failed to put Senator Wag-

ner's speech on the air we would have been accused of discrimination, and rightly so.

It seems odd that it should be necessary to take space in a book to point out that a matter of vital concern to the whole country should take precedence over a prizefight, but you wouldn't think this explanation unnecessary had you been at one of the NBC switchboards that night in New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Chicago, or one of the other big cities.

Our New York switchboard alone received over three thousand telephone calls of protest and inquiry; Washington received over two thousand calls of a similar nature, and Philadelphia approximately the same number. There is no way of estimating the total number of telephone calls regarding the same matter received by newspaper offices all over the country. The *New York Times* reports that they alone received over a thousand.

The following is a quotation from a report made by NBC's chief telephone operator in New York City that night:

Due to NBC's inability to broadcast the Armstrong-Jenkins fight, all our lines were tied up with calls complaining and inquiring why the fight was not on the air. The calls congested our board and the central office of the Circle exchange to such an extent that the superintendent of the New York Telephone Company called in three times requesting us to make an announcement over the air.

What does all this prove? That people aren't interested in politics? That they prefer prizefights? Search me! There are people and people.

I consulted Jim Farley on the problem presented by the necessity of canceling either the Armstrong-Jenkins broadcast or the Wagner platform speech, and he did not attempt to tell me what to do. However, he did say, with a laugh, "If you cancel the fight you will make a lot of fight fans sore at us Democrats."

George W. (Johnny) Johnstone, Director of Radio for the

Democratic National Committee, does not read nearly so much significance into the telephonic blitzkrieg staged by the fight fans. "You know who made those calls, don't you?" he asked. Then, answering his own question, he added, "Republicans!"

It was known that President Roosevelt would speak when Secretary Wallace had been nominated for the vice-presidency and the business of the convention was over.

I was standing by in the NBC booth trying to estimate the time the President would go on the air. It was now about 10:30 and the vice-presidential question had not yet been settled. In fact, the New Deal wing of the Democratic Party was encountering more difficulty in putting Wallace over than they had anticipated. An anti-Wallace demonstration was in progress on the floor, punctuated by appeals from Chairman Barkley to unruly delegates to remember they were on the air.

I put in a call to Washington to learn if the President would be ready to take the air on short notice after the nomination of Wallace, which seemed assured despite the opposition of Democratic conservatives. I was informed that he would, and I was just hanging up when there was a rap on the door. Our caller proved to be a local cop who said, "Who's the guy in charge?"

I told him I was.

"Follow me," said the cop.

The news directors of CBS and Mutual were similarly paged.

The three of us wound up in the office Harry Hopkins was using in the auditorium as his headquarters.

Mr. Hopkins was most cordial. "I can put a call through to the White House that will give you fellows a better idea as to when the President will go on the air," he said.

I had just been assured that F.D.R. would go on shortly after Wallace's nomination, but a little added assurance through an official source would be all to the good. All three of us thanked Mr. Hopkins for his thoughtfulness.

But that was the last I heard of that. Mr. Hopkins un-

doubtedly meant to be of help but he forgot to follow through. He was the President's personal representative at the convention and he may have been called away to do some last-minute master-minding in connection with the stubbornness of the opposition to Wallace.

At any rate, I want to give Mr. Hopkins credit for good intentions. He *was* friendly.

After the Wallace nomination there was no further business for the convention to transact. The delegates were getting restless. It was a hot night, and, after several days of cheering this and booing that, they were tired and wanted to go to sleep—or make a bee-line for the nearest bar.

It was now after midnight and one of our men on the floor reported that the poor hard-working delegates—those unselfish toilers in the political vineyards—felt they had done their bit for party and country and they were beginning to grumble. "When will the President go on?" was what they all wanted to know as they waited for FDR's speech.

I kept in constant touch with our Washington office and with the chief of our crew Fred Shawn, who was waiting in the Oval Room of the White House.

At 12:15 Shawn said to me over the telephone, "Here comes the President now."

I said, "Is he ready to go on the air?"

Shawn replied, "Wait a minute. . . . The President says he will be ready at 12:25."

I phoned Johnstone, who was on the platform, and told him that the President would be ready to talk in ten minutes.

Johnstone immediately communicated this information to Barkley, and they phoned me back to say: "Please tell them at the White House that Barkley is having a lot of trouble keeping the delegates in their seats; they are getting restless. Their job is done, and it is awfully hot here."

While I held the line, Shawn gave the President the message and then told me, "The President says he will go on any time they say."

A few minutes later—a little before 12:25—the President was on the air.

With Johnny Johnstone I prepared Chairman Barkley's brief introduction to President Roosevelt's address. It was not a writing job so much as a matter of assembling the words—and as few as possible—that would quickly tell the radio audience what it was all about. Then we would undertake to put the text in the hands of the other networks so they would know just when to switch to the White House.

Chairman Barkley's concluding words were supposed to be: "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

When these words were spoken, our engineers at the convention, at the controls in Chicago, and at the White House, would flip their keys the other way, meaning that the microphone from Chicago was now dead and that the microphone from Washington was open. Radio, with its precision, switches immediately on such a cue, the whole procedure never taking more than two or three seconds.

When Barkley got to the phrase, "The President of the United States," everybody who was technically concerned with the broadcast switched. But Mr. Barkley added a phrase to cover a point that had been covered several times over the air shortly before in referring to the President's speech. The phrase was: "who will speak to you from the White House in Washington."

Barkley's voice from the microphone on the platform boomed over the Chicago Stadium as the President's opening words, "My friends" came in and were drowned.

The radio audience of course did not hear the confused opening, for our engineers switched before the phrase "who will talk to you from the White House at Washington" was spoken. But the people in the Convention Hall didn't hear the President's standard salutation, "My friends." However, the delegates didn't make much comment on this seeming omission. After all, they had nominated Mr. Roosevelt again and they could be reasonably sure he was still their friend.

XIX

Of Mikes and Men

THERE ought to be a chapter in this book about radio engineers. Many an important news broadcast would never have taken place if not for the courage or ingenuity of the engineer on the job.

One day I told my then boss, John F. Royal, that I was working on a book about my job. He said, "I hope there's going to be a chapter about the engineers. An analysis of the success of many a radio news story that was put across under difficulties would show that some engineer deserves 60% of the credit.

"Our *Graf Spee* scoop is a good example. I'll admit you used your head on that one, but you would have been nowhere if you hadn't been lucky enough to have an engineer like Clarke available at Montevideo. It was he who worked out the intricate system by means of which we had the story covered for miles along the waterfront, and it was he who made the recommendation that Jimmy Bowen, a man who had never before faced a microphone, would be the ideal man to do the actual broadcasting."

Mr. Royal went on at some length about the importance of the radio engineer in newscasting. I regret that I was unable to gather enough material for a chapter on these nervy, resourceful, unobtrusive workers. And I'll put the blame for my inability to produce the chapter Mr. Royal suggested where it belongs: at the doorstep of the engineers themselves. They're too darned modest.

In talks with engineers designed to help me assemble the facts involved in a number of dramatic, daring, and even spectacular stories involving engineers I constantly ran into such

comments as these by the men whose feats I wanted to describe:

"Please skip it. It's part of my job to do those things."

"Use the story if you want to but please don't use my name. The other engineers will razz hell out of me if you try to make a hero of me."

"Yes, it happened. But there was another engineer on the job,—Jim Brown. Better ask him. It was mostly luck, but he had more to do with saving the program than I . . ."

When I looked up Jim Brown he referred me to Joe Smith who told me the foregoing. "Honest Injun," says Joe, "it was all Jim's idea. I merely helped him carry it out."

It's hard to write a chapter around guys who are that self-effacing. But I will tell you the story of Engineer X who took a big chance to save a Poughkeepsie Regatta broadcast.

A screw in the motor generator that created the power for our broadcast fell out and it looked as if the whole program would have to go off the air. To hold the generator brushes in place and continue the power, Engineer X put his little finger in the opening where the screw was. A fraction of an inch away was the live wire supplying the current that could have electrocuted him. He held his finger there for the rest of the broadcast, bracing himself with his disengaged arm so that if anyone accidentally bumped into him he would not be jolted into contact with the exposed juice less than an inch away that could have killed him.

When Congress convenes we set up our broadcasting equipment on the House floor in the Record Room to broadcast highlights of the opening ceremonies.

The late William B. Bankhead, Speaker of the House, made a practice of turning the gavel over to Representative Sam Rayburn—or some other member of the House—a few minutes after he had spoken the words that formally opened the deliberations of Congress. Then Bankhead would saunter over to the Record Room knowing that that early in the session he was not neglecting anything.

Once as the Speaker under such circumstances sauntered over to where our equipment was set up, a member of our staff remarked, "You're quite a radio fan, Mr. Bankhead, aren't you?"

"You can't prove it by my presence here," said the Speaker as he lit a match and winked. "This gives me a chance to get off the floor and catch a smoke."

Bill McAndrew, formerly of our Washington staff, is my favorite political story teller. Bill will now tell you a story:

"I'll never forget the bitter campaign in Maryland in 1938 between Senator Millard Tydings and Representative David J. Lewis. The New Deal was attempting to purge Tydings and was running Lewis, a Cumberland lawyer, against him. The campaign was a bitter one from the beginning and the feeling became even more intense when the President announced he would make a speech on Lewis' behalf.

"The night of the election both CBS and NBC sent crews to Cumberland and Baltimore, the respective campaign headquarters of the two candidates.

"I was assigned to Lewis' office, a dingy little affair down near the railroad tracks in Cumberland. Lewis was tired after a strenuous campaign, and was on the second floor of the building receiving returns by telephone.

"Along about 11 P.M. it appeared certain that Tydings would be re-elected. All evening we had been trying to get Lewis to agree to make a statement on the air; a similar attempt was being made in Baltimore. But neither Lewis nor Tydings would acquiesce.

"Finally, in desperation, I told Lewis' secretary that the President—who was visiting his son Jimmy at the Mayo Clinic—was listening, waiting to hear him. Then word came through that Tydings was going to speak. We told Lewis this, again through his secretary.

"Still no definite answer. Time was getting short. Then we heard Senator Tydings through our earphones making a statement from Baltimore. This was followed by the announce-

ment, 'We take you now to Representative Lewis' office in Cumberland.'

"I told Lewis' secretary that we would be compelled to announce that Representative Lewis declined to go on. I tried to get across the idea that despite the bitterness of the campaign it would be wise to make a statement—perhaps briefly congratulating his opponent, instead of lapsing into what would seem a sullen silence.

"By this time our announcer, Dorian St. George, was talking, describing the office, the furniture, anything else he could think of. Lewis' secretary ran upstairs to see his boss and was back in a moment.

"'He'll go on if he can speak from upstairs,' he whispered. We signaled the announcer, and our engineer began re-arranging his complicated set-up. CBS men did the same. With cable dangling behind, both announcers made their way up the narrow stairway, continuing to broadcast all the while.

"Lewis, behind a plain wooden table, read from a piece of foolscap. With a sigh the announcer came downstairs only to discover that none of Lewis's remarks had gone on the air. Our engineer in his frantic scrambling had bumped into a switch, knocking the program off the air.

"Back again we went. Lewis was nowhere to be seen. The announcer introduced him. Then came an awkward pause. At that second there was a disconcerting noise which the open microphone caught and sent from coast to coast—Mr. Lewis, emerging from the men's room, was now ready to speak."

George Hicks, one of our ace reporters, has been all over the world for us. He covered the maiden voyages of the *Normandie* and the *Queen Mary*, and in June of 1937 we sent him to Canton Island, five thousand miles west of California in the Pacific Ocean, to broadcast the longest eclipse of the sun in one thousand two hundred years.

Hicks' Canton Island assignment, one of his most difficult, resulted in one of the outstanding jobs of his colorful career. His job was to help make understandable to the general public

the findings of the eminent scientists with the United States Navy—National Geographic Expedition then based on the island to record data about the eclipse and to photograph it with a view to finding out more about the composition of the sun. We moved tons of equipment to the island to cover a phenomenon that lasted three minutes and thirty-three seconds,—long for an eclipse but brief for a so-called special event.

As the sun began to slide behind the moon, Hicks described the scene in these words:

“Darkness is really coming on us. It is an unhealthy and unnatural sort of dark. The brilliant light of the South Seas, the blues and greens and yellows of the sun, are now all as though washed over by dirty color. The men are standing down below me and they cast a long and rather clear, dark shadow. . . .

“Blue flames of light estimated to be a million miles long are shooting from the sun’s rim behind the shadow of the moon. Artists are working hurriedly by flashlights painting the spectacle while enormous cameras click. Frigate birds come in from the sea to roost in confusion on the island during the sudden darkness. . . .

“Darkness is now really upon us. We see the diamond ring, that famous circle around the moon. We continue to see those sun streamers breaking through the mountains of the moon. We see for the first time the magnificence of the corona, which extends in great streamers away out. We see one streamer down toward the south that seems to be at least twice the distance of the diameter of the sun itself. . . .

“We are looking now without glasses directly up at the sun. . . . We see an impenetrable black circle, which is the moon’s shadow before the sun. Around that is comparatively brilliant white or pearl-gray light that makes up this corona haze, and it diffuses out in great streamers all around.

“The sky is dark blue. Directly overhead we see a brilliant star which seems to be Venus. The light of the sun itself is reflected down along the horizon in yellow bands that are very

pale, fading into lemon and then into darkness. The clouds have changed suddenly from white to dark lavender.

"As we look closely at the rim of the sun we can see those huge flames of hydrogen that leap up from the sun's surface hundreds of miles a second, fifty or sixty thousand miles in the air.

"The sun and the moon remain seemingly stationary in the sky. It is a magnificent spectacle. . . .

"The mechanical precision of the scientists is going on without a hitch. The cameras continue to click. And here comes the first crest of the sun—its huge diamond rings—and now it is growing, growing rapidly. It is a great burst of light and our darkness has raised immediately.

"The great frigate birds set out to sea again as the excited scientists begin to put away their instruments and the precious photographic plates on which they have recorded different phases of the great eclipse. . . ."

But this story of the eclipse is merely told in passing. What I am really trying to do is to build up a little anecdote about George Hicks, using far-off places to help sharpen the point.

When Pan-American Airways announced its first transatlantic passenger flight I got hold of Hicks and asked him whether he'd like to make the trip.

George was all for it. I like guys who make up their minds in a hurry, so I said, "When you get over to Europe, you might as well get some recreation. Your work, of course, will be over when the Clipper lands. You might as well spend four or five days loafing in London and Paris and make a leisurely return by ship."

"What is the date of the trip?" asked Hicks. "I've got to figure something out."

"You're not running out on me, are you?" I asked.

"No," said George, after I had given him the date of the Clipper's departure. "I just want to see how this fits in with my plans. . . . Let me see. . . . Yes, that will be all right. . . . I just wanted to make a guess as to whether I can get a good liner back in time to start my vacation at Lake George."

Who is the greatest commentator?

Time and again I am asked that question.

I decided to put the matter up to the commentators themselves in a one-question questionnaire: "Why do you consider yourself America's best?"

I sent this simple questionnaire to Lowell Thomas, Raymond Gram Swing, H. V. Kaltenborn and other outstanding commentators—with the explanation that I was launching an every-man-his-own-Crossley movement.

I am happy to report that the response from these gentlemen was most gratifying. To a man they endorsed my new movement. Manfully they tackled my questionnaire and sent me their replies. Some of these I am appending. Here, to begin with, is Lowell Thomas's:

"The real answer to my superiority to all other news commentators is to be found in my ability to mispronounce French with a mastery never before achieved. I am a believer in thoroughness. No half-hearted mispronunciation for me. When I mispronounce a French word it stays mispronounced.

"Apparently radio listeners who understand French—and they seem to be legion—find something wistful in my struggle with the language of Voltaire, Molière, Anatole France.

"Long before my radio days I was engaged in telling the story of Lawrence of Arabia on the lecture platform. I recited it in Great Britain, then all over the British Isles, and from coast to coast in the United States. In London I got an offer to deliver my Lawrence lecture in Paris. I accepted.

"I had my English lecture translated into French and this transliterated into American phonetics. I practiced reading the phoneticized version until I had the pronunciation down pat—at least so I thought as I laboriously drilled myself in the phonetics.

"Came the night when I was to deliver my lecture in Paris. The audience, a brilliant one, listened with solemn attention. They were dignified people, not too addicted to those vulgar interruptions known as applause.

"Of course there was applause at the end. It was a bit on

the desultory side, I'll admit, but it was applause nevertheless; and I distinctly remember two bravos.

"My real reward, however, came when a large Parisian lady who might best be described as a French Hokinson girl kissed me on the cheek and gushed something that was afterwards translated for me to mean, 'You tried so hard! It was splendid!'

"I can still arouse more interest by mispronouncing a French word than by almost any other means. Word gets around that Lowell Thomas hasn't mispronounced a French word in a week and people listen eagerly night after night for a slip.

"I attribute many new listeners to this fact. While waiting for me to achieve some epic feat of French mispronunciation they get acquainted with my program, and once they have heard me they are lost. They become rabid Lowell Thomas fans and never miss a program."

Raymond Gram Swing replied as follows:

"The reason why I am the outstanding commentator of America is because, in talking about foreign affairs, I was able to start with the right principle. This I learned while sitting at the feet of one of America's creative geniuses of radio. 'The greatest contribution to international understanding ever made by the radio,' he said, 'was when from England the song of the nightingale was rebroadcast to the United States.' I know some of you were at the occasion when this great utterance was made.

"Startling though this statement was, further contemplation of it showed that it was even more profound than it was startling. The basis for international understanding is not politics, not diplomacy, not military and naval force, not commerce, it is still deeper than any of these. It is the common sharing of nature. And in my discussion of the news, I have assiduously applied this wisdom.

"I emphasize the part that sunshine plays in daylight air warfare, the part that clouds have in night bombing, how the simple movement of the waves on the English Channel decides so great an enterprise as the invasion of England.

"This basic note of earthiness, of reality, is what distinguishes my program. And it is not inappropriate to point out a further truth. My program most fittingly is financed by Nature. It is paid for by a product of the soil. Appropriately, it is named for a bird—the White Owl, a contemporary of the nightingale. The product which I help to sell, and which enables me to convey my message to millions, is one of nature's noblest gifts, tobacco. And I take this opportunity to suggest that the smooth, mild, mellow Havana tobaccos that make up the filler of the New White Owl Cigar, are in their own way as important and as delectable as the song of the nightingale."

Here's how Gabriel Heatter handled my one-question questionnaire:

"I know I am the best commentator in all America because a man once told me so. All those other fellows, he wrote, talk about Indo-China or Madagascar or economics or military strategy or the time they were out on the desert and they looked up and there was Lawrence of Arabia and he said, 'Hello, Lowell, how's tricks?' and Lowell said, 'Okay, Larry, but watch your step because the enemy is on your trail and right now I can see a mean-looking guy with a white towel wrapped around his head sneaking a look at you from behind his reclining camel.'

"My admirer went on, 'And you don't go in for any of that mysterious stuff, Mr. Heatter, and you are a man who speaks my own language and you talk about things I can understand like hair tonic or coffee or what kind of a magazine a nickel will buy and where to borrow money and no questions asked.' . . .

"You can't convince any of the other commentators that that letter is genuine because naturally each and every one of them wants to go on dreaming he's tops. Suppose I can't produce the original? I will swear on a stack of Blue Sunoco road maps or a mound of Mounds, that delicious candy treat, that there was such a letter.

"I once figured out, with the aid of an expert cost accountant, that if I tried to save all my fan mail it would cost me

\$273 a week for sorting, filing and storage alone, and then where would I be?

“Of course the fact that I get so much fan mail is further proof that I’m the champ.

“Want still additional proof? Well, one day I got a telephone call from Hollywood in which a man who represented the movies said they had noticed a falling off in pictures for the nine o’clock show and he thought it might be due to the fact that I am on at nine o’clock. People were probably staying home to hear Heatter instead of going out to watch Garbo make love.

“And he wanted to know what I would charge to change my hour. Now I know some of you people who are reading this may be a bit skeptical—and I can hardly blame you. But the fact remains movie attendance has been falling off in America for the past seven years—and those are the seven years I have been on the air.

“There is an old Hindu proverb which says:

Who by the famed is unimpressed
Of greatness is himself possessed.

“I can truthfully say that at one time or another I have listened to all the famed commentators who precede and follow me and that I am unimpressed.

“It is too bad. Competition is the life of trade. The news commentator industry—and it now *is* an industry, and one of the leading ones, not far below automobiles, steel and food-stuffs—is undoubtedly suffering from a dearth of competition.

“You have undoubtedly heard that Thurman Arnold is investigating me as the person responsible for this lack of competition. Granting that I am the cause, is it fair to penalize quality?

“I plan to see my lawyer. In the meantime I shall not worry. A man who gets as many offers as I do would be a sucker to worry. One of my latest is from a manufacturer of ladies underthings. When he sees the series of proposed commercials I’ve written for him, one of the juiciest deals in radio

history will be closed and I'll have the biggest hook-up in the world. In fact, my program will girdle the globe."

H. V. Kaltenborn, too, rallied to the every-man-his-own-Crosley banner.

"It's a great idea," he remarked, "as it gives me an opportunity to say something I have always wanted to say about Kaltenborn, whose native modesty would never permit him to discuss, unless invited to do so, his pre-eminence among American commentators. Even though 98% of the American people are aware that Kaltenborn is in a class by himself, it would be in bad taste for this great news analyst to volunteer comment. The fact that now NBC, through its director of news and special events, seeks my opinion of Kaltenborn, makes it possible for me to forget the ordinary restraints and say what must be obvious to all except the prejudiced. Kaltenborn is tops.

"Eighteen years ago when Kaltenborn began his news interpretations the commentator was an unknown species. Kaltenborn was the first and remains the first. He is the George Washington of commentators. The best that a man like Lowell Thomas could claim is that he is the Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lesser lights like Gabriel Heatter, John B. Kennedy, Edwin C. Hill, Raymond Gram Swing, Elmer Davis and Earl Godwin might be termed the Martin Van Buren, the Zachary Taylor, the Millard Fillmore, the James K. Polk, the Chester A. Arthur and the Franklin Pierce, respectively.

"Kaltenborn has been widely imitated,—his writing style, his delivery, his interpretive method, his mode of dress and the special brand of eloquence he uses in captivating women's clubs.

"For eight years Kaltenborn was the only commentator who said, 'Good evening, everybody.' And for ten years, Lowell Thomas hasn't found anything better with which to open his program. Imitation, as the fellow said, is the sincerest flattery.

"*Fortune Magazine* recently took a poll to determine the popularity of commentators among different groups. Practically everybody with an income exceeding \$10,000 a year voted

for me. A big percentage of the votes cast for other commentators came from those on relief.

“Don’t be deceived by mere numerical superiority or Crossley ratings. What counts is quality, not quantity. That holds for listeners as well as for clothing, ketchup, gasoline, hairnets and toothpicks.

“The other day Kaltenborn got a letter which read: ‘On the radio you are my first man; Dorothy Thompson is my second man; Lowell Thomas is my third man.’ I cite this to show the distance that separates Lowell Thomas, who thinks he’s best, from Kaltenborn. The letter is remarkable in that it is the only piece of fan mail Kaltenborn has received in years that even mentions another commentator.

“Under the code of the National Association of Broadcasters, neither Kaltenborn nor any other commentator is supposed to express opinions. But when Kaltenborn does not express them, his listeners get mad, and when any of the other commentators follow suit their listeners are glad.

“The other day a man sent Kaltenborn a postcard on which he had printed two short words in big capital letters. It said, ‘You stink.’ Kaltenborn challenges any of the other commentators to prove they have ever inspired such heartfelt comment. Commentators, like cheese, have to be well-seasoned before they are appreciated.

“You have to be on the air for at least fifteen years before people smell you as well as hear you. Even with television they only see you and hear you. When that new miracle of the laboratories—smellelevision—goes into mass production and achieves the success it deserves Kaltenborn will have still another ‘first’ to his credit.”

I do not make a great many speeches because that’s not my role, but every once in a while I am sandbagged into accepting a speaking engagement. During the inevitable question-asking bee someone is sure to ask, “Mr. Schechter, who is America’s greatest commentator?”

In this chapter I have answered that question to the best of my ability.

Even in a shattered world one dares to hope, and maybe some day there will be fewer rating-system bandwagons to board, fewer people eagerly waiting to be told what to like and more people who figure things out for themselves.

Until that great day comes I shall continue, in response to a demand that one in my job cannot ignore, to clarify the public's thinking. If these pages have thrown any light on the question I never seem able to escape I shall feel amply repaid for my efforts.

XX

Battle of Pitcairn Island

IN DECEMBER of 1936 a Gloucester fishing schooner, the *Yankee*, dropped anchor at lonely Pitcairn Island in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean. Among those who debarked for a visit was Alan Eurich, radio operator of the New England fishing vessel.

Eurich was chiefly interested in visiting Andrew Young, who ran the island's tiny one-man radio station. The American radio operator had been in communication with Young, who was a direct descendant of the Edward Young who had deserted with the mutinous crew in the famous sea chronicle.

Young's was probably the most primitive "official" radio station in the world. He kept in touch with the outside world by means of equipment, long since outmoded, that the British Marconi Company sent him in 1930. They also sent him information on the use of the equipment and a Morse code guide-book.

Eurich was fascinated by what he saw in the dimly lighted shack where Young sat signaling to ships that passed within a thousand miles of the island. Often the signal was a prelude to a conversation with a passing vessel in which the Pitcairn operator, on behalf of the islanders, offered to trade rare fruits for clothing and foodstuffs. Sometimes Young would not particularize and on behalf of his associates would ask the radio operator of a ship with which he had established contact to request the captain to name the "necessities" he was willing to trade for those exotic fruits found only in a few other places in the world, and for Pitcairn curios and mementos.

Of course there was no electricity on the island and Young operated his radio unit by means of a gasoline-driven power-

generator. Naturally there was also no gasoline on the island, and for several years the Pitcairn Islander nursed along a huge supply—huge at least in terms of the amount needed to keep so small a radio operation functioning—that the British Marconi Company shipped him when they originally sent him his radio equipment.

After a few years Young's gasoline supply started running low, and he appealed for more by radio. His appeal was heeded when it was arranged some months later to have a freighter put in at the little island that had been visited by so few ships in its entire history. While in communication with the radio operator of a passing ship, regarding his gasoline problem Young learned all about dry storage batteries and arranged to have a supply of these sent him on the same vessel that was carrying his gasoline.

Once again when Young's gasoline had run low and his batteries needed recharging he kept going as a result of a wholly unanticipated stroke of luck. The organizers of a trans-pacific seaplane flight looked at the map and decided it would be a good idea to use Pitcairn as a stopping-off place. It would lend color to the enterprise, they thought, and be helpful in a publicity way. The Nordhoff and Hall novel *Mutiny on the Bounty* was a worldwide best-seller (the movie had not yet been produced) and Pitcairn Island had captured the popular imagination.

I don't know what route the backers of this flight had planned, but evidently they felt Pitcairn would also be valuable as a base and, consequently, they shipped a big supply of gasoline to the island. Later, when the flight was called off, Young inherited the flyers' supply of fuel, which kept him going for a long time.

When this supply dwindled, Young returned to his batteries and sent an appeal for more gasoline. None was forthcoming after a series of appeals covering many months and he hit upon the idea of appealing for new batteries. When this elicited no response, he got in communication with a ship bound for New Zealand and was persuasive enough—(he asked

the captain to communicate with the British Marconi Company before turning him down)—to get the ship's master to stop off and pick up his batteries, have them recharged and return them to the island. In all this entailed a journey of 3800 miles.

It was a great day when the ship bearing the batteries was sighted and islanders rowed out in boats laden with fruits and curios which was the only compensation they could offer. Contact with the outer world had now become a habit and they were always ready to reward richly—according to their way of thinking—anyone that helped them maintain their only means of swift communication.

Sometimes they had a chance to put letters on ships, but these occasions were few and far between, and there was no telling how many months would elapse before these letters would reach their destination. One such letter was seven months in transit, and the reply was not delivered until ten months later when the recipient was able to locate a ship that would stop at Pitcairn Island "some time within the next year if convenient."

This gave me a graphic picture of what it must mean to be isolated on a tiny island in the middle of the South Pacific that was almost as effectually removed from the ways of modern life as the dwellers, if any, on some planet whose distance from the earth is casually measured by those nonchalant astronomers in terms of millions of miles. There is nothing tragic in their remoteness from so-called "civilization," but, as I thought more than once, it must be tough when a good doctor could save a life and there is no way of summoning quick medical aid.

Alan Eurich was thrilled as he stood by and watched Andrew Young converse with the radio operators of ships that were three or four hundred miles away, and he was positively excited when Young let him put on his head-gear so that he could listen to a radio program that originated in a California station some 4500 miles away.

All this made a lasting impression on Eurich. To him An-

drew Young, seated at his old-fashioned transmitter and keeping Pitcairn Island in touch with the outside world, was one of the most picturesque and dramatic figures in radio.

When the *Yankee* returned to Gloucester, Eurich wrote the story of Andrew Young for *QST*, the radio-amateur magazine, which is the bible of so many "hams." It was an excellent job of reporting in which he told, among other things, how under the tutelage of Young, practically all of the two hundred inhabitants of the island had learned the Morse code as a convenient means of inter-island communication. He told how Young had read about flashlights in a magazine someone had sent him and how he had acquired a supply of them in return for a boatload of Pitcairn fruits, and how stirring it was at night to look around and see dwellers in different parts of the island expertly signaling each other by means of these little pocket electric lights.

Without trying to make a heroic figure of Young and merely by recording the quiet little drama as he saw it, Eurich had succeeded in writing one of those minor masterpieces of simplicity that the reader finds unforgettable. To him Pitcairn Island's call letters—PITC—had become the symbol of radio as a romantic adventure and in effect he said so.

Perhaps because there was no striving for that quality of "punch" that editors so frequently scream for, the article in *QST*, which almost succeeded in making a character of the antiquated equipment for which Young seemed to have the same feeling that an equestrian has for a favorite mount, packed an unmistakable wallop. It attracted much attention and resulted in a good deal of laudatory discussion among hams (some of whom made a point of telling one another about it by radio).

In Providence, R. I., Lewis Bellem, Jr., a radio engineer who was an active ham on the side, read Alan Eurich's article and got an idea. He discussed it with a good friend, Granville P. Lindley, with whom he was associated in the manufacture of radio equipment. He felt sure that Lindley was the right type of man to approach, for you had to have

the love of far-away places in your make-up to appreciate this idea, and Lindley had served as chief electrician on one of Admiral Byrd's expeditions to the icy no man's land of the Antarctic.

When Lindley expressed his enthusiastic approval, he and Bellem decided to get busy and enlist the necessary support to put the idea in effect. Briefly, it consisted of appealing to American radio manufacturers for donations of the different parts needed to build a modern transmitter, which they then planned to present to Andrew Young and his fellow Pitcairn Islanders. This was to be the gift of American radiomen in appreciation of Young's feat in pulling his remote and almost mythical little speck in the Pacific into the sphere of radio communication by means of equipment that was almost primitive.

The two men—Bellem, who was chief engineer, and Lindley, who was chief electrician—decided to seek the aid of the head of the organization that employed them,—F. C. Henrikson, President of the Coto-Coil Company.

Henrikson quickly endorsed the idea, promised full co-operation and encouraged Bellem and Lindley to get their drive under way as soon as they found it convenient to do so. He directed them to help themselves to any of their own company's equipment that they needed and to devote as much time as was necessary to seeking the co-operation of the manufacturers of the other essential parts of the costly modern transmitter it was planned to present to Pitcairn Island.

The manufacturers of radio equipment, whose contribution of this or that special part was needed, responded to the call, and not long after Bellem first got his idea from Eurich's article the powerful up-to-the-minute transmitter, which was to supplant Young's obsolete equipment, was pledged.

Henrikson personally underwrote the trip to Pitcairn Island that Bellem and Lindley would have to make to see that the transmitter was properly installed and to instruct Young in its use. Arrangements were made for the two experts to sail on a Panama Pacific liner after the line agreed to stop the

ship at the Island to enable Bellem and Lindley to install the equipment and to pick them up on a stipulated date after they had done their job.

Early in January of 1938 Bellem and Lindley called at my office to tell me about their plan. The motion-picture version of *Mutiny on the Bounty* had just been released and had scored a big hit. Pitcairn Island was now known to millions of people, in addition to those who already knew about it, and the suggestion of the two technicians that we do some broadcasts from the island could not have been timelier.

We were glad to pay for these broadcasts, not only because they were a good investment, but for the additional reason that Lindley and Bellem were bound to run into unexpected expenses and the money we agreed to pay for the sustaining programs—plus the return from the sale of any of the broadcasts to a commercial sponsor—would help finance a worthy undertaking.

Arrangements whereby Lindley and Bellem would broadcast for us from Pitcairn were quickly concluded. It developed that, to be completely on the safe side, they would need some additional equipment, and this we donated after placing our research and engineering departments at their disposal and determining what would be best.

We were helping ourselves as well as the gift-transmitter project, for NBC in California would be able to conduct tests that would yield useful information about the specially constructed Pitcairn equipment and we would also have established a contact that would prove helpful if Pitcairn Island, directly or indirectly, figured in an important news story.

Memoranda in our Pitcairn files remind me of some amusing sidelights. Bellem, whose spare-time activities as a radio amateur are mentioned earlier, was carrying on a short-wave conversation one day with a brother ham. (With not many exceptions, radio engineers—including many whose professionalism is too much for me except when engineering problems of an elementary nature are discussed—are enthusiastic “amateurs.”) Later that day Arthur Feldman, then of our Boston

news staff and now attached to News and Special Events in New York, sent me a wire informing me of a short-wave "two-way" he had just picked up about a forthcoming expedition to Pitcairn, and urged me to investigate and get in on it if it proved authentic.

The call letters of the person informing his brother ham that he was planning a trip to the remote little British possession, needless to say, proved to be Bellem's. When I told our Boston man that the Pitcairn expedition was all sewed up for NBC he was flabbergasted.

This little sidelight, by the way, typifies the alertness of our men in translating—or trying to translate—any promising information they receive into possible broadcasts.

In radio we find ourselves eternally looking into the future. We are no more forward-looking than most other industries, but ours changes even more rapidly than a majority of the others, so, with an eye to television, I made sure that Bellem and Lindley would bring back a movie record of their experience.

We seldom take anything for granted in radio. Where anything is involved that necessitates our securing governmental permission to make a broadcast possible we do not think of the program as an actuality until official consent has been secured. Somehow it never occurred to us that we would run into any official red tape in connection with broadcasting from Pitcairn Island.

In fact, I expected—naively, I now realize—that the British would do some diplomatic equivalent of planting a kiss on the combined Bellem-Lindley-NBC brow. Surely they would appreciate our efforts to assure dependable communication between the Empire and its least accessible outpost by means of modern equipment that would supplant the technological jalopy, still referred to as a transmitter, by means of which Great Britain occasionally went through the motions of determining that Pitcairn Island had not been washed into the Pacific.

Since it was not difficult to see the hand of officialdom in

the British Marconi Company's original presentation of the equipment that brought the call letters PITC into the radio world, we could be pardoned for thinking that superior equipment would be welcomed. No such luck. The minute you try to give something to Great Britain you are under suspicion,—sometimes under even worse suspicion than if you try to *take* something from Great Britain. The British feel that the fellow who has tried to take something from them has at least declared himself. His motives are known. But the blighters who are trying to *give* something—what are *they* up to?

The burning question now, therefore, was: what are Lindley, Bellem and NBC up to? Were we participants in an anti-British plot who were using this transmitter as an excuse to spy on Pitcairn Island and learn the secrets of its defenses? Were we diagramming and charting and mapping the place? Whence this sudden interest in Pitcairn Island and its lowly inhabitants? What, to repeat, were we up to? Declare yourselves, Messrs. Lindley and Bellem and Schechter. Don't hold anything back! For Scotland Yard will get you if you don't watch out.

I love tea, English muffins, Shakespeare, London bobbies, *The Mikado*, Bass' Ale, the odes of Keats and Shelley, Worcestershire sauce, Mr. Pickwick, Guinness' Stout, *Pinafore*, Rupert Brooke, fish and chips, *The Pirates of Penzance*, A. E. Housman, Beatrice Lillie, roast beef at Simpson's, Byron, *Iolanthe*, Mr. Micawber and the thousands of distillers whose "by special appointment to His Majesty the King" I have seen heralded on practically every scotch bottle-label I have ever read, but—and this is a big "but"—I hate red tape, especially the British variety with its annoying smugness.

Perhaps the tense should be changed. It would be more appropriate to say, How those British could annoy me in the days when they went in for red tape! For since the outbreak of the Second World War most British red tape has disappeared and the British are easy to deal with.

In fact, one of the few things on the asset side of the war

ledger I can think of is the virtual disappearance of official British stuffiness. There are still restrictions, but most of these are the ordinary precautions of a nation in a grim fight for survival and cannot be classified as red tape.

I casually radioed Fred Bate, our London representative, to see that the proper officials instructed R. E. Christian, Chief Magistrate of Pitcairn Island, to approve the installation of the new radio transmitter. Despite all my experience with British red tape I did not expect any difficulty.

If the British had wanted to give away Pitcairn I doubt if there would have been any takers. In fact, the new transmitter would make the little Pacific outpost worth owning, so I momentarily expected a reply informing me that Bellem, Lindley and I would one day be enshrined as Empire saints and would we be good enough to stipulate the window in Westminster Abbey on which we wanted our likenesses reproduced.

It developed that we had not made our purpose sufficiently clear, so we defined it all over again for the benefit of the British Colonial authorities. We told them how the plan for presenting the transmitter had originated, how that had led to the plan for broadcasting, etc., etc.

It developed that the proper procedure—it sounded a bit Gilbertian but who are we to ignore advice from the right sources?—was to describe for the benefit of the proper officials in London our “plans and purposes,” with plenty of information about Bellem and Lindley and “those behind them,” after which we were to request the Colonial office to request the Western Pacific High Commissioner at Suva, Fiji, to request someone else to grant station PITC a new frequency and new call letters which would make it possible for us to contact Bellem and Lindley from an NBC California station.

A few pages back I mentioned that usually we took nothing for granted. We had in this case, for Bellem and Lindley had reached Pitcairn Island when we were still trying to unravel the official red tape that had been wound around this venture until it was like a leg in a well-wrapped spiral puttee.

There was much cabling back and forth. We kept firing messages at the High Commissioner in Fiji and the Colonial Secretary in London and getting inconclusive replies. Hams were listening in on our conversations with our London office and, in an effort to be helpful, were relaying all sorts of messages that merely added to the general confusion.

We finally got word from the British Consulate that the High Commissioner of the Western Pacific Islands had granted "a temporary provisional license" permitting Andrew Young to operate the new equipment. One of the "provisions" was that the apparatus was to be presented not to the man Bellem and Lindley had set out to honor, but to the British Government.

There were many other conditions and stipulations, including one to the effect that communication with passing vessels would be restricted to "matters of interest to the island," whatever that meant. This applied not only to messages from Pitcairn Island to ships but from ships to the island, meaning that to live up to the requirements of the "provisions," Andrew Young would have to know before taking a message whether it involved "a matter of interest to the island." This, of course, added mind-reading to the qualifications necessary for a radio operator.

It was all a mess, though naturally any protest I made would be confined to the silly regulations affecting broadcasts. Bellem and Lindley were the donors of the transmitter and any protests about the equipment going to the British Government instead of to Andrew Young would have to come from them.

I telephoned the British Colonial office in London and said some undignified things to the first person I could reach who knew what it was all about. What I said was nasty and to the point. I've never straightened out a tangled foreign red-tape situation except by the use of well-chosen verbal brickbats.

Diplomacy is a long-winded ineffectual business at best, and at so many dollars per minute on the transoceanic tele-

phone, it runs into money. It's much simpler to reserve diplomacy for inexpensive local calls.

Brashness finally got results in my battle to put Pitcairn on the air. The decision of the High Commissioner was amended to read: "In view of the circumstances of this whole expedition, as a special concession, the Chief Magistrate at Pitcairn Island has been empowered to approve three short-wave broadcasts of not more than ten minutes each, to be confined strictly to non-political subjects, with no reference whatsoever to matters of government or administration."

This enabled us to go ahead, and we made our announcement of the forthcoming broadcasts from the island. The response from the public was gratifying. Here are some highlights indicative of the public's interest, as taken from our mail-response records:

1. There were 846 letters from stamp collectors requesting us to have Bellem and Lindley send them letters from the island. A word of greeting on a sheet of paper would be sufficient, or, if they didn't have the time, they could simply mail a blank sheet of paper in an envelope. Stamp collectors are evidently accustomed to paying their way, for each letter contained money, which we returned, of course. If we ever fall for the soft impeachments of the persuasive stamp collector we will have set a precedent and will have to start a Philatelic Division. But these people were interested in what we were doing and that was reassuring.

2. There were 417 letters from people who belonged to Pitcairn Island clubs. A small percentage of these knew people on the island and wanted to converse with them when we established the two-way broadcasting we announced as a feature of our programs from the island.

One of these letters was from the mayor of a town in the Southwest who said in part:

"I have been representing a small group of Pitcairn Islanders, in the United States, for more than twenty years,"

he wrote. "I keep in communication with them by mail, although this is not very satisfactory because there are no regular schedules to the island. I also occasionally receive a wireless message via passing steamers and amateur stations; and once in a while I get a wireless message through to them.

"When communication is opened I should like to have a few minutes on one of your programs, if this can be arranged."

Judging from the rest of the letter this man actually knew people on the island, but for several reasons we were unable to accommodate him.

3. There were thirty-seven letters from hams claiming we had made mistakes in our announcements over the air and in the newspapers about the forthcoming broadcasts from Pitcairn Island. Most of these pointed out what they declared to be technical errors in our description of the obsolete transmitter used for years by Andrew Young. Four of our critics claimed to have been in communication with him at one time or another—(one, a former ship's wireless operator, said he had talked with Young via short-wave from his ship when it was passing the island)—and insisted that their knowledge of the Pitcairn operator's equipment was based on questions they had asked him about it.

4. There were 1,003 letters from people who said that since we had been unable to give the exact dates of the broadcasts they feared they might miss them. What they had read and heard about Pitcairn Island had fascinated them and they didn't want to run the risk of missing these broadcasts. Would we be good enough to notify them of the exact dates when they were fixed?

5. And finally there were sixty-two letters requesting that we put some specific resident of Pitcairn on our programs from the island when we got around to organizing them. One of the most interesting of these letters follows:

83 Ivy Street
Brookline, Mass.
February 12, 1938

NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY,
Radio City, New York, N. Y:

GENTLEMEN:—

I understand that you have sent, or are sending, men to Pitcairn Island, to set up a broadcasting station there and plan to send out interviews with people on the island; and I am writing to tell you how greatly interested I am in this proposed program.

It has so happened that I have had a lifelong interest in Pitcairn Island, and have corresponded for many years with one of the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers living there. When I was a small boy an aunt of mine, Mrs. Adelia Talpey, whose husband was a sea-captain, visited the island with her husband on two of his voyages; and on one of these visits a baby girl by the name of McCoy,—a descendant of the mutineer of that name,—was baptized and named for my aunt. As the baby grew up a correspondence was carried on between them till my aunt's death; after which it was for many years kept up by my mother, and afterwards by other members of my family. This namesake of my aunt's is now Mrs. Edgar Christian, having married a descendant of Fletcher Christian, the leader of the mutiny, and usually goes by the name of Ada in the island, instead of by my aunt's name, Adelia.

The scores of letters that I and other members of my family have received from her show her to be an unusually intelligent person, and considering the limited opportunities she has had, a remarkably well educated one, whose acquaintance anyone might consider an honor; and it is largely with the object of trying to induce you to include her among those whose interviews you broadcast that I am writing you now.

However, I feel sure that I would not be the only one who would be interested to hear her speak, as I know of several other persons who have corresponded

with her,—some of them through introductions of my own. She also has, if I am not mistaken, a sister who is at present a schoolteacher living in Connecticut, and who would of course be interested in hearing her speak. In addition to this there are, I feel sure, quite a large number of people who would recognize her name from having seen it in an article written by Dorothy Brandon and published in *Maclean's Magazine* of January 1, 1935. Miss Brandon was one of the passengers on the schooner *Yankee* on one of the voyages when a stop was made at Pitcairn Island, and in her account of her visit she says:—

“It fell to my lot to be the guest of Ada and Edgar Christian;—pillars of the community and direct descendants of McCoy and Fletcher of *Bounty* fame. I was asked to call them by their given names, because there are so few surnames on the island; so Ada and Edgar they were from the start.

“Ada, a woman about fifty years old, had one of the calmest faces I had ever seen. She had a gentle, refined manner, and though her advantages had been very limited, I found her to be a lady in every sense of the word. She never raised her voice once during my visit; she executed her domestic duties with the greatest of ease and her every thought was for my comfort. In Ada Christian I felt that I had made a real friend, though in all probability I shall never see her again.”

Trusting that you will find it possible to give us an opportunity to hear Mrs. Christian's voice over the radio, and wishing you every success in your enterprising venture, I am

Very cordially yours,

DEXTER CARLETON WASHBURN.

There was great excitement among the islanders as Bellem and Lindley, arriving at Pitcairn, supervised the ferrying of their heavy equipment from the Panama Pacific liner to the island by means of small boats.

Andrew Young, who seldom left the little shanty that became known to the radio world as Station PITC, was on

shore to greet them and to express his appreciation of the recognition his efforts were receiving.

Assembling the new transmitter was a complicated engineering job that would take about three weeks, so we did not expect to hear from Bellem and Lindley for at least that length of time. When it was assembled we would conduct a series of tests to determine at which hour we could get the best transmission. Our tests satisfactorily concluded, we would stage the first of the broadcasts from the island.

It developed, by the way, that the late Richard Edgar Christian, Chief Magistrate of the Island, and a direct descendant of Fletcher Christian, was both happy and unhappy about the plan for the broadcasts. The erection of the transmitter was almost completed and still he had received no official word authorizing these broadcasts.

We had received our okay but Christian's was slow in coming. Oddly enough, when it finally came it was not transmitted by the official British Government wireless. It came through shortly after Bellem and Lindley had completed their job of assembling the new transmitter and was received over it by short-wave from the British Consul in New York. A couple of amateurs assisted in relaying it through to Bellem, who was operating the Pitcairn Island transmitter until Andrew Young became thoroughly acquainted with it. Thus one of my most exasperating red-tape experiences wound up on an unorthodox note.

Young, by the way, was rendered speechless by the powerful new equipment. He had read about such transmitters in radio magazines but not in his wildest dreams had he ever hoped to operate one. Despite his enthusiasm over the new equipment, however, he seemed a little sad about discarding the primitive transmitter that he seemed to regard as a pal. He kept it around quite a while where he could look at it.

After all the officials had been satisfied and all the necessary authorizations given, I got busy working out the kind of program I wanted for the first broadcast. We were all set technically, for Bellem and Lindley, clever engineers, had

done a fine job of assembling and testing the new transmitter. They would need all the help I could give them in connection with the actual broadcasts, for, after all, program-building was something new to them.

They were most co-operative in helping me put together the kind of program I wanted, which called for native singers, native music,—(an odd combination of what they had heard and improvised)—and brief talks by the Chief Magistrate, Radio Operator Young, and the two engineers themselves. The speechifying was to be informal, with emphasis on certain human-interest values which I defined. There was to be a strict minimum of such stultifying platitudes as “on this historic occasion,” “this red-letter day in radio annals,” “a landmark to which future chroniclers of radio will give due recognition,” etc. Radio audiences have suffered through too much of that tripe.

Our first broadcast took place on the night of April 6, 1938, and was a success.

We went to work on a second program in which we planned to feature Vreder Carlton Young, then the oldest living descendant of the original *Bounty* mutineers. At eighty-nine this oldster, reputed to be the most colorful story-teller on the island, was in good health, and we planned to give him a five-minute spot if it developed that his voice was good enough. The old boy was said to possess an infectious gusto that made his fair to middling stories seem good and his good stories great.

We mentioned the Pitcairn octogenarian in an announcement of our forthcoming second broadcast from the island. The announcement caught the eye of Bob Ripley of *Believe It or Not* fame, and Bob put in a bid for Vreder Carlton Young as a feature of one of his broadcasts. Somehow the old man got lost in the shuffle—(my records do not show how this happened or why)—but Ripley wanted a Pitcairn Island program just the same and we finally consummated the arrangements, after taking the matter up with Bellem and Lindley and getting their approval.

Ripley's show was a commercial program and the sponsors (from whom Bellem and Lindley would derive their compensation for this particular program) insisted on a rehearsal. Poor Bellem nearly went crazy finding the type of material Ripley wanted and then taking down, word for word, the six-and-one-half-minute talk based on his material that was prepared in New York by the script-writer for the *Believe It or Not* program. This talk he was to deliver himself.

It is safe to say that the try-out of Bellem's talk broke all records for long-distance rehearsing for a radio appearance. The rehearsal went off well and the Ripley show featuring Bellem's talk from Pitcairn Island was scheduled for April 26. The engineer did a first-rate job and stirred up a lot of enthusiastic comment in radio circles.

The only criticism we had of the program involved the unnaturalness of Bellem's repeating the phrase "believe it or not" as frequently as Bob Ripley wanted it used. The script-writer, overpowered by the romantic hocus-pocus of the occasion, outdid himself in the use of lyrical passages and never was glamour made to seem more glamorous or nostalgia more nostalgic. Writers of poetic travel leaflets who thought they had cornered the market in terminology heavy with the fragrance of the heavenly blooms of far-away Garden Spots must have turned green—and all the other colors in the spectrum—with envy.

Here is a passage from this splendid prose poem that made such an emphatic hit:

. . . The Southern Cross has taken its place in the heavens to watch over this South Sea Island paradise. Soon the moon steals over St. Paul's Peak, to silhouette pandanus "palms" and majestic coconut trees against the sky of cold, silvery radiance, and from one of the island homes amid such a setting of tropical splendor comes the music of an antiquated phonograph, reproducing the strains of some almost forgotten melody. Truly the music breaks the island stillness, as if wafted on the exotic aroma of the countless blooms of the

frangipani trees. And so too ends the day for the stranger so fortunate as to be accorded the privilege of tarrying amid the grandeur of rock-bound Pitcairn. And with these few remarks, Bob, let's get on with the show.

I am sure if our positions were reversed, and you were here, you could uncover no end of unusual oddities in this unique community. Believe it or not, I am grateful that the opportunity did not come to you first. One's first impression of Pitcairn concerns the type and construction of all the island homes. Setting on innumerable stilts of knotty timber, their rough-hewn unpainted appearance attracts more than passing attention. Inquiry brings out the fact that each house is fabricated from native trees, felled on the mountain-side.

These are dragged down to the village, placed on high racks, and ripped into rough boards with huge pith-saws. Believe it or not, etc.

No "color" broadcast within my memory had elicited a finer response, believe it or not. It was gratifying—because it showed that this was no mere long-distance stunt—to learn from the letter response that the general public was as enthusiastic as the hams everywhere who now eagerly followed everything that involved Pitcairn. And when you can score simultaneously with the average listener and a specialist like the radio amateur, you've got something, believe it or not. At least that's what my hypercritical associates tell me, b.i. or n.

On April 29th we put on the last of the three broadcasts from the island that we were permitted under our agreement with the British Government. It was a great farewell party, featured by Bellam's presentation of the transmitter. This was not repetition, either, as I recall the matter. The first time he gave it to the islanders; this time he gave it to the British Government.

It was a wonderful leave-taking,—sentimental, tearful, human. Bellem and Lindley had gone over big, and the

islanders were cut up over their impending departure. Some of the natives actually wept, so it was only natural that some real emotion got into the broadcast,—and that never hurt a program. Radio audiences get plenty of stage tears in soap operas; they seldom hear anything like the good cry several of the islanders had for themselves as they said goodbye over the air-waves to their benefactors.

We expected this to be our last broadcast from Pitcairn for a long time, but a strange set of circumstances contrived to put the island back in the headlines in July of the same year. A story was headlined all over the United States—and picked up by the press in many foreign countries, for lonely little Pitcairn's fame was now worldwide—telling of a typhoid epidemic on the island.

No one seems to know for sure how the story got out. Some newspaper people trace it to reports picked up and relayed by radio amateurs. Those who advanced this theory seemed at a loss to know where the hams—whose reports are reliable more frequently than not—got their information. But the fact remains that the British Government quickly spiked the story. They had investigated the report, they announced, and had discovered it to be wholly without foundation.

Some thought the British were covering up. But the British, with characteristic forthrightness—a virtue more important than red-tape is a vice—repeated their denial, pointing out they were compelled to do this to discourage those who were talking about organizing a committee to send a rescue ship which would carry doctors, nurses, medical supplies and food to the “stricken.” They would not and could not permit well-meaning people to spend money on a mission of mercy designed to fight a non-existent epidemic.

Regardless of the facts, Pitcairn was once more in the news in a big way and I again applied to the British Government's Western Pacific High Commissioner for permission to do a broadcast from the island. I pointed out that the best way to kill the false reports would be to interview Andrew Young, have him discuss the “epidemic” (about which he undoubt-

edly knew by now as a result of the many times it had figured in news broadcasts), and, if possible, explain the origin of this queer scare story.

The British liked my suggestion and promptly authorized me to go ahead. In London the papers were still featuring the story of the epidemic, with all the trimmings that had got into American papers and news broadcasts, including ours: food shortage, no medical supplies, etc. So the British also okayed my suggestion that we short-wave the program to London for rebroadcast in England.

Mrs. Dorothy Hall of Springfield, Long Island, for years one of the country's leading radio amateurs, had been in constant communication with Andrew Young for weeks prior to the epidemic story. It struck me that novelty would be added to the basic news value of the story if we staged a conversation between Mrs. Hall and Andrew Young, rebroadcasting this "two-way" on a coast-to-coast hook-up.

Young got his permission to go on the air for us simultaneously with the receipt of our authorizations to stage the broadcast. Mrs. Hall graciously agreed to let us set up facilities for doing the relay from the radio room of her residence, so we were all set.

The broadcast took place on July 27, 1938, and despite interference and the indistinctness of Young's replies to Mrs. Hall's questions in the opening minutes, the program had dramatic value and what is known in the trade as "listener interest."

I can cite programs of ours that were flops because of interference or fuzziness. In this case, fortuitously, our efforts early in the broadcast to elicit information merely lent suspense. Not till we reached the two-thirds mark did we get definite assurances from Young that there was no epidemic on the island. In fact, a friend joshingly accused me of deliberately holding up Young's denial until the end. "You operated," he said, "on the ancient principle of the acrobat who heightens the effect of a difficult stunt by first failing twice."

Young finally got through to us with a good informal

report on health conditions on the island. There had been only one recent case of illness on the island,—a girl who was recuperating from bronchitis. She had seemed so ill when she first took to her bed that they were worried about her. She acted suspiciously like someone else who had come down with a bad case of pneumonia. A ship was passing fairly close to the island and Chief Magistrate Christian had ordered the radio operator to appeal to the ship's captain to stop at Pitcairn and put off the ship's doctor.

The message was sent and the captain of the passing vessel agreed to put in at the island. The ship's doctor was picked up by Pitcairn oarsmen who rowed him to shore and rushed him to the patient's side.

"Bronchitis," the doctor had said, "she'll be all right in three weeks if you watch her carefully." He left some medicine and returned to his ship.

Soon after the doctor's departure the rumors of the typhoid epidemic started.

Who started them? No one knows. It's still a mystery.

Be that as it may, radio performed a service by putting the final quietus on the false reports.

XXI

Offshoots and Oddments

WHEN the President of the United States goes on the air every precaution is taken to prevent a slip-up. Double sets of equipment are installed, lines are checked and rechecked; in fact, nothing is overlooked in an effort to do a perfect job.

Despite this, once in a while something goes wrong.

In 1938—I don't recall the exact date—President Roosevelt was scheduled to deliver a morning speech which we were to carry on one network. On the other network we had a breakfast-food commercial.

The President was to be introduced from Washington while he spoke from another city. In a case of this kind control of the program is held in New York, and Washington merely becomes another microphone position.

Everything was going along smoothly until New York discovered that the stations supposed to be getting the cereal program were getting the President. New York frantically called the Washington control desk, "Cut him! Cut him!" the voice said.

A slow, Southern drawl answered, "Mister, you can do what you want, but down in this bailiwick we don't cut the President of the United States."

The upshot of the matter was that New York did cut him off the wrong stations and joined the cereal program just in time to hear a glowing endorsement of the product.

So the President of the United States puzzled a lot of people by seeming to be selling Bixby's Barley Grits, the luncheon of champions, in the big pink box.

You learn a lot from the reactions of the stations to broadcasts of a special nature. One of the most pointed telegrams

we received during the last International Yacht Races was from one of our stations in the Middle West. It read:

THE MIDDLE WEST HAS NEVER HEARD OF A J-CLASS SLOOP
HAS NEVER SEEN ONE AND NEVER WILL. GIVE US MUSIC.

Jeff Davis, yachting expert of the *Providence Journal*, saw to it thereafter that we translated all yachting terms into simple, understandable English.

During the International Races in 1937 so many airplanes decided to follow the yachts over the course that the Coast Guard, as a safety measure, asked all the pilots to travel in one great circle and to continue round and round in this clockwise fashion. It was a sound ruling.

One day as the two yachts were approaching the finish line, the airplane from which we were staging some of our broadcasts was almost directly over the two contestants. Our plane continued to travel in the prescribed circle. An airplane chartered by a New York newspaper and carrying a staff photographer was about two miles back in this circle, and when the pilot saw that the race was about to come to an end, he suddenly shot out of line and raced for the scene of the finish.

The newspaper plane almost collided with ours. In fact, it clipped our antenna and our ship had to make a power climb while the newspaper plane was forced to make a power dive to prevent a crash.

The antenna that had been dropped over the side of our plane was snipped by the rule-breaking pilot and as a result we lost contact with the NBC plane which had been providing us with one of our best running stories. Fortunately even yachts that are about to cross a finish line are pretty slow in doing it, so we were able to cover the finish by communicating with one of our crews aboard a Coast Guard vessel and getting them to rush to the finish line.

I decided to look over our arrangements for the final race of the Vanderbilt-Sopwith set-to. I was on the way from New

York to Newport by car and was passing through Providence when I heard someone say over my radio, which was tuned to one of the local stations, "Shut up, Greek!" Even though I heard this against a musical background, it was not exactly music to my ears.

Recognizing the voice as that of Jack Hartley of our news staff, I drove to the nearest telephone pay-station, hopped out and telephoned our control-point at the Coast Guard station at Bretton Point.

When I got Hartley on the telephone I learned that it was his wisecrack that had come over the air.

"What's the big idea?" I asked Jack. "That 'Shut up, Greek!' stuff sounds awful."

"We are not broadcasting," replied Jack, "just testing."

It developed that the boys were testing their mobile equipment along the shore near the Coast Guard station. Their signal had somehow carried across to Providence and had got through to a regular normal wave-length channel that was carrying a musical program.

Later on I joined Hartley's unit as the boys were doing some more testing at the Coast Guard station. I had just spent a few hours arguing some society women into allowing us to run lines over their backyards. I discovered this was good for my appetite. So I was in a receptive mood when Hartley yelled to me as I approached the mobile unit, "We are going to town to eat. What would you like?" I figured that Jack was asking the question so he would know what type of restaurant to take me to. "I guess I'll have a steak," I said.

About half an hour later we pulled up at a Howard Johnson restaurant on the outskirts of Newport. The place was jammed. Every table was taken. "Let's try another place," I said as I turned to go.

"They'll take care of us all right," said Hartley as he took me by the arm and moved me toward a table. There were four of us in the party.

Just as I was about to ask, "How about getting someone to

take our order?" a waitress started serving our meal, including my steak.

It developed that the boys on the mobile unit did not confine themselves to the meaningless phrases by means of which equipment is usually tested. They had discovered that the radio at the Howard Johnson restaurant was capable of picking up their tests, which gave them the idea of naming actual food in conducting these tests and asking the waitresses to listen in for their orders.

Years ago F.P.A. made a practice of citing in his column in the old *New York World* examples of what he called the maximum of effort with the minimum result.

Which reminds me of the French journalist who called on me in 1938 to study our method of handling news and special events. He said he had come to the United States for the sole purpose of studying American radio news methods. As he interviewed me for his paper, he told me that he expected his article to have an effect on French news broadcasting, which he said was "exploited by too many amateurs and incompetent professionals who were discrediting a great new form of communication."

He thanked me profusely for the information and suggestions I gave him. A dozen trips to America would be justified if each visit yielded so many valuable tips and so good a close-up of what he declared to be a more factual, spirited, and pointed handling of news over the air. French commentators, he said, rambled on endlessly about minor stories. These shortcomings would be corrected, he hoped, by the tactful use of the information he had picked up in the United States.

Some weeks later I received a clipping of a flattering five-column interview headed: "*Le Radio-reportage aux Etats-Unis.*" In infinite detail the French journalist spread on the record the views of "*M. Schechter, directeur des services de Radio-reportages de la N.B.C.*" There were four two-column photographs showing members of our news staff covering important stories. Two of them showed the "directeur des Ser-

vices de Radio-reportage de la N.B.C." in the act of helping make radio news coverage in the United States the fine thing it is today.

I was all set to dash into the boss's office with this evidence of how we were already affecting French radio journalism in accordance with the plan of the gentleman who interviewed me when this "tactful" line in his story leaped up from the page and belted me between the eyes: "These American methods cannot be adopted because of the ignorance of French radio officials."

The day before the 1940 White House reception for the press and radio, Bill McAndrew of our Washington office was standing in the hallway outside Mrs. Roosevelt's studio in the White House waiting for her to appear for a broadcast.

A friend of Bill's, also waiting for Mrs. Roosevelt, engaged Bill in conversation. "How about dinner tomorrow night?" asked Bill's friend.

"Thanks, but I can't make it," said McAndrew. "I'll be at the White House reception."

As McAndrew made his declaration Mrs. Roosevelt came up even with the conversing pair and said, "Well, I'm glad someone is coming."

Mrs. Roosevelt enjoys great popularity among radio people in Washington. She is easy to work with and goes out of her way to co-operate with announcers, engineers and production men.

Paul Archinard, formerly in charge of our Paris office, and now reporting for us at Vichy, has sent me some of the most interesting letters I have received from our foreign staff since the start of the Second World War.

Here are some excerpts from a long letter Paul sent me as the Germans were smashing through France:

"JUNE 10: A week after the NBC office in Paris was bombed, I pulled out for Tours with Helen Hiatt, Kay Herrick, and sundry baggage. It took us six hours to cover eighty

miles to Orleans, which meant fast stepping in face of conditions. We slept in the park and reached Tours next morning in time to cover our noon show.

"JUNE 11: At Tours I covered the first night shows, writing my story in the studio by candlelight while German planes flew over the city looking for nice spots on which to drop their bombs. Had to hike two miles in the rain and darkness to the censor's office in town, trusting to luck that no shell fragments would spoil my features and broadcast. It was impossible to drive a car, forbidden in fact. Studios were in suburbs near railroad tracks and well located in case of bombardments. We were sure to see fireworks. There was no shelter—only a glass roof over what was once a perfume factory.

"JUNE 12: Signs of a general move southward. Set off ourselves Thursday afternoon exactly thirty minutes before bombardment of Tours. Fact is, we had to lie in a ditch for an hour while bombers cruised overhead.

"JUNE 14: Reached Bordeaux in time for noon broadcast after sleeping in wheatfield and getting good case rheumatism or something in left foot. We had three shows out of Bordeaux before competition turned up.

"JUNE 15-19: Slept in car. Helen got room in town. . . . Lucky breaks on Reynaud resignation which we announced before French radio and any paper. . . .

"JUNE 19: Germans getting too damn close for comfort and for my peace of mind. All broadcasting stopped. Competition left this morning. . . .

"JUNE 23-24: American press representatives and American Colony in France stampeded Biarritz consulate to leave country. Followed to St. Jean de Luz in hope going along too. Passport complications and visas hindered this. So lit out for interior to follow Government about two hours before German troops arrived at St. Jean. Last American had gone; so had last British ship for England—which was luck, else I might be stuck there now.

"It took me a week to reach Clermont, gasoline trouble was main cause. It took a whole afternoon to get gas. Camped

by wayside. Lot more rain than ever saw since rainy season I knew down in Cuba thirty years ago.

"Now endeavoring set up facilities in Vichy. Trust you got wire and could advise Jordan. Would like know what chance broadcast from Paris and my status with German Komandanten. In this respect feel pretty confident okay, since always abided rules NBC in objective and neutral commentaries of the war. . . .

"I shall stick it out over here as long as possible. . . . Keep my salary for me until further notice."

"This joint is lousy with clocks." One of our guides who had just completed a tour of our New York studios with a group of sightseers quoted a member of the party as making that remark.

The joint *is* lousy with clocks. This is because the whole radio industry operates on split-second precision.

There are hundreds of clocks in our New York studios alone,—in fact, there are so many of them that the man whose task it is to check up on them finds time for nothing else. His job is to see that these clocks are always exactly right. If your watch were only ten seconds slow or fast you would probably think of it as a perfect timepiece. The chances are you would not even know about the error.

In radio, however, ten seconds can be an eternity. A clock that is ten or even two seconds off can get you into a lot of trouble.

All radio stations have to keep their clocks exactly right. Some two hundred stations are involved in a switch from one program to another over the two NBC networks, and the timing in all those stations must be perfectly synchronized. Eternal vigilance is necessary. Even the best clocks have a way of gaining or losing a few seconds, and it is the job of our official clock-watcher to detect at once the slightest deviation from perfect accuracy.

The bars and restaurants in the neighborhood of Radio City set their clocks from five to ten minutes fast. They are the

most time-conscious purveyors of food and drink I know. They know that most people like to dawdle and they seem to feel that "the radio gang" should be given a little insurance. Not many members of the radio gang know that these clocks are fast, and I trust that this paragraph will not result in more leisureliness than the margin of safety justifies.

Perhaps I will catch hell from someone for publicly revealing the secret of the fast clocks.

Some years ago when I was gathering news for NBC under difficulties I ran into a fascinating story in a newspaper published in English in Shanghai. The press-radio war was at its height and the ordinary news channels were shut to us. The press associations were not permitted to serve us and we were not allowed to clip news out of the newspapers.

This, of course, applied only to American newspapers. Nothing had been said about newspapers published in Shanghai. Having become an expert all-nations foreign correspondent by means of what I called Scissors Coverage—(in fact, I've covered far more ground with my shears than John Gunther, Vincent Sheean, and a host of other writers of foreign correspondence memoirs ever did by the slower methods described in their books)—and I could see that I had something in this Shanghai item. Its seven brief paragraphs contained more story elements than I had ever seen before in so short a piece,—murder, banditry, social significance, sacrifice, a colorful setting, suicide, a hero who, more than any character I had ever met in fiction or real life, placed honor first, and a rescue in the nick of time from certain death.

It was the story of the Hwang family who had once been well-to-do farmers. They had been especially successful in raising the finest grade of Chinese peanuts. Civil war came and their green acres became a battlefield. Except for a patch of weeds here and there nothing grew any longer in that charred and devastated soil that had once given so bountiful a yield of food to eat and food to sell for pieces of silver.

Papa Hwang's despair grew to dark desperation. The

money-lenders would not let him have another yen; for he no longer had collateral. His family were starving. This, and the fact that he was heavily in debt, meant only one thing: he would have to put his family out of their misery and also kill himself. It was the only honorable thing to do. It would be cruel to let his wife and children suffer any longer.

No matter how fine his motive he would be committing murder—the thought made him shudder—but it was murder in a good cause. Simultaneously he would commit suicide—that thought also made him shiver in his tattered slippers—but it was more honorable to do these things than to continue listlessly acting out roles in this dreary drama of living death.

He had worked out a plan. With some pieces of silver that his superstitious wife had saved as luck charms—each one part of a liberal payment for a plentiful crop—he bought meats and fish and fowl and vegetables and cakes and fruit for a final feast that would be reminiscent of what once had been normal living in the house of Hwang. He would poison the food and they would all die together.

He explained the banquet to his family as an effort to placate the gods who had been known to relent when people whom they were crushing showed enough spirit to gamble for momentary happiness. He quoted Confucius: "He who is poverty-stricken can sometimes give his life a new pattern by contriving an action more in keeping with a full purse than an empty one."

The feast was prepared. Everything was in readiness. Just as Hwang and his family prepared to sit down and partake of the elaborate food which he had secretly poisoned there was a crash of shots as bandits swarmed in and overpowered all of the Hwangs.

Bound hand and foot, Hwang's wife and children and all the others who lived with them—including his wife's aged parents and his own—looked on as the bandits ate the poisoned food and dropped dead. Hwang said the gods were punishing them for their avarice and the members of his family accepted

this explanation for it was habitual with them to accept anything he said as the truth.

When all of the bandits were stretched out dead on the floor Hwang sent for the authorities who instantly recognized the dead marauders as members of one of the most notorious bandit rings in the land. There was a price equivalent to \$5,000 on their heads.

This money was paid to Hwang, who was now able to settle his debts. With what remained—a tidy sum—he would be able to restore his farm and once again all the Hwangs would have plenty to eat and be able to live in comfort. Hwang offered up fervent thanks to the kindly fates that had frustrated his original plan.

We used the story.

Two years later it turned up again. This time it was laid in the little village of Shan Kung in the outskirts of the city of Shingishu in Korea. Instead of Hwang the name of the family was Kang. Like the Hwangs the Kangs were farmers. The only difference here was that the principal crop of the Hwangs was peanuts, whereas the Kangs were rice growers almost exclusively.

The poverty of the Hwangs had been caused by civil war. Cobras which infested the rice *padis* and nipped the work oxen as they worked in the fields, had ruined the Kangs. Ox after ox had died of cobra bite. As fast as they replaced the stricken beasts the cobras would kill them. At last they were reduced to poverty and plunged into debt.

The head of the house of Kang, like the head of the house of Hwang, decided to stage a final feast. He would have the last of the oxen slaughtered and roasted on a huge spit. Then he would smear the meat with a deadly poison and he and his family would die together.

From this point on the Kang story was identically the same as the Hwang story. Like version one, version two was written as a straight news item. Names, places and dates were given,—even the sum of money which the Kangs owed the money-lenders at Shingishu before they had their stroke of good luck.

This story has turned up on my desk so many times I have named it Old Faithful.

Shortly after Germany's invasion of Holland, Bill McAndrew of our Washington news staff was conversing with Secretary Hull who was about to go on the air for us.

Bill told the Secretary of State about a bulletin we had just received from Holland in which the situation was described as grave.

"My boy," said Hull, "watch the next ten days. The situation is more than grave."

Needless to say, the Secretary was right. In fact, this was the first time in my career as a newsman that the normally powerful journalistic cliché—"the situation is grave"—emerged as a weak understatement.

Should Christmas be abolished? Annually I ask myself that question early in December. It is not that there is anything fundamentally wrong with Christmas but that the problem of evolving something new and different in the way of Christmas programs is becoming tougher and tougher.

Unexpected developments have a way of threatening and sometimes upsetting the best-laid plans of News and Special Events. For instance, a few weeks before Christmas in 1939 I got an idea for a Christmas broadcast from the Maginot and Siegfried Lines. Things were pretty quiet on the Western Front at the time and there was a lot of talk about a "phoney war." Was this a time to emphasize further that the war had bogged down by having soldiers sing Christmas carols from pill-boxes? I wondered.

Some of the same people who have since expressed horror over the inhumanity of modern warfare felt cheated by the headlines that promised so much blood and thunder and yielded so little. When you got back into the runover you ran into those stories about big friendly signs displayed on both Maginot and Siegfried fortifications indicating that the French and Germans were trying to fraternize.

I know one man who had every edition of all the New York afternoon papers sent up to his office from the day war was declared in September of 1939. And his business was not following the news. Fundamentally he was not a bloodthirsty sort, but the stage had been set for a big European tiff, and after a few months of the tamest kind of scenes in the theatre of war he was all set to go to the box office and demand his money back. He had bought a lot of tickets—all those newspapers—and he wasn't getting his money's worth. Whoever had angeled this production didn't know show business.

I was thinking of this man—and the many others who were reading newspapers and turning dials only to hear about a phoney war—as I sent my radiograms to our Paris and Berlin representatives telling them about the Maginot-Siegfried broadcast I hoped to stage on Christmas eve. Our Paris office replied in part: "What you are attempting runs counter to what both governments are trying to accomplish. In your meddling way you are trying to stir up good-will at a time when they are striving valiantly to create true war feeling."

Well, we got the Christmas broadcasts from the Siegfried and Maginot Lines, as described more fully in the next chapter. French and German soldiers, against a background of big guns and vast stores of munitions, sang their Yuletide carols.

As a kind of Christmas cheer to those made unhappy by the phoniness of the war, the French refused to broadcast on the same program with the Germans. So, four hours later, we gave the French a separate program on a different network.

When we cut into the networks to put on the flash that the *Graf Spee* had been exploded and scuttled we were compelled to interrupt the Sherwin-Williams operatic program.

The studio never knew they had been cut off the air. The listeners heard a break in the music, followed by a voice saying: "This is NBC at Montevideo. The *Graf Spee* has been scuttled and sunk. We return you to the National Broadcasting Company."

Then in came Announcer Milton Cross in a deep, calm voice: "And that is all you need to know about paint."

Occasionally I am called on to make an address on some aspect of my job. When my talk is over there is the inevitable question-asking bee.

I had made the statement in one of these talks that, in addition to trivia, future historians would find valuable material in our files. One of my questioners wanted to know what I meant by "valuable material." He assumed I meant the radio speeches of Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, Churchill, Roosevelt and other world figures. "After all," he said, "the newspapers carry the text of such speeches. Historians can get such things out of back files."

I was grateful to my interrogator even though in addition to questioning me about what I meant by the "valuable material" for future historians, he tried to supply the answer. I was not thinking in terms of world figures, although it might be pointed out that our files contain permanent records—in the form of electrical transcriptions—of the voices of the world figures mentioned.

What I had in mind was the accumulation of speech and interview scripts involving lesser figures who have played some little role here and there in the drama of history-in-the-making.

I cited as an example of what I meant a radio interview—by George Hicks—with William A. McHale, Captain of the Moore-McCormack freighter *Mormacsea*, the first ship in Norway at the time of the German invasion to arrive in the United States. When I described this broadcast my questioner agreed that material of this character would be helpful to future chroniclers of these times.

To give the reader a better idea of what I mean, I am appending some excerpts from this broadcast:

HICKS: Where was your ship the day the Germans invaded Norway?

McHALE: Tied up at the dock in Trondheim.

HICKS: What were you doing in Norway, Captain?

McHALE: I was there to discharge my cargo from the United States.

HICKS: What was in your cargo?

McHALE: Automobiles, oil, Red Cross goods and general cargo.

HICKS: Who was to get this cargo?

McHALE: Sweden, Finland, and Norway.

HICKS: How long had you been tied up in Trondheim before you saw the Germans?

McHALE: I tied up on April 8th. The Germans came in on the 9th.

HICKS: Captain, many of us here in the United States are still in the dark as to what happened on that first day. Can you tell us, as you saw it, what happened on the morning of April 9th?

McHALE: Well, the first thing I heard was an airplane flying around my ship. It flew around three or four times. . . . It woke me up. . . . It was very early. . . . I went out on deck and saw a big cruiser in the harbor, with her decks loaded with troops. And looking around I saw a destroyer, also with troops.

HICKS: You didn't see or hear these ships come into the harbor?

McHALE: No, sir.

HICKS: How did you know they were German ships?

McHALE: Well, I went round the decks and I looked over the side and onto the dock, and I saw a lot of soldiers there, and they looked suspiciously like German soldiers I'd seen before.

HICKS: Were they in uniform?

McHALE: They were in uniform.

HICKS: I see. Did you ask anybody what was happening?

McHALE: I asked the night watchman on the ship, a Norwegian I'd hired to keep me posted on things, "Are they Germans?" He said, "No, they're Norwegians."

HICKS: Why would he say that, I wonder?

McHALE: I don't know.

HICKS: What happened after you saw the German fighting ships and the German soldiers on the dock?

McHALE: Next thing a German officer came aboard and asked me if I'd allow one of his ships to come alongside of mine, to land material and soldiers off my ship. My ship was smack alongside the dock.

HICKS: You mean he wanted to tie up on the outside of your ship and walk across it?

McHALE: Yes, that's it. I told him I didn't want anybody to board my ship,—that I'd prefer to shift the ship first and let them take my berth.

HICKS: That was all right with them?

McHALE: Yes. . . . I asked then if there was a war on in Norway and they said no,—that they'd only come over here to protect Norway from the English.

HICKS: Did they bring their ships along the dock?

McHALE: I moved my ship into another berth and they put one of their war-ships just where my previous berth was and discharged ten or twelve small cannon, a lot of troops and ammunition and stores.

HICKS: The ammunition was boxed, I suppose?

McHALE: Oh, yes, all boxed.

HICKS: Were there any British or Norwegian fighting ships in sight in the harbor or in the fjord?

McHALE: No.

HICKS: How did the Norwegians feel when they, like you, saw the Germans on their land that morning?

McHALE: They all seemed to be dumbfounded. They couldn't make head or tail of it.

HICKS: Did they show resentment,—did they want to fight back?

McHALE: They were so taken by surprise they didn't know what to do.

HICKS: Did the Germans tell you what to do?

McHALE: They said I could leave or stay, but advised me to stay. I decided not to unload and to leave.

HICKS: You were up in the town of Trondheim after the German occupation, weren't you, Captain McHale? Did you see troops scattered through the town?

McHALE: Yes, at all the vital points around the town there were little detachments of troops around the bridges, street corners, and at all the big business buildings, and shipping offices.

HICKS: They were armed, of course.

McHALE: All armed—a lot of them had hand grenades in their belts, too.

HICKS: Did they have bayonets on their guns?

McHALE: Bayonets on their guns.

HICKS: In other words, they were troops ready for action.

McHALE: Ready for action. . . .

HICKS: What kind of men were these German troops?

McHALE: Mostly young boys between seventeen and twenty.

HICKS: Did they seem to be well trained or like green youngsters that didn't know what it was all about?

McHALE: No, they all seemed to know where to go and what to do.

HICKS: You mean that there seemed to be a plan?

McHALE: Yes. Everybody seemed to know exactly what his job was.

HICKS: How did the people of Trondheim act toward these troops standing in their town, the Norwegians I mean?

McHALE: They just stood around in little groups staring at them. Occasionally you heard little groups mumbling to each other about it.

HICKS: Before you were at Trondheim, you were at Bergen, weren't you?

McHALE: Yes.

HICKS: And I understand that you picked up a cargo there. Will you tell us about that?

McHALE: Well, I picked up a lot of general cargo that had been transhipped from Copenhagen, Oslo, and various ports, and also four and a half million dollars in gold.

HICKS: Where did the gold come from?

McHALE: Stockholm.

HICKS: How did you get it from Stockholm?

McHALE: It was sent by rail from Stockholm to Bergen.

HICKS: In other words, when you were in Trondheim, you had four and a half million dollars of gold in your hold? Do you think the Germans had any idea you had any such cargo aboard?

McHALE: No. I kept them away from the ship so they couldn't possibly learn anything.

HICKS: Of course, the Swedish were sending this money to the United States?

McHALE: Yes, for safekeeping.

HICKS: Where did you store the gold?

McHALE: It was carefully hidden in the lamp locker.

HICKS: Did you allow any of your men to go ashore?

McHALE: No.

HICKS: Why?

McHALE: So as they couldn't get around and talk to people about what I had on the ship. I trusted them, but I was afraid of a slip. I was taking no chances.

HICKS: How did the German naval vessels get through that narrow fjord at Trondheim?

McHALE: I don't know the whole story, but a former Norwegian naval officer told me that a cruiser came through the fjord with a small Norwegian passenger boat alongside of it.

HICKS: And used it as a shield?

McHALE: Used it as a shield.

HICKS: So that the fort on shore couldn't fire on the cruiser without hitting the passenger vessel?

McHALE: Yes. The Norwegian also said that the cruiser had notified those in command of the forts that he'd blow heck out of the town if they didn't surrender.

HICKS: Then the forts surrendered?

McHALE: Yes. Of course, the Germans had already landed troops at the foot of the fort—and they just marched up and took over.

HICKS: The Germans seem to have had it all figured out in advance.

McHALE: It must have been figured out months ahead.

HICKS: Captain, did you see any British war-ships on the morning of the 9th, the day of the invasion?

McHALE: No, no fighting ships at all—but there was a freighter in the drydock.

HICKS: A British merchant ship?

McHALE: Yes. And I was told by one of the Germans that they'd just taken forty men off her as prisoners. They took the British merchantman over for their own use.

HICKS: What did they do with the British prisoners?

McHALE: The next day I saw these British prisoners being put into lifeboats and taken out to the harbor to be put aboard a German transport that looked something like the *Tacoma* that was at Montevideo.

HICKS: Did you witness any fighting?

McHALE: Yes. You see, I moved my ship away from the Trondheim harbor for safety. I didn't want to be alongside those destroyers if enemy bombers came. On the way to a little place called Homovik, about ten miles away, we were looking astern and there were five planes. They proved to be German. And the cruiser opened fire on them.

HICKS: On their own planes?

McHALE: Yes, thinking they were enemy planes. We saw one with a shattered wing being forced to land in a field.

HICKS: That was only an accident?

McHALE: Yes. . . . Of course, we stopped the ship to see that.

HICKS: Did the Germans tell you whether they'd mined the fjord when you left?

McHALE: No, sir. When I asked the Germans for permission to leave—and of course I had to—I inquired of the officer in command if the Germans had laid any mines. He would not say yes or no.

HICKS: So you took your chances and went out anyway?

McHALE: Yes.

To our staff in the capital "Santa Claus," "Yuletide," "Kris Kringle," "Season's Greetings," etc., are fighting words. In fact, I have stopped saying "Merry Christmas" to the Washington staff because I am tired of getting the stock reply, "What's merry about it?"

NBC's principal Christmas show from Washington is our International Young Folks Program, which features the children of diplomats sending their greetings by short-wave back home and to the rest of the world.

Naturally, there are a number of delicate situations arising, what with protocol and diplomatic precedents; and ever since the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, even more delicate situations have arisen among children of diplomats whose nations are at war.

In 1939, for example, no children from attachés of the German Embassy took part. The official reason given was that the children were out of town. However, it's said that the real reason was that the Embassy wanted to save the children from possible embarrassment. Previously they had to be withdrawn from a private school in Washington because they had been taunted by their schoolmates over Hitler and the War. And it was feared that some incident might mar their participation in the radio show.

In the United States, and in many other countries, indignation over Italy's Ethiopian adventure was at its height when a chubby little boy from the Italian Embassy caused program officials some anxious moments.

After finishing his routine Christmas greeting the little Italian boy threw out his chest, pushed his hand up in a Fascist salute and while an audience of diplomats gasped, he shouted into the microphone, "Viva Mussolini! Viva Italia!"

Another time when the Japanese were pulverizing the Chinese with daily bombing raids, children from the Japanese Embassy went on the Christmas program with a message of "peace and good-will at the Yuletide."

Children from the Chinese Embassy, sitting across the room, merely stared.

Some years ago when the Hunter brothers were making their record-breaking endurance flights over the Chicago Airport, Wallace Butterworth, who was doing the announcing for us, waited day after day for the flyers to come down so that he could interview them. The Hunter brothers had perfected a means of refueling in mid-air, and it looked as if they would never come down.

One day early in July, Butterworth, who had been standing around and perspiring by the hour, decided to avail himself of the shower facilities in one of the hangars. This seemed a perfectly safe thing to do, because the endurance flyers had given no indication that they might land soon.

However, the announcer had hardly removed his clothes and turned on the water when the Hunters signaled their ground crew that they were about to descend.

The NBC engineer who was on the assignment with Butterworth had the presence of mind to make up a long cable lead immediately and rush it over to the hangar where Butterworth, looking out of the window of the shower-room, described the plane's descent. Then the engineer rushed over with a mike as the brothers hopped out of the plane.

Although he admits it doesn't mean anything, Butterworth claims to be the only man who ever did a broadcast from a shower, *au naturel*.

This was one of those jinxed broadcasts. So great were the crowds that hemmed in the brothers that it was difficult to carry on an interview where they landed. We had anticipated this and had run a microphone line into the hangar. With the aid of the police, the young men and their plane were rushed into the hangar and the hangar door shut to keep the crowds out. With the slamming of the sharp steel doors our microphone line was cut in two.

Present in the hangar was William Burke Miller, NBC's first Special Events man, who had the presence of mind to grab an emergency microphone and wire, and start broadcasting from his own position until our ever-present engineers could put in an auxiliary line.

XXII

Ubiquitous Max

As NBC's continental European news chief Max Jordan has performed so brilliantly—both on assignment and in digging up his own stuff—that some day he will be a legend. I'm not sure he isn't a legend already.

A roving center, he is all over the European gridiron to such an extent that sometimes he seems to be in two or more places at one time. If some book publisher doesn't offer Max a contract soon I'll lose faith in book publishers or begin to believe that NBC has not done as good a job of making Jordan known to the general public as it has to the industry in general and to those who might be termed radio insiders.

Max will probably swear at me in all the eight languages he speaks for this shameless baiting of the book publishers—one of his reasons being that he claims to be too busy for "such luxuries as writing books"—but I always enjoy his multilingual cussing, so this paragraph is bound to pay dividends of one kind or another.

Naturally Jordan and I keep in constant touch with each other,—by telephone, letter and radiogram. The most satisfactory way of giving a good close-up of Jordan is to present excerpts from letters in which he gives action shots of himself at work on important stories. To round out the picture I will also present letters of my own (also radiograms) which complement Max's correspondence.

DEAR MAX:

How can you expect us to make you famous unless you give us the lowdown on the Munich broadcast. As my radiogram informed you, you beat the whole world—European and American newspapers, press associations, and broadcasting sys-

tems—in relaying the text of the Munich agreement. I know you're busy as hell, but I want to know how you did it. Write it full. It's too late to release this information as a news story. Many newspapers have already been sporting enough to acknowledge in their radio columns that you scooped the field. But no one knows how you did it. It's a story that would be welcomed by the trade press. Also, it's information we want for the archives. . . . And don't forget I have to make speeches on radio news coverage. I duck most such assignments, but I can't duck 'em all. What gorgeous speech material the inside story of the Munich beat will make. . . . And don't send me a bill for it, either. It's sound barter. You provide me with speech material and I make you famous.

DEAR ABE:

In this letter I will supplement the bare outline of the Munich beat that I cabled you.

Shortly prior to the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting in Godesberg, most observers in the German capital professed complete ignorance as to what was going to happen. Finally I decided to take a train up to Cologne as preparations seemed to be far enough advanced for a regular conference.

In Cologne I had an appointment with a local radio engineer, who drove me straight down to the Dreesen Hotel in Godesberg. It was obvious that they were just about getting ready for the big meeting.

I met Fritz Dreeze, owner of the hotel and long-time friend of Hitler's who had given shelter to the future Führer after he had been released from prison and at a time when all the other local hotels refused admission to the man who was to become Chancellor because they were afraid the then government would object. Hitler had been a guest at the Dreesen Hotel on many occasions since, and this was going to be his sixty-seventh visit.

Fritz Dreeze was the first man to go on the air for America from Godesberg, and he gave an intimate description of his experiences with the Führer. No better entering wedge

could have been found, for Herr Dreese was so pleased with his own broadcast that he gave me a pass permitting me to enter his hotel any time, even after the Nazi Black Guards had been instructed to refuse admittance to all but officials of the various delegations.

We succeeded in having our microphone installed in a pantry behind the main lobby, where we could peek through the little glass "look-outs" while heads of governments and diplomats were hard at work nearby. Waiters rushed in and out with pots of coffee and Rhine-wine bottles while our circuits to New York were kept wide open.

The evening of the fateful Friday when a breakdown of the conference seemed imminent—Chamberlain had refused to consider Hitler's claims with regard to the Sudeten territory of Czechoslovakia—we had another microphone installed in a small bureau whence we could watch the main hotel entrance constantly. We were virtually kept in confinement in that small room, but were never out of touch with the world because we had both a microphone and a telephone installed on the desk. Thus I could rush urgent wires to New York and arrange for bookings, all the while keeping in touch with events and going on the air whenever something worthwhile had transpired.

I had hardly returned to the office in Basle (NOTE—Jordan makes his permanent headquarters in Basle) when a message from New York asked me to be on the lookout for the forthcoming Sports Palace meeting in Berlin. I rushed up there immediately and the same evening went on the air with a description of Hitler's speech.

However, this was only a prelude. The next day came the sudden announcement of the Munich Conference. Everybody felt that Europe was on the verge of war. Troops were marching in Unter den Linden. I booked a seat on a plane and an hour later was facing a microphone in the main station of Munich reporting Mussolini's arrival. Then back to the airport—and from that moment on it was a mad scramble all day long and most of the night.

As you know, we were able to cover every single phase of the Big Four meeting. We even got into the "Brown House" to describe the scene of the conference from an improvised studio under the roof of the building.

In case you don't recall the exact number, we did fourteen broadcasts from Munich in that one day.

When the dramatic hour came and the final protocol was to be signed, I strolled down the main lobby, which leads up to Hitler's private study. Nobody knew what decisions had been reached, outside of those who had been present at the last meetings, but it had transpired that an announcement was forthcoming.

I noticed a group of British diplomats leaning against the staircase railing. A friend pointed out to me Sir William Strang of the London Foreign Office. He seemed to be my man, so I approached him asking for his help to secure the official English text of the statement which was to be released. This he agreed to do, warning me that the conference was about to come to a close.

I dashed upstairs where the microphone was installed under the roof, and started frantically calling you in New York to stand by for an important broadcast.

When I got back to the lobby, the Italian delegation was just rushing out of the building to catch their train. But I had lost sight of my British friend, who seemed to have disappeared entirely.

The "Brown House" in a way reminds one of the Capitol Building in Washington. It's easy to get lost, and there are so many entrances and exits that it is difficult to find one's way about.

Somehow my instinct led me to take the elevator downstairs, and true enough, there were the British!

Chamberlain was about to board his motor car to drive back to his hotel, and there was my new-found friend, Sir William Strang.

"Hey!" I shouted. He turned around. (What a way to ad-

dress a diplomat! He noticed that I seemed a bit flustered as I realized how brusque I had been.)

"Oh! That's right," he said. He was standing near Sir Horace Wilson, who was carrying a bunch of press releases under his arm, ready to distribute them among the press correspondents who were waiting at the British delegation's hotel.

These seconds seemed ages. Then Sir Horace Wilson, having had the proposition explained to him by Strang, turned around pleasantly, and personally handed me the first copy of the conference protocol which up to that moment nobody had seen, except for the closest advisers of the Big Four.

I dashed upstairs to my microphone in record time.

At first the German radio official in charge refused to believe I really had the official text and did not like the idea of giving me permission to broadcast to America when the German text had not yet been released to their own listeners.

We had a heated argument which nearly ended in a fist-fight. Fortunately we did not knock over the microphone—and five minutes later the complete text of the Munich agreement went across the ocean by short-wave. The toughness of the German official almost ruined everything. But I didn't blame him. Had I been in his position I'd have been just as tough.

Now, go ahead and make me famous.

DEAR MAX:

When you get a breathing spell please write me a letter about the things we discussed over the telephone today,—the air-raid sirens that proved to be a rehearsal, (necessitating a corrective postscript to our original announcement over the air) the problems of war-broadcasting, etc. The connection was not a very good one and I missed some of the things you said. As you know, we are keeping a complete file of such information. . . . Keep on hiring all the planes you need but don't buy any. Having said that, I've fulfilled a promise! A guy in the Accounting Department who once-overs expense

accounts said the other day, "Does Jordan hire planes or buy them?" "He hires 'em, of course," I replied. "Why don't you make sure?" he added. So I'm making sure. . . . Once again congrats on the great job you're doing. You make me look better every day.

DEAR ABE:

I will try in this letter to restate what I told you over the telephone. As I explained, the war has not yet been productive of broadcasting material to the extent that many had anticipated. Naturally, handicaps stand in the way of war-time broadcasting, which cannot be so easily overcome. Censorship, in the first place, prevents ad lib broadcasting from the scene, and the military authorities are reluctant to admit radio reporters to battlefields where their descriptions might bring the horrors of war too close to the listener. At the same time, these authorities are unwilling to expose radio men to dangers for which they cannot assume any responsibility. On top of it all, serious technical problems arise, as it will hardly ever be possible to maintain wire circuits where battles are raging, and as you yourself have pointed out, it also seems questionable whether it is the proper thing to have ear-witnesses from afar reclining in their easy chairs while people are killed wholesale.

Only once so far were we able to broadcast actual war sounds when a period happened to be scheduled from Berlin the very day of the outbreak of the war. . . .

The sirens sounded suddenly with their shrill echo all over town. At that very moment I was about to start my broadcast. Hurriedly I opened the windows of the studio, instructing the engineer to do his best to pick up the sound from outside as a background to my running commentary. Thus we had the first air raid on the air, but I am afraid results were not very satisfactory acoustically, for lack of preparation.

Afterwards it was found that the air raid had been no air raid at all and only a rehearsal for meeting one! Had it

been a real air raid all broadcasting transmitters would have been shut off anyway, for enemy planes are easily guided by air waves, which means that radio broadcasting must stop in case of real danger.

Attempts made to link up the western fortifications with a broadcasting transmitter have likewise failed so far on account of strenuous objections by the military authorities.

Tell your pal in the Accounting Department that I haven't bought any planes yet, but I've seen some real bargains lately, and you know how I can be tempted by a bargain.

DEAR MAX:

I can't find anything in our files on how you got the official German statement on the air after England declared war.

The Promotion Department wants to do a job on this, showing our resourcefulness, and I'd like to have the details so they'll be able to do a factual account.

Bought any airplanes lately?

DEAR ABE:

Just bought a wonderful six-seater plane. Will now be able to do some real aerial entertaining. What a bargain! As special concession to NBC, price has been cut to \$18,000. . . .

Now, about that other matter. On September 3rd all cable and telephone communications linking up Berlin with the outside world were suddenly cut off by the military authorities. For several hours not even press dispatches could be filed.

Fortunately, I had tipped you off that very morning to monitor a certain short-wave transmitter as we had expected important pronouncements coming from Government quarters.

Diplomatic relations between England and Germany were cut off at eleven o'clock that day. Two hours later I was able to read the complete English text of the pertinent official German statement over the air to America.

It was a "blind shot" for there was no way of telling whether my voice was actually heard in New York, but after-

wards we found that it had been heard and that ours had been the only message that got through to New York during those critical hours when all other contacts were interrupted entirely.

DEAR MAX:

Congrats to you and Mackenzie on the swell job you did covering the death of Pope Pius XI and the election of his successor. This, of course, becomes a chapter in radio history, and we want the usual record for the archives. . . .

One of my spies tells me you were seen recently wearing a hat that seemed too battered even for a radio journalist. Better buy a few new ones and put 'em on the expense account. You rate a hat bonus at least.

DEAR ABE:

Thanks for the hat bonus. But why only "a few"? I'm thinking of ordering a dozen. Thus I would get the wholesale rate and the price per hat to NBC would be lower than if I bought a mere few and paid the retail price. . . .

As to the broadcasts regarding the death of His Holiness: Eighteen months of preparation were involved. No use of going into all the grubby little details.

But we didn't overlook anything that would enable us to flash the news first when the 81-year-old Pontiff passed quietly from life. I've been checking with your office and find that we were describing the impressive scene in Vatican City for the benefit of the radio audience in the United States 31 minutes after His Holiness passed away. It seems hardboiled to talk of "firsts" in connection with this solemn drama but it is a matter of record that we got the news out first.

We put up our Rome representative, Philip R. Mackenzie, in an apartment overlooking Vatican City. A special telephone linking up the apartment with the transmitting company in Rome had been installed.

At the same time, we arranged for special contacts inside

the Vatican so we could be notified immediately when the condition of the Pope became alarming.

The night this happened our Vatican contact man phoned to say that we should stand by. Immediately, Mackenzie got in touch with me. I happened to be in Basle that night. From that moment on the wires were burning between Rome and Basle on the one hand, and Rome and Vatican City on the other, and through our Rome office between New York and the Italian communications center.

The moment the Pope's death was officially confirmed, we were thus able to put on a broadcast which had been prearranged in all details and reached New York prior to closing hours, long before other networks were in a position to make arrangements of their own, since the studios of the Italian Broadcasting Company were closed when the Pope's death occurred, about 4:30 A.M. Rome time, and since the other American networks had made no preparations comparable to ours.

Thanks to the arrangements made beforehand, Mackenzie was in a position to speak directly from his house, using the special microphone and the special circuits that linked up with a Rome short-wave transmitter. These arrangements had been perfected, and there had been frequent tests for over a year between New York and Rome (after considerable red-tape had been slashed).

Similarly, we installed a special circuit in the building of the Salvatorian Fathers on the edge of St. Peter's Square, to cover the Conclave that was to name the new Pope. A room in that building, facing the square, was used as an emergency studio. There we had our microphone installed at a vantage point where the famous smoke signals could be observed.

Also, we had a special phone installed in that same room, and to maintain the contact with the Vatican transmitter a receiving set was tuned in constantly on the Vatican frequency.

The moment the election of the new Pope was over—(a special cue had been agreed upon between the broadcasters

and the Vatican station beforehand)—we were able to signal you in New York so you could pick up the official broadcast directly in connection with our own commentary from the scene.

The moment the official function was over and the Papal blessing had been given, we continued our own running commentary.

This was only possible because of the constant direct contact we were able to maintain with your office while these broadcasts were being delivered. As you know, Philip Mackenzie and I alternated on the air while one of us received instructions from your office over the transatlantic telephone circuit. We were thus properly guided with regard to the length and the kind of broadcasts which had to be arranged on the spot without any previous notice.

DEAR MAX:

After a while you will wish we had no filing system. I hate to badger you, for I know how busy you are, but I do wish you would give me some of the background of the Siegfried Line broadcast. All I know about this is that for weeks you tried to carry out our request for such a broadcast, and, after making no headway, you suddenly got permission from the German authorities.

Fill me in on this, will you, insofar as you can.

How is the airplane situation these days? Give me the names and serial numbers of any aircraft you have purchased so that they may be listed officially among NBC's assets.

DEAR ABE:

There isn't a great deal to tell about landing the Siegfried Line broadcast. It's one of those situations where a No becomes a Yes without any explanation.

Permission to do this broadcast, which I had sought for some time, came rather suddenly. At your request I had applied for permission to broadcast from the West Wall shortly after the outbreak of the war, suggesting that the pick-up

point be one of the steel-reinforced, concrete pill-boxes now called "bunkers," thousands of which form the western outpost of the German military defense system. But the necessary okay from high Army officials had been withheld.

For some time it looked as though such a broadcast were not feasible at all, for military reasons, but a few days prior to Christmas I was given the good news that the German Army High Command had not only given the necessary approval but also expressed its willingness to help us make the technical installations.

On a bright morning the day before Christmas, we started out from Berlin in an army motor car, and a few hours later we had reached our destination, in close proximity to the West Wall. Thence I was taken to one of the military reservations near the very banks of the Rhine River. (A.A.S.—*Please note: If I charged up any airplanes on my expense account that day, please cancel; for by my own admission I traveled by car. M. J.*)

The Rundfunk had dispatched some of its engineers, and a special pupinized cable had been stretched from a pill-box straight to the next amplifying center of the German postal administration so we could connect with a Berlin short-wave transmitter. . . .

Because of our policy I had been compelled to turn down the suggestion originally made that the program be recorded inside of the pill-box and the record then simply sent to Berlin by post, for the short-wave relay to New York. I wanted a "live" broadcast or none. Now no such makeshift arrangements were required, and a microphone was installed on the very spot where the soldiers stood on guard, at the entrance of the "bunker" assigned for our undertaking.

At eight o'clock on Christmas Eve everything was in readiness. A brief rehearsal convinced me that all the material was there to provide an excellent program. It was a cold winter night and though we were so close to the French border that we could hear rifle practice of the French resounding ominously across the river, everything was peaceful and quiet.

Inside the "bunker" twelve soldiers had gathered around their Christmas table, and there was tense expectation when the cue came through from New York to stand by.

I think the best way to complete the record would be to add to your file the text of the continuity I used. I presume your office had this recorded on a disc as it came in, but here it is in writing:

"Hello, NBC—Max Jordan calling from Bunkershausen! My listeners won't find this name listed on any map for it's located in what you might call no man's land. I am speaking to you from a fortified military zone which is part of the famous Siegfried Line, opposite France's Maginot Line. It's now nine o'clock in the evening here and pitch dark. It's a rather cold winter night. I spent the day visiting these parts. The courtesy of the German Army High Command made it possible for me to look around freely. What I'm now telling you has not been censored. I have just seen pill-boxes and fortifications of all kinds, barbed-wire fences and gun-towers, climbed over cat-walks to the very banks of the River Rhine, and could clearly see the French border on the other side. But everything is amazingly quiet. If not for rifle practice of the French which resounded from afar, I might have been sightseeing in peacetime, in a zone reserved perhaps for Army maneuvers. As a matter of fact, this very afternoon German soldiers stood on one side of the river playing Christmas carols on their accordions. To these familiar tunes French soldiers sang lustily on the other side, and to show their appreciation, they set up Christmas trees on their pill-boxes, clearly visible on the German side, and shouted Merry Christmas across the water—in German, mind you, for most of the French troops in these parts are Alsatians entirely familiar with the tongue of their opponents. . . .

"Yes, indeed, it's a strange war. Here I am in the very trenches, linked up with America by a special cable which the German broadcasting officials have installed for NBC. And I am to tell you of Christmas in Bunkershausen. Bunker,

you see, is the name of that new type of iron-enforced, concrete pill-boxes, thousands of which form the Siegfried Line. I am standing in front of one of them. It's dark now, but in the daytime this bunker looked like an inconspicuous elevation of the soil, like a small hill covered with fir trees and shrubbery. Only when coming closer can one distinguish it as a fortification. For we are here at the very front. Should the French by any chance feel like dropping a few bomb-shells on this wintry scene, you would hear them explode in the course of our broadcast. . . .

"But I don't anticipate any such static. Inside of this bunker there are twelve German soldiers celebrating Christmas—for Christmas Eve is the time when the German people really celebrate. They are single men. The married men have been given leaves to spend Christmas with their families, I am told. . . .

"Let me take you inside. I'm holding a portable microphone and will now walk through the entrance. It's a small passageway. So small, as a matter of fact, that I must bend very low in order not to knock my head against the concrete walls.

"Hey, just a moment! The engineer behind me pulls the cable which connects us with the outside wall, but I can't go so fast.

"Now we enter the chamber. I think you can hear the soldiers singing. Well, we're here. I'm now standing at the entrance of the inner chamber which is divided into two fairly large rooms. . . ."

(NOTE—There is no need of quoting the rest of the broadcast. In it Jordan gave a detailed description of how the German soldiers lived in the Siegfried Line, the kind of accommodations they had, and how they celebrated Christmas Eve. . . . Earlier we broadcast a similar program from the Maginot Line. As the pattern of this program was like that of the Siegfried Line broadcast, and as it is not part of Max Jordan's story, there is no need for describing it.)

DEAR MAX:

I'm in again. There seems to be a difference of opinion around the office as to how you performed your latest feat,—the City of Flint broadcast. When we asked you to land the Captain for us, we were hopeful, as we always are, when you tackle anything, but in the back of our heads was the thought that perhaps this was something no one could accomplish. Now that you've done it, we're completely mystified; for our information is fragmentary and we have to do a certain amount of guessing to fill in the story. . . .

How is the airplane situation? See any bargains lately? Designs are changing so rapidly that I hope you are waiting for the new models and not buying anything obsolete. Radio, don't forget, is the last word in communication, and everything we do must be le dernier cri. Sometimes we even have to streamline le dernier cri to satisfy the passionate cry for progress. . . .

Come clean about the City of Flint. I can't very well say to my associates, "Jordan won't talk." . . .

DEAR ABE:

When will you put that airplane joke in mothballs? There's a war on. Be your age. . . .

Before I give you the dope you ask in your letter, let me say I'm delighted over the cable information that newspapers all over the United States reprinted and quoted from our broadcast with the proper NBC credit. This certainly puts the clincher on this being an exclusive, although in this case it was so clean-cut that I don't see how anyone could have said otherwise. Certainly no one else put Captain Gainard on the air, and his own words gave the world the first real picture of what had happened to his ship.

As frequently happens, first word about the American ship *City of Flint* being marooned somewhere in European waters came to us from New York. I had just arrived in Berlin when a query reached me from your office. Then and there started a wild chase.

No tangible information could be obtained from either German or Russian sources. It was a mysterious story that one just could not get hold of properly.

Finally I succeeded in convincing the German officials that it was to their own interest that the facts be told by the Skipper himself, and they promised to give us a chance as soon as the ship had reached German waters.

Preparations were then made so I could take a special plane to an un-named destination the moment the *City of Flint* had reached German waters, and interview the Captain on the spot.

I must say the German engineers did wonders. Plans were made so a portable short-wave transmitter could be taken along, just in case we had to climb on the boat and interview the Captain on the bridge.

But at that time there was no way of establishing where the *City of Flint* really was. Most reports seemed to indicate that she was confined in Murmansk, a Russian port far up north. So I took a plane to Moscow where I had other business to transact anyway. I arrived too late, for it was announced in the Soviet capital just about that time that the *City of Flint* had proceeded for an unknown destination after having been released by the Russian authorities (contrary to international obligations) under the command of a prize crew.

I did what I had to do in Moscow as fast as I could and flew straight back to Stockholm. There it was confirmed that the ship had actually proceeded for Tromsø, the Norwegian port near the North Cape and was now heading south.

A telephone call to Oslo was helpful in ascertaining further details. Through our radio friends there I booked a special plane and then caught the night sleeper from Stockholm to the Norwegian capital.

That very day the *City of Flint* had pulled in where she was not expected at all—in Bergen.

The night before, telephonic information from Berlin had indicated that the Germans were still expecting the ship and had made all preparations accordingly. But Captain Gainard

apparently was in no mood for having his ship interned in Germany.

It will perhaps never be known how Gainard managed things in that last stage. But the fact is that I got hold of him by calling him up from Oslo, and willingly he agreed to do the broadcast.

I wanted to fly up to Bergen, but at the last moment the Norwegian military authorities refused permission for the flight. They said we might become the target of anti-aircraft guns along the coast, and snow was falling too heavily to permit crossing the mountains between Oslo and Bergen. Also, the train was out of the question because it would have taken twelve hours to reach Bergen from Oslo, and Captain Gainard had already promised the Bergen press correspondents who had gathered in large numbers to give them his first statement that very afternoon.

Lady Luck was on my side again when the Captain promised to combine his broadcast with the press statement. This, of course, meant that no faster means than our microphone would be available to put the story across to America.

Rush wires to you cleared the necessary radio time, and all particulars were arranged as a matter of course by long-distance telephone from Oslo to Bergen. . . .

When the time came to broadcast, I sat in the Oslo studio linked up by double wire circuits with the one in Bergen. We gave the Captain a voice test. Then we checked our lines through to Geneva, but ten minutes prior to the broadcast confirmation had not yet been received from Berlin that circuits would be available all the way through Germany. We had to use the Geneva transmitter, for the one in Berlin would not have been available under the circumstances unless we had been in a position to submit Captain Gainard's text to the German censor beforehand. This we could not do, which meant we had to rely on a "neutral" transmitter such as the one in Geneva.

The Germans were obliging, and confirmation from

Berlin came when we had already thought of postponing the broadcast for an hour.

I then started with the customary "Hello NBC!" to introduce the Captain, and when the latter heard the cue which had been agreed upon, he went on himself—giving us a beautiful clean scoop, the first complete story of what had happened to the *City of Flint* while she was wandering about between ports, being chased by newspapermen and radio reporters all over the map.

XXIII

Vox Pop Enlivens Things

IN POMONA, Cal., Mr. Jack D. Getar was driving his car into his garage. The program to which he had been listening had wound up a moment before and a new one had started. He was about to turn off the radio when his ear caught the word "pencil." Then he heard the word "pencil-cap."

Mr. Getar had repaired pencils—the "re-fill" type—and fountain pens for twenty-five years. No words meant more to him than "pencil" and "pencil-cap." In fact, pencils and everything connected with them had become a part of his life.

Mr. Getar became more and more absorbed in the broadcast. A re-fill pencil was being described in careful detail by the announcer. Exact measurements were given. It was a pencil that came equipped with a cap. An effort was being made to find a cap that would exactly fit the pencil described.

This effort to find a cap to fit a pencil was no idle whim. It was an S.O.S. Mr. Getar jotted down the measurements of the pencil the announcer was describing in detail, also the estimated measurements of the cap.

In a nearby California town twelve-year-old Andrew Bleakley, Jr., lay in a bed in an emergency hospital. Lodged in the main bronchus of his left lung was a pencil-cap that he had swallowed by accident in school.

The doctors in attendance reported that because of the position the pencil-cap had taken up in the bronchus, and due to the method of removal that had been decided upon to minimize the hazards of the operation, it would be tremendously important to locate a duplicate of the cap the youngster had swallowed.

On both our networks we repeatedly broadcast a description of the pencil for which the doctors sought a cap.

Hundreds of caps were received from listeners eager to aid young Bleakley. These caps came in from all sections of the country, many of them by airmail, others by special delivery, and a number with both airmail and special-delivery stamps affixed.

One after another the pencil-caps were examined by the doctors in charge. Some were *almost* what was wanted but none was exactly right.

And then Mr. Getar heard our radio appeal and got on the job. He rummaged among a lot of old pencil-caps and found one that proved to be exactly right. He took it to the local Police Department who in turn rushed it to the hospital.

The cap—"just what the doctor ordered"—played an important part in the successful operation that was performed a few days later. In fact, it was now possible to improvise an essential instrument designed to fit over the swallowed cap; and this improvisation used in conjunction with the bronchoscopic tube, minimized considerably the danger involved and gave the attending physicians much plainer sailing.

One Sunday in the Spring of 1938 Alexander Woollcott appeared as a guest speaker on the "Magic Key" program. During his talk he told how for years he had tried to locate a certain bound volume of a magazine that has long since entered the hereafter of deceased publications.

But let Woollcott tell the story himself:

"As a staff aids a wayfarer, so it would help me if I could actually hold in my hands something that was part of the life of the eight-year-old boy I used to be. And I know what would help me most. Something I used to read, but also—and this is all important—something I have had no chance to see since. I know what fills that bill for me—the stacked-up copies of the magazine for which I used to wait so impatiently every week that I would run out to meet the postman halfway down the block.

"What I am willing to pay handsomely for, is the bound volume of *Harpers' Young People* as it came to our house in

1894 and 1895. It is the volume numbered sixteen, published when it meant most to me. I was eight years old, and I can't begin to tell you in what a lather of excitement I waited for each issue.

"In this age—when entertainment grows on every bush—in this easy age of Dick Tracy, and Donald Duck, I wonder if any kid can enjoy anything as much as *Harpers' Young People* was enjoyed by those who were eight in 1895. Of course, bound volumes of that period are scattered all over America. I am sure that here and there a copy of the one I want—Number Sixteen—stands dusty and neglected on some shelf from which it has not been taken down in years. Do you suppose it could be among those shabby books that were moved up in the attic after Aunt Minnie died? You might go up and look.

"It will come to light, if at all, in some such hideaway. I do not look to find it in a big city. Not in New York, certainly—here where yesterday is always hastily rubbed out as if it were a dirty word written in chalk on the sidewalk. Here no one stays put long enough to accumulate anything. New York—the city without any attics.

"So my *Harpers' Young People*—yes, mine—the 1895 volume—is waiting for me elsewhere. I wonder where. If you know, please write me. Write me care of the National Broadcasting Company, New York. Or try writing me at my home. The address, I add boastfully, is Vermont. Just Vermont."

Before Mr. Woollcott had completed his talk, ten telephone calls had come in telling him where he could locate the bound volume he sought.

He is probably right about there being no attics left in New York, but three Gothamites must have the equivalent, for they rummaged around in whatever they use for an attic and found Volume Sixteen.

I don't know whether it was one of this trio or one of the out-of-town possessors of the volume that emerged as Mr. Woollcott's benefactor. I hope he didn't eventually insist that Volume Sixteen come from a Vermont attic.

But it is no understatement to say that Mr. Woollcott was

amazed over his good luck. He had been hopeful but had hardly expected the response he got. For years he had been unable to find the book, and now we had worked this magic.

"Did you ever see anyone look so surprised?" remarked a studio wag as the round raconteur bounced happily homeward. "He wouldn't have been so astonished if he'd remembered he was on the Magic Key."

In delivering his broadcast on February 7, 1938, Lowell Thomas mentioned the fact that he and President Roosevelt were broadcasting simultaneously that evening. "So," said Lowell, whose listener-rating year after year has been the envy of many a news commentator, "I guess nobody's listening." Before Lowell had left the studio, eighteen telephone calls came in from fans assuring him they were listening.

One left this message, "Don't you worry, Lowell, I'm with you."

Another said, "Those Democrats can't do that to us."

I'm reminded of another Lowell Thomas story.

One December night Lowell was about to go on the air. It was 6:40. In five minutes he would start broadcasting from our New York studios. It's not easy to change your script at the last minute, but Lowell complied when he was asked to broadcast an appeal for—of all things!—a watermelon, to be used medicinally.

Watermelon juice was urgently needed to treat a fourteen-year-old boy—Paul Clark was his name—who was seriously ill in a New Jersey hospital with acute nephritis. Watermelons are scarce in wintertime, especially in New Jersey.

Arnold Lane, an official at the hospital, is a radio fan. He knew that radio had been used successfully in situations comparable to that of the Clark boy whose doctor had stated that watermelon juice was essential to the proper treatment of his patient.

I don't know where it came from, but an hour after the broadcast a watermelon was delivered at the studio. And later,

scores more were offered to Lowell's sponsor in Philadelphia.

The pay-off came when a whole truckload of watermelons was deposited at the hospital by a benefactor who declined to leave his name.

On September 3, 1937, fight promoter Mike Jacobs, referred to elsewhere in these pages, staged what he called the Carnival of Champions all in one evening. He put on bouts for the bantamweight, lightweight, welterweight and middleweight titles.

We had made a deal with Mike to broadcast the four fights. At that particular time there was considerable difference of opinion on the subject of fight announcers. In fact, it was hard to name a fight announcer whose name didn't elicit such comments as "He's the nuts!", "He's maybe all right for announcing bingo, not fights," "He stinks." I'm afraid that "He stinks" was the most familiar comment at the time,—that and variations on the theme.

That, of course, was nothing to worry about. The radio fight fan, as I know him, takes his fisticuffs seriously. When things are going against his boy and something in the voice that is describing the fight suggests that its owner is enjoying the shellacking that Gus Fan's favorite is getting we're sure to get a great many squawks about the announcer.

At the time Jacobs staged his Carnival, the fans, the sports writers, and those who ran the fight game, seemed to be in agreement: something had to be done to improve the bouquet of fight announcers.

It was true that some of the fight announcers were overdramatizing what they saw. For this they were being properly criticized. It was also true that Gus Fan was tired of seeing his favorite lose. So it was pretty definitely agreed that fight announcers "smelled out loud."

A study of the written complaints revealed that some of the squawkers also thought the whole fight game needed re-scenting. Fight announcers were merely an item on their bill of particulars, furnishing further proof of what they had long sus-

pected. As most of these letters would never have been written if scrapper B had won instead of scrapper A, they were not taken too seriously.

As long as fights are held, there will be those who will tell us our fight announcers are better or worse than they are. However, when your critics are more than normally vocal you've got to do something about it. We decided to assign four different announcers to the *Carnival of Champions*. It weakens a man's case when he insists that *everybody* gives off that fetid whiff.

One of the most outspoken of our critics was a sports writer who could not find language violent enough to tell what he thought of our sports announcers. As this man was highly regarded by his associates, and as he had had a loyal newspaper following for years, we decided to invite him to broadcast the round-by-round description of one of the fights. He accepted our invitation.

The records of our chief operator show that during the first round of this writer's broadcast we received 178 telephone calls complaining about the inferior quality of the broadcast. A number of the peeved listeners, I regret to say, told us, "He stinks."

The Non-Partisan Citizenship Committee thought Thomas E. Dewey would make a good Governor. They decided to buy a half hour for a Dewey speech toward the end of the 1938 Gubernatorial campaign.

The Committee had very definite ideas about the time they wanted. They wanted the 8:30 to 9:00 P.M., "Information Please" spot. This was then a sustaining program. It was taking hold fast and developing a big following.

There was no advertiser involved and it was a simple matter to give the Committee this period, but we urged them to take another spot. We suggested the half hour before or after "Information Please." We saw no reason for depriving the audience this program had developed of its favorite show and suggested the half hour preceding or following the popular

quiz program. Among other things, we pointed out that one way to annoy the voters was to interfere needlessly with their listening habits.

The Committee insisted on 8:30 to 9:00. Their argument was that they wanted a ready-made audience. After much discussion, we decided to let them have their way. They contended that the Dewey program was in the realm of "public service" and that we should permit them to purchase the unsold period they considered most desirable.

There is no need to add anything to this entry from our Press Department Log:

"9 P.M., Information Please. Nov. 1. Assisted handling flood of listeners' queries and complaints. Switchboard lost count after 765 calls. Miss Maloney estimated total of 1200 calls complaining about cancellation of 'Information Please.' Such remarks as these were made:

" 'I won't vote for him.'

" 'Why can't he talk some other time?'

" 'I ask you, which is more interesting: a political speech or Information Please?'

" 'Haven't you guys got better sense than to cancel a good program for a bum speech?'

" 'I thought Dewey was brighter than that. I thought you guys knew better, too.'

" 'Nuts to Dewey! Nuts to NBC!'

One of our news commentators staged a contest designed to elicit stirring stories of true adventure. His own career had been characterized by high adventure and he sought stories that featured "excitement of an unusual character." One of his replies—and after four years many of us still consider it the most graphic in our files—reads as follows:

"I have listened to your program and decided to write of an experience I had four years ago.

"My sister and I went to Massillon, Ohio, to attend the triple funeral of my cousin and her two children. After the funeral my sister and I went down the lot to the outside toilet

my aunt had. We were each wearing a new percale dress, and I was standing while my sister was still sitting we were talking about the funeral. When there was an awful crack and the floor just left the sides of the toilet and went down. My sister went with it. I put one foot on the seat and the other on the door-sill—and just as she was sinking I grabbed her by the neck of the dress, and I screamed and called it seemed like hours. But really must of been only ten or fifteen minutes. And she was in it up to her chin. And just when my hands were so numb I could hardly hold her any longer and thought I would have to let go. They heard my scream and come running. And put a ladder down and helped her crawl to safety. I get awake at night and shudder to think how near she came to drowning. And what a horrible death it would of been. Had she had on an old dress she would of drowned because it would of never held her weight. My uncle told us afterward that he just nailed the boards on the sides of the building. And he fixed it different the next day. I have never written any story before so if you select mine you can put it in your own words.

“Thanking you for the privilege.”

The Club Matinee program, which originates in Chicago, opens up with a festive fanfare of trumpets and bugles. It is a gay tarantara that suggests rejoicing. If that weren't so one of our most indignant vox pop letters would never have been received.

Earl Browder, Communist leader, was on trial for using a fraudulent passport. When the verdict came in, one of our New York announcers took the air and read the bulletin telling of Browder's conviction.

Our Chicago studios then took over on the same network. The program immediately following the Browder announcement was the Club Matinee show, which burst forth a few seconds later with its jubilant opening.

A letter from a Browder sympathizer accused us of celebrating the Communist leader's conviction.

"I guess you think it was a pretty smart thing all right," wrote a listener from the Yorkville section of New York City. "I'm an American since twenty-five years and I don't care about the old country any more, but I don't think you got a right to go around insulting foreign people that made good.

"I didn't get wise till my boy starts to laugh. He laughed when Hitler goes on, and I said what's so funny about that and he just keeps on laughing."

The rest of the letter made it clear what we were being criticized for. Adolph Hitler, scheduled to make a speech following Germany's invasion of Poland, did not take the air in accordance with schedule. There was a fifteen-minute wait, so the orchestra that always stands by filled in with music. The number in the medley that they played just before Hitler went on was *You Grow Sweeter as the Years Go On*.

Vox Pop is so frequently motivated by a desire to be helpful that we can't become too excited over the Bronx cheers we get, deserved or undeserved.

There was, for instance, the thoughtful gent who called up our New York news room about three o'clock in the morning of Monday, September 4, 1939. He said, in what sounded like a whisper, "I want to check those Fourteen Points you read." He was referring to Hitler's ultimatum to Poland.

Then the person who was phoning us said something further that the NBC man couldn't hear.

"Speak a little louder," our man said. "I can't hear you."

Our caller was phoning from Connecticut. He was speaking softly, to begin with, and besides the connection was a poor one.

"I can't speak louder," said the telephoner. "My telephone is in the bedroom. I have no extension. My wife is asleep in the next bed."

Our man said, "Hang on a minute. Maybe I can improve the connection."

Our man was almost asleep on his feet, but he was doing his best to find out what this was all about. England and

France had declared war on Sunday the 3rd—the day before—and this NBC news-room worker, like the rest of us, had been without any sleep ever since (unless you counted the snatches grabbed now and then in chairs in the office).

It developed that what had disturbed our caller was that he thought we had made a mistake in our last announcement of Hitler's Fourteen Points. We were open all night, bringing in as much news as we could.

Our Connecticut friend, very much concerned over the situation abroad, was listening to the news in his living-room. There, his radio toned down, he had heard every news broadcast for hours. He had heard Hitler's Fourteen Points read several times.

After a while he almost knew them by heart. The last time he had heard them—over the Red or the Blue, shortly before he had telephoned—we had left out two of Adolph's fourteen.

We asked the weary announcer to consult his script. Sure enough one of the pages had been dropped and we had whitened the Fuehrer down to twelve points. We promised to restore the two points when, as and if we again had occasion to re-read the ultimatum.

Now, Mrs. W., you know we wouldn't do a thing like that! Of course not! No, no, no! You're wrong. Why, if your friend had not delivered a speech that was a minute and a half shorter than we had been told it would be, no music would have been played and it could never have happened.

But perhaps I'd better tell the story.

News and Special Events had given Mrs. Ella Boole, head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a fifteen-minute period to deliver a speech on the virtues of temperance and the evils of drink. When her speech proved to be short we had to call upon a piano stand-in to do his stuff.

No, the piano player hadn't the faintest idea who the person was that preceded him. He didn't even know that that person was a speaker, much less what his or her subject was. For all he knew, he might have been preceded by a singing

mouse or a talking parrot. He could have found out, of course, but he showed no interest. All he knew when he was suddenly thrust on the air was that he was to play for a minute and a half. It's too bad, Mrs. W., that the number that popped into his head as he sat down to play was the *Champagne Waltz*.

One day News and Special Events received a telephone call from the New York Department of Sanitation. Could we send someone over right away? It was important. They had something belonging to us and they wanted to place it in our hands immediately. Several people in the department got excited as they tried to figure out what we might have lost.

We rushed someone over to the Department of Sanitation. When he arrived he was handed an envelope.

"This," he was told, "is the property of the National Broadcasting Company. You'd better rush back with it as your office will need it tonight."

The envelope, it developed, contained the announcer's opening and close in connection with a "special event" that was to go on that evening. Because of the many changes that had been made in the introduction and sign-off, the announcer no longer needed this script, which he dropped, without crumpling it, out of a taxi window.

A solicitous street cleaner—(he was a devoted radio fan, it developed, and hated to see things go wrong)—had picked up the script and turned it over to his superior who had handed it over to *his* superior, etc.

The Department, desirous to be helpful in what they thought was an emergency, asked us to send someone over immediately "to get our property."

Vox Pop is an interesting but difficult taskmaster. Among other things, he has made it crystal clear that:

1. We broadcast too much European news.
2. We do not broadcast enough European news.
3. We are pro-British.
4. We are pro-German.

5. We take too much for granted in assuming that the public will tune in at this or that arbitrary time for the news and don't give a big part of the radio audience a chance to know what is going on.

6. We are too repetitious and wear people out by giving them the same news too many times a day.

7. We are so grimly realistic that the net result is to make the listener want to bring an ax down upon his radio and kiss this wretched world goodbye.

8. We do not think people can "take it" or we would not sugar-coat the news.

9. We seem utterly unaware that there is sex in the world. Radio news is a eunuch, as sexless as an old boot.

10. We are more concerned with finding commentators with vocal oomph who are capable of giving the fair sex a dubious thrill than we are in finding men who know how to present the news objectively and in terms of its true values.

Etc., etc., ad infin.

Vox Pop is the guy who one day wrote us, "Why don't you do something different? Here's a good idea for a broadcast. People are not supposed to feed the animals at the zoo. They usually pay no attention to the signs warning them not to toss peanuts to the monkeys and the elephants and to refrain from giving sweets to certain creatures that cannot resist them and get indigestion when zoo visitors ignore the signs on the cages. Why not have an announcer go from cage to cage with a mike and broadcast the different cases of the public breaking the law?"

He is also the guy who can roll up his sleeves, spit on his hands and pitch into us as follows:

"When are you people going to grow up? This is not the time for broadcasting frog-jumping contests. Life is more than beer and skittles. Cut out the trivia. Stop the juvenile appeals to our alleged love of nonsense. Give us life in the raw and stop trying to be Mark Twains of the air. You're third-rate Mark Twains at best."

He is constantly suggesting broadcasts, occasionally one we

can put on. One day he is in the mood for light stuff, the next day he becomes deeply serious and wants to have a good think for himself. He is as mercurial as life itself. Only one thing he never is: silent. Thank God for that. For if we didn't hear from him we would not have the benefit of his fair and unfair criticism, his good and bad advice, his watermelons, his pencil-caps, and—what is most important—the encouraging assurance that he is listening.

The translators in NBC's International Division regularly turn over interesting letters to me. Some of them that have nothing to do with my Department wind up on my desk because of the way the envelopes are addressed. Seekers of information from the broadcasting companies frequently address inquiries that have nothing to do with the news to those who handle the news on the theory (not always substantiated) that these people are the best informed.

Here are some excerpts from a letter—one of the most pathetic I have ever read—that was translated from the French by the International Division and placed on my desk on March 14, 1939.

“. . . near the end of the World War, in the Meuse region, to be more precise in Vignot near Commercy, the refugees lived in close contact with the young men of the great American democracy. . . . We do not forget St. Mihiel, Thiencourt and Pont-à-Mousson. . . .

“I hope you understand my point; how from this association, many children were born,—children who became a burden to their mothers. You know, to be abandoned with an American child, without means, is not a very enviable situation. The mothers had to struggle to bring up those children. . . . I am the son of an American soldier. . . .

“That is the reason why I wish you would help me to find some of my mother's friends in America. I would like to get in touch with Mr. ———— and Mr. ———— who both fought in Vignot, near Commercy. The first will remember carving

two vases out of the big metal jackets of artillery shells; on one of them he engraved my mother's name: ———.

"I would like to know if there is a law dealing with young men born from American fathers but who never saw the country of the father.

"Please write to me?

"(signed) ——— ———"

Who was the first news broadcaster? There you have one of Vox Pop's most frequent queries.

The more questions like this I answer the easier it will be for me to say to future inquirers: "Your question is answered in a splendid new book called *I Live On Air*. No home that boasts a radio set should be without a copy."

Leo Rosenberg's broadcast of the 1920 presidential election returns is generally conceded to be the first scheduled news broadcast. At any rate it is the first of which there is any record.

In those days Rosenberg, a Pittsburgh publicity man, had heard about the experiments Dr. Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse engineer, was conducting in his backyard garage in the same city. Conrad had set up a radio transmitter that differed from the ordinary transmitter of those days which merely sputtered out dots and dashes. Conrad was teaching his crude device to speak a language all could understand.

Leo had the vision to realize the importance of what was going on in that garage. He contrived an acquaintance with the Westinghouse scientist and followed each step in the laborious series of experiments with avid interest. In fact, Rosenberg's hunch that something tremendous was in the making became an obsession.

Conrad was touched by Rosenberg's faith in what he was doing. It is violating no confidence to say that important men in the scientific world did not match Rosenberg's faith. Men of science cannot afford to have laymen's hunches. Cold-bloodedly they figure things out and some of them could not see anything in Conrad's experiments.

When the experiments, covering a period of many months, had proven moderately successful, Dr. Conrad moved the equipment from his garage to the Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant and there, on the night of November 4, 1920, the first scheduled news broadcast originated. That was the day the nation was deciding whether Harding or Cox would be the next president and Conrad had arranged to receive the returns by wire at the plant and broadcast them. Meanwhile Rosenberg had talked his way into the announcer's role.

Of course, there were no radio sets on the market in those days. But, according to the reports of a handful of people—radio hams who had built their own receiving sets—reception was fine within a radius of fifty to seventy-five miles.

Twenty years later Leo again found himself broadcasting presidential returns,—the results of the Roosevelt-Wilkie election.

It occurred to me that Leo could be used effectively in a ten-minute spot on one of our 1940 election night broadcasts. I located him and he accepted. Appropriately enough Graham McNamee, the first big-name announcer developed by radio, introduced Leo and told the story of the first broadcast of a presidential election.

No radio subject matches politics as a combined stimulant and irritant guaranteed to produce favorable and unfavorable letters in volume. This is particularly true during an important election campaign.

The favorable letters, of course, are most welcome, but in a book they would sound pretty dull. Besides, some of the more fulsome ones praise the wrong things and unconsciously are letters of criticism.

The most interesting letters of criticism are those that are intended as such,—the ones meant to scorch and blister. Some of these achieve a denunciatory eloquence that borders on perfection. One of the best letters in this category reached the NBC News Department during the fall of 1940. It read:

“Last evening about 6:40 I turned on your station to be

ready when Lowell Thomas came on and to my utter amazement there was a man on who is either a Fifth Columnist, Bundist, Communist or Anarchist or all and after some of his anarchist and inflammatory remarks of hate of the President and Government and some unmitigated lies about the President and acts of Congress all of which was highly applauded by a receptive audience that I was utterly disgusted and began to think that after all perhaps Hitler was right that we could not survive as a Democracy if we permitted such public speeches berating our Government. So I turned off, did not even wait to find out who it was.

"Now I believe in free speech but I do not believe that Fifth Columnists, Bundists, Communists and Anarchists should be permitted to use the radio to spread their venom of the Government to an unwary public and therefore censorship of the radio should be more severe and such inflammatory speeches of Hate of the President and Government should be barred by yourselves for just as long as you permit it to go on I can only believe you are in sympathy with these Fifth Columnists Bundists and anarchists."

The author of this letter, a master of unconscious irony, concluded with a last paragraph that called us a lot of unprintable names. This profanity was followed by the sign-off, "Respectfully yours."

To take the curse off this show of respect there was a magnificently obscene postscript.

I was curious to find out what had stirred our correspondent to such bitterness. It proved to be a campaign speech by Wendell Willkie!

XXIV

The Bluntest Broadcast

AFFAIRS of much greater importance have so thoroughly monopolized the headlines since then that it is hard to believe that as recently as 1938 the income of James Roosevelt, son of the President, was virtually a national issue.

Columnists of the standing of Westbrook Pegler were demanding to know just how much money young Roosevelt had made in the insurance business. Washington correspondents were hinting broadly to James that the matter was becoming an embarrassment to his father.

The climax came with the publication of a magazine article on the young man's income. The article was a front-page natural. It made the headlines all over the country and was widely discussed.

The article did not flatly state that James Roosevelt's income had been so much during this particular year and so much during such-and-such year. It estimated the income as between a low of \$250,000 per year and a high of \$2,000,000.

When estimates are made in these matters people have a habit of remembering the higher figure. It makes more sensational conversation. It was being said by many that James Roosevelt was earning two million dollars a year.

One day young Roosevelt issued a statement to the press assailing the estimates of his income and announcing that in an article in another magazine he would publish the actual figures.

On August 12, 1938, the first instalment of a two-part article telling the detailed story of James Roosevelt's income—in the form of an interview by Walter Davenport—was to appear in *Collier's Weekly*.

It sounded like a good idea for a broadcast. The subject was a timely one, and I knew that James Roosevelt had an excellent speaking voice. In fact, I had heard that his voice and delivery were very much like his father's.

I checked to see where young Roosevelt was, and learned that he was at the Roosevelt town house in the East Sixties in New York. I made an appointment and went over to see if I could sell the President's son the idea of a broadcast on the subject of his income.

I was not too optimistic about the outcome. Discussing your income in a magazine is one thing and discussing it for the benefit of a radio audience is something else again. It amounts to having a heart-to-heart-talk with the public on a very personal matter. There is a psychological something about the microphone that makes some people reluctant to say for an audience of listeners the equivalent of what they are perfectly willing to say for an audience of readers.

At any rate, no man had ever before given his side of an income squabble over the radio. There had been plenty of stories in the public prints in which well-known figures had unhesitatingly given their side of an income argument, but a study of the records revealed that no one in the history of radio had ever taken the air to defend himself in such a controversy or to answer his critics.

This was what I planned to ask James Roosevelt to do. It was substantially what he had undertaken to do in *Collier's Weekly*—in fact, the broadcast I wanted would be based on what he would say in the magazine—yet because of the extremely personal nature of the subject, especially when you got down to such details as whether in selling insurance you had capitalized the fact that you were the President's son, I would not very well be able to register surprise in case young Roosevelt turned me down.

Our meeting in the old brownstone house in the East Sixties was not too well timed. When I arrived, James was in conference with Walter Davenport on the final draft of the articles for *Collier's*. The magazine's staff photographer was

taking pictures while Roosevelt and Davenport went over the manuscript line by line and made their final corrections.

I sat there mentally putting my story together in the midst of all this activity and wondered whether I would have a real chance to make a sale. "Move over a bit closer to Mr. Davenport," said the photographer. "That's better, Mr. Roosevelt. I want to get a good natural shot of you and Mr. Davenport working on the story." Young Roosevelt mechanically complied with the photographer's request as the magazine writer, reaching the last line of the manuscript, said with characteristic bluntness, "If there's anything you've held back, Jimmy, you'd better tell me now. It will be too late once we go to press. There'll be hell to pay if you've been holding out on me."

J. R. said he had Told All and that was that.

One of the things that impressed me at the time was the fact that although I had never seen Roosevelt until that day I was permitted to sit in the living-room where his meeting with Davenport took place and hear everything that was going on. I knew Davenport, and many of his associates, but when the writer and the photographer had finished and I finally got a shot at young Roosevelt, I didn't get the impression that he had been offhand and casual about his personal affairs in my presence because anyone had told him that this would be perfectly all right.

Instead I got the notion that if a half dozen strangers had walked in from the street and sat down the young man would have continued to discuss his personal affairs in their presence. Whether he was normally so casual about his private life, I don't know. He certainly seemed confident as well as offhandish. I gathered that he felt his critics would not have a leg to stand on when he had had his say because of what he considered the grossly exaggerated estimates of his income that they had made public.

Another thing that impressed me was the absence of White House counsel. At that time James Roosevelt was on the federal pay-roll as one of his father's secretaries, and anything he

said in print might have far-reaching consequences. For this reason I was surprised to see the President's son putting Davenport's manuscript to bed without some official or semi-official adviser at his elbow. Davenport, having interviewed Roosevelt a few weeks before, was now showing him what he had written, and Roosevelt, suggesting an excision here and there or an insert or a change in phraseology, was relying on his own judgment and consulting no one as to policy. Present also was Mr. Sargent, his former partner in the insurance business, but he used Mr. Sargent merely to check on figures.

When I finally had a chance to tell Roosevelt what I wanted, he seemed interested but told me he could not give me an immediate answer.

However, the questions he asked indicated that he was considering my proposal. When did I want him to broadcast? Eleven P.M. EDT the night before the publication of his first article in *Collier's*, I told him.

In case he decided favorably, how much time would he be allotted in which to present his case? "A half hour if you want it," I replied, "but you'd be wiser to figure out a way of telling your story in fifteen minutes. A crisp fifteen-minute broadcast is better from the standpoint of the listening audience than one that takes twice as long, unless a man simply cannot tell his story in the shorter period. What's best for the audience is best for you, as they're the ones you're trying to convince."

"If I do it at all," said young Roosevelt, "I'll take your advice. I should be able to cover the main points in fifteen minutes."

A few days later the President's son made the decision to tell his story to the radio audience over a nationwide hook-up. The broadcast was scheduled for Thursday night, August 11th. Mr. Roosevelt would then be on vacation at Campobello Island off the coast of Maine, so we worked out a plan for originating the broadcast—which would be in the form of an interview, with Walter Davenport asking the questions—at a little hotel in the nearby town of Eastport, Me.

We observed the greatest secrecy to prevent Columbia or

Mutual from horning in. We figured that if news of the broadcast leaked out, CBS or Mutual, or both, would ask for the program—perhaps through White House connections—and we would have to say Yes. The best safeguard would be to take every possible precaution to prevent news of the broadcast from getting out.

So cautious were we that in offering the program to our own stations and affiliates we did not tell them what this "special event" would be. We simply informed them that the program would be an important interview involving a matter that had been widely discussed in the press. We seldom offer anything to the stations in this guarded manner, and the best proof that they were willing to accept our judgment on the importance of the Roosevelt-Davenport interview was the impressive coast-to-coast hook-up that resulted.

Nothing was released to the press—nor did the stations know what the program was to be—until three or four hours before Roosevelt and Davenport were to go on the air; and then it would be too late for the opposition to shoulder its way into the picture.

An announcer, an engineer, and I set out for Eastport with the necessary broadcasting equipment. There was much excitement in the little hotel about noon of the day of the broadcast, as our equipment (which practically filled a car) was carried into the lobby and taken upstairs for installation in the little old-fashioned bedroom from which we would later reach millions of people from coast-to-coast.

In no time at all it got around that the President's son was to deliver a nationwide radio address from the hotel, and every once in a while, as our engineer rigged up the apparatus that was converting the little room into a broadcasting studio, the door would be opened about a foot by some curious person who would stick his head in, look around and swiftly withdraw.

When the engineer had set up his equipment and satisfactorily tested it, I left for Campobello. Mr. Roosevelt had sent a man over with a small boat to pick me up.

I was eager to see what the President's son thought of a

proposed script *Collier's* had mailed to him and to me a few days before. This was an interview in which Roosevelt answered Davenport's questions regarding his insurance activities. The script was a literal radio version of what Roosevelt had said in the issue of *Collier's* that would be published the morning after the broadcast.

To save time this script had been mailed to Campobello four or five days in advance. This gave Roosevelt a chance to make any changes he thought necessary. It was impossible to compress all that was to appear in print within the twelve or thirteen minutes of the fifteen-minute period that would be left for Davenport and Roosevelt after time had been taken out for the opening and closing announcements. The President's son would thus have plenty of time to restore anything that had been omitted that he considered more important than the material selected. Moreover, he would be able to change the phraseology wherever he considered that necessary.

A representative of the magazine who understood radio had "conversationalized" the article—that is, made it sound more like a man chatting than a man writing—but we were prepared to make any changes young Roosevelt thought would make for a more comfortable delivery, without, of course, changing the meaning. In a broadcast of this kind it is unwise for the broadcasting system or station involved to insist upon anything except the facts and good taste in presenting them.

A set of words known as a broadcast must *fit*. A man may find comfort in one set and discomfort in another. I was there to help Mr. Roosevelt tailor his broadcast until he thought it was a good fit. I was hoping he would save work for both of us by exclaiming, "This script is swell."

He said no such thing. He wanted to eliminate some things he didn't consider important, wanted to add others that he regarded as essential and suggested a number of changes in phraseology.

"Okay," I said, "but let's return to Eastport and you can do your revision there after we take some pictures. I want some shots of you and Davenport at the mike. The papers will

be yelling for them once they know what we're up to, especially Boston and other New England papers."

Roosevelt's insurance firm—Roosevelt and Sargent—had made its offices in Boston, and ever since the first attacks on the insurance activities of the President's son, most newspapers in New England had featured every phase of the story.

My plan was to have pictures taken hours before the broadcast and fly them to Boston for development and local use there and for national distribution. We had chartered a plane which would make the hop from Eastport to Boston as soon as the pictures had been snapped.

Roosevelt was amused by our improvised radio station. So was I for that matter. I had seen NBC equipment in strange places, but it was the first time I had ever seen an old iron bed—relic of a vanished era—serve as foreground for one of our broadcasting units.

We posed Roosevelt and Davenport at the microphone and managed to keep the bed out of the pictures.

The pictures taken, Mr. Roosevelt decided to go back to Campobello (a twenty-minute trip) and return late in the afternoon for a session with Davenport and me on the changes he wanted made. As our broadcast would not go on until 11 P.M. he had plenty of time. He promised to return with a list of the specific changes he wanted made in the script.

I had a few hours to kill, so I headed for a barber shop to get a much-needed shave. As a result of this I am able to tell you about the diplomatic barber I drew into conversation in an effort to satisfy my curiosity about how the local populace would react to James Roosevelt answering the charges regarding his income.

After telling the barber where I was stopping I said, "There's a lot of excitement over at the hotel. The proprietor tells me they're going to have a broadcast."

"Yes," said the barber, "that's what I hear."

"You'd think if people in Maine wanted to broadcast," I said, "they'd go to Portland, or some place like that, where

they've got real facilities." This was my lumbering method of keeping from being mistaken for a radio man.

"There's something to that," said the barber. "But I hear they're holding it in Eastport because Jimmy Roosevelt is going to do the broadcasting, and he lives near here."

"What's he going to talk about?" I asked.

"No one seems to know for sure," said the barber, "but I hear talk he's going to take a crack at those fellers who keep knocking him about making so much money in the insurance business."

"What do *you* think?" I asked. "Do you think there was anything improper in Jimmy's conduct?"

In the mirror I could see the barber eyeing me sharply. Until I asked this question he had been casual in his manner.

The diplomatic barber countered with a question. "How do you like our town?" he asked.

"I like it fine," I said.

"Here on vacation," he asked, "or business?"

The little Eastport hotel relied principally on traveling salesmen, but there was also some vacation business. In the summer (this was August) it was hard to tell which was which.

"On business," I replied. "Selling trip."

This elicited no comment, so I had to tackle the barber anew. I was curious to know how people in this small town felt about the James Roosevelt insurance matter.

"It's going to be interesting to see what people around here will say if young Roosevelt talks about his income," said I, returning to the original subject.

"Well, I'll tell you what *I* think," said the barber. At last, I thought, he's going to let me in on something. "Most people figure a thing like that is no skin off their own backside one way or t'other."

Later in the day Roosevelt returned from Campobello and Davenport and I went over the script with him line by line. Again, I was impressed by the fact that Roosevelt was operating on his own. Once you've spoken your piece in radio, especially on a nationwide hook-up, you've spread something on

the record. It would not have surprised me to see someone from the White House staff turn up and give the President's son some fatherly advice.

But no one appeared. And, so far as I know, young Roosevelt was not in communication with anyone. He turned up with a definite idea of the changes he wanted made, but if he had arrived at those changes after consultation—perhaps over the telephone—with one of his father's advisers, he certainly treated the advice lightly. For after talking things over with Davenport he changed his ideas about some of the revisions. There proved to be plenty of them, but more of them grew out of conversation as we went over the tentative draft than out of Roosevelt's list.

By this time the story of the broadcast had been released, and the little switchboard in the hotel was beginning to handle New York and Boston calls. We had been assigned the best room in the house for our broadcast—one that had an old-fashioned wall-box telephone—and the proprietor and a member of his family alternated at the switchboard in handling the many calls that came through. Most of them were for me.

One of the calls was to tell me that the plane carrying our photographer and his plates had been forced down by thick fog at some point whose name I no longer recall. I instructed him to hire an automobile and drive as fast as he could, without getting pinched, to the nearest railroad station where he could catch the Portland express bound for Boston. The proprietor, who acted as if it was his responsibility as much as ours to make all our plans click, supplied the name of the station which the photographer could reach in time to catch the train from the point where he was fogbound.

The telephone kept ringing, and each time I answered it I felt a bit apprehensive. I was afraid, especially when the call was from our News Department in New York, that the voice at the other end was about to tell me that Columbia or Mutual, or both, had fixed it so I would be asked by the White House to let them pick up our broadcast. Among the calls I visualized was one from Steve Early saying, "You'll have to let

the other broadcasting systems in on this. The President thinks as many people as possible ought to hear Jimmy's story."

But no such call came through. And I was tickled, for I wanted to keep this broadcast away from the opposition, especially Columbia.

The work of revising the script continued. Phrase by phrase Roosevelt and Davenport went over it and soon they had only one problem: a punch line for a strong finish.

Davenport, for years a hard-hitting newspaper reporter and now a magazine writer whose copy was known for its zip, wanted to get a wallop into the sign-off. "Why don't you say," he suggested to the President's son, "that you're ready to go to Alcatraz if anyone can prove you falsified the record?"

"Isn't that a bit strong, Walter?" asked J. R. "What do *you* think, Schechter?"

"It would be a strong finish," I replied, "if you want to say it. It's up to you."

"It might sound as if I were being too dramatic," said young Roosevelt. "Why not wind up by reminding the radio audience that there are Government agencies empowered to check my statement of the facts? That carries with it the implication that these agencies can take the necessary steps if they find I have falsified the record. Let's do it that way." And we did.

Davenport hated to see his Alcatraz line go. So did I for that matter. And so did our engineer, who had overheard the conversation and afterwards urged me to help Davenport sell the idea to J. R.

I declined, sagely observing, "Never mention Alcatraz to a man more than once. It's bad form."

We had our voice tests, and I was surprised to find how truly James Roosevelt's voice resembles his father's. Davenport's voice had a nervous ring, but he asked his questions with the brusqueness of a prosecutor, which was good from the radio standpoint as it was a guarantee that the broadcast would not sound like a brother act. Davenport's radio style

was a perfect reflection of his attitude which was truly objective.

While the voice levels were being taken, an associate of mine was having a minor skirmish with a New England reporter.

"Why should *Collier's* and NBC rush to Jimmy Roosevelt's defense?" asked the reporter.

My associate countered with a question of his own. "Haven't you got the wrong impression?" he asked.

"You guys seem to be going to a lot of trouble to white-wash Jimmy Roosevelt," said the reporter.

"It all gets down to this," said my associate, who if given an opening will deliver a speech at the drop of a hat on True Liberalism, the Democratic Ideal, etc., "—a lot of people have been saying things in print about young Roosevelt's income from his insurance activities. Some of them have been demanding the actual figures. Such a fuss has been kicked up that James Roosevelt's income is damned near a national issue. That's pretty silly, especially since everything that has been written about his income has been based on rumors and estimates. No one has yet produced actual figures. Roosevelt feels it's time to do just that, especially since so many columnists have demanded them. We do not attempt to interpret those figures. We merely present them. There's story enough in that to justify thorough coverage. The public can decide for itself whether James Roosevelt's story stands up or not. Surely in a democracy no one can criticize NBC or *Collier's* for giving an accused man a chance to tell his side of the story."

My associate's peroration didn't satisfy the reporter but it at least got him off our doorstep. "If you guys won't help me," he said as he departed, "I'll see what I can dig up on my own."

About an hour before our broadcast I got an unforgettable picture of political etiquette. A local politico dropped in unannounced as I was clocking a rehearsal of the interview.

Interrupting Roosevelt as he read, the politician said, "I just dropped in to pay my respects. I hope your broadcast is a big success."

"Thanks a lot," said J. R. Then, as the politician departed, he added, "The lousy — — — —! That guy hates Father and he hates me. 'I hope your broadcast is a big success.' What he hopes is that I choke, the hypocrite!"

The broadcast opened at 11 P.M. with our announcer saying:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we now present an exclusive broadcast in which James Roosevelt, son and secretary of the President, will be interviewed by Walter Davenport, associate editor of *Collier's*. Mr. Roosevelt will answer questions concerning his insurance activities and income prior to assuming his present post at the White House.

"The reasons underlying this unusual interview were given in a recent statement by James Roosevelt in which he said: quote, I have had many requests for a reply to a recent magazine article purporting to tell the story of my activities in the insurance field. What is needed is not so much a reply as a factual account of those activities with a view to correcting improper conclusions drawn from statements so adroitly dressed up to resemble a factual account that many evidently have accepted them as taken from the record. Inasmuch as I now hold public office I feel that the public is entitled to a clear statement of all the facts so that they may judge for themselves. I have offered *Collier's* the facts and access to all my personal and business files and records concerning my operations in the insurance business and they have agreed to publish them. Unquote.

"That was James Roosevelt's statement, and he will now proceed to give you the facts, documented and described in an interview in tomorrow's issue of *Collier's*. We present James Roosevelt, secretary to the President, and Walter Davenport, author of this interview, in a broadcast from Eastport, Maine.

"First, Mr. Davenport. . . ."

Because I consider it the bluntest broadcast I have ever handled and because—quite apart from the question of whether James Roosevelt did or did not acquit himself well that night—radio talks frequently suffer because the speakers

needlessly pull their punches, I am appending the exchange between Davenport and Roosevelt:

DAVENPORT:

We might as well get right down to business. The magazine article attacking you to which our announcer referred stated that New York insurance brokers estimate your income at \$250,000 a year, while Boston brokers estimate it at \$2,000,000 a year. There's quite a spread there. But, either way, it's a lot of money, and many people have assumed that the correct figure is somewhere between these two estimates—somewhere between a quarter of a million and two million a year. What was your biggest year's income?

ROOSEVELT:

1934 was my big year. In 1934 from insurance commissions, radio talks, and dividends, my income was just under \$50,000. That's not a bad income, I'll admit, and represents a lot of insurance policies sold, but \$50,000 is a long way from \$250,000 and it's still further from that two million. Those people who estimated my income at six and seven figures had better practice up on their estimating. As I say, 1934 was my top year, with close to \$50,000. I'll give you the other years in round figures. In 1933, I made \$21,000. In 1935, I made almost \$34,000, and in 1936, it was almost \$45,000. That was my second best year. Then in 1937, my own personal income dropped to just under \$24,000. That's largely because in 1937 I left the insurance business in order to become the President's secretary. The secretary's job, as you know, pays \$10,000. That's the answer briefly. Is it clear?

DAVENPORT:

Just a minute. Maybe I'm not very good at figures. In 1937, you went to work as the President's secretary at a salary of \$10,000 a year, but you say your income for that year was \$24,000. Where did the difference come from?

ROOSEVELT:

Well, when I took the job as the President's secretary, I resigned from the insurance firm of Roosevelt and Sargent, reclaiming only my stock interest in that corporation. It was agreed among the partners that I would receive dividends on my stock equal only to the income received from business already on the books before I went to Washington. In other words, I have derived no income from any business acquired after I went to Washington. Remaining officers were to benefit from business acquired after that date. This policy has been strictly followed. My year's income in 1937, therefore, came from my Government salary and those dividends. I hope that makes it clear.

DAVENPORT:

Yes. These other figures cover all the years since your father entered the White House, and they show an average income for five years of just over \$34,000 a year. Not bad, though disappointing compared to two million or even \$250,000.

So much for your income—that is, the figures. Now for the question of how you made it. You know \$34,000 a year is pretty good money for a man then in his twenties, no matter how you look at it. How do you explain it?

ROOSEVELT:

Well, I'll say right off that there was no question that I got into places and saw prospects that I never would have seen if I hadn't happened to be the son of the President. I realize that. But son or no son, I got tossed out a lot, too. Prospects don't wilt just because you happen to be the son of the President. You haven't heard, have you, about the times I've tried to see a prospect and have been turned down flat? And the times I couldn't even get in? Of the many times when other men beat me to the contract? Well, there have been plenty of those, too. For insurance is one of the routine phases of modern business. Practically every business man buys insurance. He seeks out the lowest cost and the best service. Like any other salesman,

I succeeded when the client found my insurance service satisfactory and my cost low enough. I failed when they were not.

I don't like unfavorable publicity any more than the next man. Anybody writing or shooting propaganda about me has always been welcome to my records. I should have been glad to give all these facts to any accredited writer. Why, Paul Clark of the John Hancock Company in Boston even tried to arrange a meeting for a much publicized recent critic of mine with the clear understanding that we would open all our files for that gentleman's inspection, but that gentleman refused. Said he preferred to get his facts elsewhere. But where could he get them or verify them except through our files? I would have been glad to let him examine my income-tax returns, just as you have done. It's too bad. We all hate to be smeared. I suppose, though, what I hate most is having the President smeared through me. That seems to me to be underhand work, and somewhat cowardly.

DAVENPORT:

It's been said that often insurance and politics, if combined, form a racket. For years men with political influence had sold insurance to business concerns on the basis of "Do it with me or else." Now, what do you think of that?

ROOSEVELT:

I've no doubt it's true. There are crooks in every business. But what do you think about this? Tell me if I seem crazy for having the idea, but I have a feeling that being the President's son, some people would be calling me a crook no matter what business I had entered, providing I'd been successful. If I had been graduated from Boston University Law School, where I studied for a while, and had later practiced law, either privately or in the Government service, that would even more have made me a subject for dark insinuations and imaginative gossip. If I had opened a neat little corner grocery store, for instance, and was making anything more than the rent, they'd have said that relief money had to be spent in my store, or else.

My trouble seems to be a mixture of being the son of the President, and not failing in business. But from a personal standpoint, may I just add this: From the day in 1931 when I entered the insurance business in Massachusetts, and my father was Governor of New York, my partners and associates have had two clear and definite understandings. First, we made it a rule not to handle any business known as political insurance. These are insurance contracts required by federal, state and city or local governmental bodies. They include contractors' performance bonds, bail bonds, financial bonds, construction insurance, and so on. And we never violated that rule. Second, all our clients have understood that our services were strictly confined to insurance. Apropos of the indirect tie-up with politics, I challenge anyone to show that, because of doing business with me, anyone at any time has ever been placed in a preferred position, or because of failure to use my services anyone has ever been prosecuted, persecuted, threatened, or in any way harmed by a Government agency.

DAVENPORT:

To change the subject, what about the income tax people? Were you ever summoned to explain your returns?

ROOSEVELT:

Yes. Back in 1935, I neglected to include in my returns a matter of \$1,000 in stock dividends. I had to go down and explain and, of course, I corrected the error and paid up.

DAVENPORT:

Why did you pick the insurance business?

ROOSEVELT:

For a very natural reason. While I was still in school, Father was vice-president of the Fidelity & Deposit Company of Maryland, an insurance company with offices in New York. I had been in the office a great deal. I'm not sure that at that time I fully understood all I heard, but the impression re-

mained,—a good impression. That led to my reading books on insurance and its scope. So when I left Harvard, and found myself without an income, just married, with family responsibilities of my own, and nothing coming in except allowances from my family, I turned to the thing which interested me most—insurance—in an effort to make myself self-supporting.

DAVENPORT:

It has been said recently and very flatly that you are one of the biggest insurers of liquor cargoes in the business, that you write the insurance on great quantities of scotch whiskies imported into the United States. What about it?

ROOSEVELT:

That's baseless,—just some more of the ugly gossip the rumor-mongers have been peddling. Whoever started that one was either purposely lying, or just didn't want to investigate. Neither Roosevelt and Sargent, nor either one of us as an individual, has directly or indirectly insured as much as one bottle of whisky imported into the United States, nor have we ever attempted to. No exceptions. None. Before spreading rumors of that sort, the malicious gossips should look up the law. For insurance on imports of whisky must be placed at the port of export. And to go a bit further, neither Sargent, nor I, nor our Company, is in any way affiliated with nor have we any financial interest in any company that insures whisky imported into this country. Is that plain enough?

DAVENPORT:

Yes. Now just one more question, an important one. It has been charged that you continued actively as an insurance operator after you went to work as secretary to the President. Is that true?

ROOSEVELT:

It is most decidedly not true. Not a word of it. Since I have been in Washington, and I want especially to emphasize this,

since I have been in Washington, I have not solicited nor attempted to solicit—no, and I haven't accepted, a single dollar of insurance from anyone at any time, anywhere. I hope that's also plain enough.

DAVENPORT:

It is. Now, look, we've just got about thirty seconds left, enough for a final question. What will be your attitude if there are further attacks?

ROOSEVELT:

I have no intention of getting into alley-fights with die-hards. There are, of course, proper agencies with full power to check my statement of the facts. So, with a word to you who may be listening, goodnight and thank you.

When the broadcast was over, the lobby of the little hotel was swarming with Eastporters waiting for a glimpse of young Roosevelt. Some wanted autographs. We kidded Davenport about the absence of demand for the Davenport autograph.

But Walter Davenport was happy now that the show was over. I don't think Walter likes to broadcast. Although he did a good job, throughout the interview he looked like a bilious gargoyle, and it was reassuring to see him smile again.

As I pushed through the lobby I saw an old man in a rocker so completely surrounded by people he couldn't rock. He indignantly demanded to know why the President's son couldn't have broadcast from Campobello if he really thought anyone cared to hear him brag about his income.

Before turning in that night, Davenport and I had a few drinks with the hotel proprietor, who confided that Eastport wasn't what it used to be. The place was dead, he said. The hostelry was losing money. After a second or a third drink of our private stock, which he termed the best "store whisky" he'd tasted in some time, he tried to sell us the hotel. We were the sort of people who could stir things up. There were more people in town than Eastport had seen in a long time. More

of these broadcasts—one a week would do—and the place would be on the map, and the hotel would be making money. We were livewires—he could see that—and if we didn't want to take over the place ourselves we probably knew some people who might want to make a good investment, etc., far, far into the night.

All the way back to New York I congratulated myself on our being able to protect a secret and shut CBS out of the James Roosevelt broadcast. "That's one Columbia would have loved to have," I told everyone who would listen. The mail response to the broadcast proved so gratifying that I started congratulating myself all over again. How smart we had been to sew up this broadcast exclusively and make it stick!

And then I had a rude awakening. Less than a week after my return to New York I learned that CBS had known about the James Roosevelt broadcast several weeks prior to its delivery! In fact, the President's son had consulted a friend at CBS before agreeing to broadcast for us!

Roosevelt's friend at Columbia urged him to go on for us because he sincerely thought it would be a good thing for J. R. The Columbia Broadcasting System, having bought insurance of J. R., did not think it good policy to offer him time on their network to defend himself. In good faith they had made a deal with Roosevelt and Sargent—for insurance which they would have purchased elsewhere if young Roosevelt and his partner had not secured the business—and they had never used the contact with the President's son as a means of gaining political or Governmental favors. One way to start the gossips misinterpreting their position would be to offer James Roosevelt a radio spot in which to clear himself. They were smart in not making a bid for the broadcast and in urging J. R. to tell his story over a broadcasting system with which he had transacted no business.

At least one CBS person had a laugh over my elaborate preparations to see that the J. R. broadcast was an NBC exclusive. And I imagine many others at CBS subsequently shared the laugh.

XXV

Youth Has Its Fling

RADIO is constantly referred to as a young industry. Yet there are those who seem surprised when we do things that suggest the exuberance of youth. Thumbing your nose at the opposition and even scribbling naughty words about them on figurative fences is part of the picture.

There are definite signs that the industry is growing up. It has donned long pants, but admittedly they are *early* long pants, which merely means that we have graduated to a more grown-up form of juvenile delinquency.

I hope we all will soon be wearing our third or fourth long pants, but I also pray that the day will never come when we grow too dignified. We must have no rivalries that are reminiscent of the vanished irascible small-town editor who would invite the editor of the paper in a neighboring community to the village green for a public caning. But NBC must never be above soaping the sidewalk for CBS, and vice versa. Of course I do not advocate using great quantities of soap, just a little.

The journalism of the air waves will lose much of its color when rival networks fall in love with one another. Obviously the saga of Poughkeepsie and the epic of Milwaukee could never have happened if NBC and CBS were not feuding, as Mr. Winchell puts it.

Let me tell you first about Poughkeepsie, or the Regatta Crisis. The R.C. was precipitated by a series of events characterized by an earnest desire on the part of NBC and CBS to put something over on one another. It was all good clean fun though more than slightly wearing.

We sewed up all the track meets exclusively, whereupon

they sewed up the major golf tournaments. They got hold of tennis and we grabbed off the prize fights. And so it went. Eventually, it reached the point where one of us was compelled to sew up polo. I am glad to be able to report that CBS did this.

Our collective merriment over Columbia's polo coup was interrupted by the news that they had also secured the exclusive rights to broadcast the annual Poughkeepsie Regatta.

"How," we demand to know, red-faced with rage, "can anyone sew up the exclusive rights to a river?" It was perfectly obvious that what happened on a river was in the public domain, and we became pretty apoplectic denouncing this outrage.

Columbia, it developed, had contracted for the exclusive rights to broadcast from the observation train that followed the shells down the river. Obviously, if we had had the foresight to sew up the observation train, Columbia would have screamed that *they* had been outraged. For so it goes.

We did our best to get our equipment on the observation train, pointing out to the racing authorities that the Bill of Rights, which guaranteed free speech, really intended that this should cover what happened on rivers as well as on land.

Our argument sounded convincing enough to us but it failed to impress the authorities. Not too politely they told us to scram when we sought to find a place for our equipment and announcer aboard the train. So we scrambled.

Needless to say, we did not give up the idea of covering the race. We do not get fully determined until someone gives us the bum's rush. In fact, we become positively resourceful when a bouncer does a job on us.

In no time at all we figured out a way of covering the Poughkeepsie Regatta. We got our lines up along the river at vantage points about a mile apart and at these points we stationed announcers with powerful field-glasses. We also made an arrangement with the New York Central Railroad that permitted us to station an observer on a convenient trestle

that would enable him to see the boats coming down the river.

As an added precaution we chartered a United Airlines plane, equipped it for broadcasting and put a crew aboard that would not lose sight of the boats at any time during the race.

The gnashing of teeth in the CBS camp could be heard for miles when our diabolical plan became known. Those NBC's were up to their dirty work again.

There was plenty of time for CBS to do its molar-grinding when rain caused the race to be postponed for a few hours. Our special plane which had to take off on time from the Newark Airport flew round and round for hours, waiting for the race to start.

Because the Hudson is very narrow at Poughkeepsie the NBC plane was flying at a sharp angle during the long wait before the race started. One member of our plane crew was a "spotter"—a junior coxswain from the University of Washington with the gift of gab—whose job it was to indicate quickly the position of the shells. By the time the race started he was so air-sick from being tilted around in circles that he slumped down in his seat and was unable to rally enough energy to sit up and look out of the window at the race.

Our other commentator was Royal Brougham, sports editor of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Mr. Brougham heroically stuck to his task, with only an occasional burp to indicate that he, too, was air-sick. He completed his ten-minute description of the race.

A member of the NBC News Department who was aboard the plane reported to me afterwards that this was undoubtedly the finest description of a Poughkeepsie Regatta by a man in the throes of vomiting in the whole history of radio.

To make it unanimous, the engineer we had placed aboard the plane,—a man who had flown the Pacific in the China Clipper on her maiden voyage and had suffered no ill effects—became violently air-sick, too.

As I sat in my office in New York listening to the broadcast

of the race I was puzzled by what I thought was a new kind of static that was impairing Brougham's otherwise excellent account of the race.

Little did I realize that this stalwart from Seattle, sticking grimly to his task, was puking his way through a four-mile course.

This is the sort of thing that happens when, with the spirit of flaming youth, one broadcasting system refuses to be outdone by another.

Naturally, CBS decided to put one over on us the next chance they got. The most appropriate way to do this, of course, would be to horn in on one of our broadcasts just as we had horned into one of theirs.

The annual National Amateur Athletic Union Track and Field Meet held a few weeks later at the Marquette Stadium in Milwaukee presented a perfect opportunity for revenge.

We had the exclusive rights sewed up, a fact that we triumphantly announced to the world. The office scrapbook reveals that everyone took our triumph seriously except the Columbia Broadcasting System. The light of high resolve in its collective eye, Columbia was determined to broadcast that track meet and they set out in a highly organized way to carry out their grim purpose.

Ted Husing was chairman of the board of strategy, and a good one he made, too. His first move was to secure an emissary, an alert young newspaper woman who lived in the neighborhood of the stadium. She was known to the Rev. F. G. Graeber, pastor of the Apostles' Lutheran Church, which is located just outside the stadium.

Husing's emissary approached Pastor Graeber for the use of the roof of the schoolhouse which adjoined the church and was part of it. If someone else had made the request he might have questioned it. But when a young woman who worked on a local newspaper asked for the use of the roof in connection with a broadcast he did not question it. Newspaper people, he pointed out, are always making odd requests.

In consideration of \$10,000 we had contracted with the A.A.U. for the exclusive broadcasting rights to national meets for a period of four years. The contract referred to broadcasts direct from the stadia where these meets were to be held. Nothing was said about broadcasts from roofs.

Judging by the cockiness with which they proceeded with their nefarious plans, CBS evidently was aware that there was no roof clause.

When Kenneth Fry, Chicago Director of Special Events for NBC, arrived at the stadium to prepare for the installation of his own equipment he became suspicious of the platform which CBS had erected on the schoolhouse roof and of the wires leading to this platform. His suspicions grew when he got the meaningful news that Ted Husing was in town.

Ken Fry immediately swung into action. His first move was to inform the Rev. Graeber that NBC had exclusive rights to broadcast the track meet, and that the platform that had been erected on the church's schoolhouse was a sacrilegious effort to defeat the ends of justice.

"I gave my word and cannot back out now," was the pastor's reply.

The next person to enter the picture was Leon M. Gurda, city building inspector, who was informed that the platform had been built without a permit.

Mr. Gurda, it developed, was not interested in mere technicalities. "While the platform was erected without a permit they did apply for one later, and I'm going to excuse the original error as an inadvertence," the building inspector was quoted as saying in the local press.

Mr. Fry's next move was a fiendish scheme to block the view from the schoolhouse roof by the adroit use of a hundred yards or more of cheesecloth.

According to reports, further plans considered by Mr. Fry were the following:

1. Hiring a brigade of small boys to shine sun reflections into Mr. Husing's eyes by means of small hand-mirrors.

2. Persuading track meet officials to confuse Mr. Husing by hanging wrong numbers on the athletes.

3. Hiring an airplane to fly over the schoolhouse roof and confound Mr. Husing by dropping things on him and by drowning out what he was saying with the aid of a motor that was made to roar its loudest.

4. Hiring a South American blow-gun artist to pick off Mr. Husing with a poison dart.

5. Arranging with a firm of building wreckers to tear the building down right from under Mr. Husing's feet.

All of these plans had to be abandoned because it was the third of July and people got so independent thinking about Independence Day that you couldn't get anybody to do any work, much less dirty work.

Well, Mr. Husing triumphed. He broadcast the meet. However, as I consult our scrapbook I am delighted to learn that it was a qualified triumph. The *Milwaukee Journal* assures me that that roof was beastly hot. It is also comforting to learn that the view was not very good. When our Mr. Fry informed me of this I, naturally, thought he might be slightly prejudiced, but it is comforting to read a newspaper clipping which says:

"The Husing roost was not the ideal spot for watching and telling the world just what was happening. It was outside looking in, and the view of the track was far from special. . . . The view consisted chiefly of two opulent elms. The leaves were beautifully rich and green but the track southward to the finish line was thoroughly screened. . . . It was a triumph for Ted Husing, but it may have been a pyrrhic victory, for when Husing climbed down from his platform he appeared to be in grave danger of sunstroke."

Though weakened by his experience, Husing had the spirit to say when he learned all the harrowing details of our efforts to dislodge him from his perch on the roof, "What are they squawking about? They did the same thing to us at the Poughkeepsie Regatta and at the National Open."

We had the sole broadcasting rights when challenger Joe Louis met Champion Jim Braddock in the fight at Comiskey Park, Chicago, that won the heavyweight title for Joe.

Since we had an exclusive, we were carefully checking all rumors that opposition stations and networks might try to pirate the event. The night of the fight, I was at the ringside with Ken Fry when the Chicago office telephoned to report a rumor that one of our competitors was going to try to broadcast a description of the fight with a "beer-mug" transmitter, to a point just outside the park. (A beer-mug, as the reader knows, is a tiny self-contained transmitting station, weighing around seven pounds, and is about six, by four, by ten inches.)

I asked Ken to investigate and see what he could find out. He left the press-stand and slipped into the crowd that was milling around in the aisles near the ringside seats. A few minutes after that he spotted an engineer from an opposition station carefully and furtively walking around the ringside section, with a bulge in the front of his coat. His coat collar was turned up around his neck and his arms were folded across the bulge.

Confident that we were on the trail of something important Ken started after his man. The fellow walked down an aisle to the edge of the ball park, around the park, and then carefully picked his way back to the ringside from the opposite side. Ken was right behind him, watching every move.

The rival engineer sat down carefully in the last row of the press section, his arms still folded over the bulging object inside his coat, and looked around very cautiously.

Ken Fry, who is not lacking in nerve, edged up and squatted down beside the man he was shadowing, waiting for his next move. The mysterious engineer eyed Ken a moment, reached inside his coat, and handing him the object he had been concealing, said in a stage whisper, "Want a drink, buddy?" He had a bottle of whisky.

"To hell with the opposition," said Ken, as he went back to work.

The National Open! That reminds me of another CBS-NBC sports feud.

Husing was right. Come to think of it, we did quite a job of muscling in at the National Open. CBS, after all, had signed this up as an exclusive, and while we did no roof-sitting we did something almost as bad.

In planning to take the shine off an opposition exclusive that involves a golf tournament, you have to do something more resourceful than plant someone on a roof. There is no roof in the world from which we could possibly steal a rival's golf show. This is unfortunate because it involves a deeper kind of conspiracy than sending a newspaper woman around to dicker with a pastor for the erection of a platform atop a schoolhouse.

The golf tournament that we planned to mike-crash was the National Open at Oakland, Mich.

The assignment called for someone who was radio hardened, who knew his way around, who had been pushed around, and who knew how to push others around, if necessary. Of course, he would also have to be a good announcer and at least know the difference between a putt and a drive.

The more I thought of my plan for annoying Ted Husing and CBS, the more I thought of Tom (Red) Manning as the ideal irritant. Red would carry out the assignment as well as anyone, and in the process prove more exasperating to the opposition than anyone else. By this I mean that Red would conduct himself with a casualness indicating that he thought he had as much right at Oakland as CBS or anyone else and, in fact, might even be counted upon to conduct himself as though the rival camp were crashing *his* show.

Red went to Oakland a few days in advance, looked over the situation and reported that the best move would be to hire the basement of a garage that was closer to the links than any other building that was obtainable. So we took over the garage basement and installed our lines. Red looked over the field of possibilities and also reported that the person best equipped to do the principal daily tournament summary (with Red

himself making the announcements) was Lawson Little, one of the country's outstanding professionals. He has a good voice and is at home before the microphone.

The tournament got under way. Manning and Little would meet nightly in the basement and figure out the day's highlights on which they thought their broadcast should be based. They would do this in time to do a daily broadcast from 6:00 to 6:15 P.M. over a nationwide hook-up.

Ironically enough—and I hope I do not seem to be gloating too much as I say this—our bootlegged broadcast had a bigger audience than the bonded Columbia product. Their day-time running story of the matches as they were played conflicted with the time when most golfing fans are either working or golfing.

The tournament was won by Ralph Guldahl. I had authorized Red to spend \$500 for a brief talk by the winner, with the understanding that he was to go on exclusively for NBC. Even the winner of a tournament as important as the National Open does not get a big money prize and the extra \$500 was a nice sweetener,—especially for what we call a "Hello Mom" speech, in which the winner of a sports event gives a few "impressions," greets the folks back home, if any, etc.

A few minutes after Guldahl was "in," Red Manning had him sewed up. And only a few minutes after this Ted Husing was telling the radio audience something like this: "Ralph Guldahl has just turned in a score that makes him National Open Champion. In just a minute we will have him on the air."

Ralph, who had been dragged over to the microphone by someone who was unaware of the Guldahl-Manning deal, whispered into Husing's ear, "I'm sorry but I've agreed to speak for NBC."

Had there been universal television at the time, the radio audience would have seen Ted Husing's Adam's apple wobble up and down as the astonished CBS star grasped the significance of the new champion's words.

Manning and Little had no time to lose. Flanking Guldahl on either side they plowed through the crowd and hustled the champ to our cozy little basement and put him on the air at once.

Needless to say, Ted Husing was burned up. In fact, he was hotter than he subsequently became that afternoon he covered the track meet from the schoolhouse roof, and that must have been plenty hot, as the records show that the thermometer hit 99 on that historic day in the annals of radio skulduggery.

It was too bad we had to do this to Mr. Husing, but think of our predicament. We had been shut out of the National Open and we could not very well take the air and explain to the golfing fraternity, "Due to the fact that Columbia sewed up the National Open exclusively, we are unable to keep you posted on the progress of this tournament. Tune in on Columbia and find out what is going on in this thrilling sports event."

We just had to get the show.

It might be added as a postscript that the following year CBS, which had a contract for the National Open that covered several years, arranged for the addition of a clause to the effect that participants in the tournament could broadcast only over the so-called "official" program contracted for by the Committee.

This rule, however, did not prevent Ted Husing from having a bad moment when he put on the winner of the 1940 Open. Little was still on our sports staff as a golf commentator and when shortly after he won the 1940 title, Ted Husing put him on the air and he opened by saying, "You know, I am an NBC man," Ted nearly died.

Then, of course, there was the battle of the race tracks. As I look back upon it now it seems as if CBS sewed up a track whenever NBC wasn't looking, and vice versa.

Not until this particular radio vendetta got going did I realize that there were so many race tracks. Columbia had

sewed up the Kentucky Derby as an exclusive and also the races at the New York tracks. We, in turn, sewed up Pimlico and the Delaware track. For good measure we also lined up Santa Anita and Bing Crosby's Delmar track.

With Belmont and Saratoga in New York, and Churchill Downs in Kentucky, CBS had the edge. But, of course, we had to be loyal to Maryland, where the top-flight Pimlico track was located, so we contrived to get into our sports broadcasts references to the superiority of Maryland to Kentucky racing. At first we tried to be subtle about it. This only puzzled our listeners, so we threw discretion to the winds and in a frenzied Chamber of Commerce spirit told all who tuned in that the Blue Grass State had better look to its laurels, that the scene of the Kentucky Derby was to be put in the shade by something more in keeping with the noble traditions of racing. It was so obvious that this was part of a kidding match that we did not draw upon ourselves the wrath of any Kentucky boosters.

The duel over race-track broadcasts reached its climax when it was announced that War Admiral and Sea Biscuit would meet in a match race. You could hear the proverbial pin drop in the CBS and NBC News Departments as both organizations waited breathlessly to hear whether the horses would battle it out over a track whose broadcasting rights were controlled by us or by the opposition.

There was much tearing of hair in our news room when it was announced that the race would be held at Belmont Park. As there was no way in which we could possibly get our microphones into that famous racing plant, we did our best to get the race switched to another track.

Someone in our organization who knows him got in touch with Charles Howard, owner of Sea Biscuit, and tried to convince that gentleman that the world would come to an end if the match race was staged at Belmont. Not even our earnestness could make our plea seem important. Someone representing Mr. Howard finally said that he would see us at Belmont Park—if we could get in.

Early in the struggle to win the great match race exclu-

sively—even before it was known where it was to be held—John F. Royal, formerly our Vice-President in charge of programs, and Larry Lowman, who then occupied a similar post at Columbia, got into a razzing match that culminated in Mr. Royal agreeing to eat his straw hat if Columbia got the race exclusively. If we succeeded in getting the race, Royal was to send his hat over to Lowman, who was to eat it, with no Worcestershire or A-1 sauce to improve the flavor.

It began to look as though Mr. Royal would be compelled to eat both his hat and his words. The evening before the race was scheduled to take place there were rumors in circulation that Mr. Royal had secretly parboiled an experimental straw hat to see if that improved the flavor. The following morning at 10:30 it was discovered that Sea Biscuit had sprained a ligament in one of his legs and the race was called off. So, temporarily, at least, Mr. Royal was saved from a possible attack of straw-hat indigestion.

Mr. Royal was pretty cheerful about the situation until it was announced that the race would be held a week later at the same track. But the season at Belmont terminated before a new date could be fixed.

There was rejoicing in our camp when not long after the conclusion of the Belmont season it was announced that War Admiral and Sea Biscuit would race at Suffolk Downs in Boston, one of the race tracks we had sewed up. This, of course, meant an NBC exclusive.

Ten minutes before the race was scheduled to start in the presence of the biggest crowd in the history of Massachusetts racing, a veterinary making a last-minute check-up announced that the Howard horse's leg had not responded sufficiently to treatment. There might be serious consequences if the animal ran.

It was decided that Sea Biscuit would have to rest the injured member three or four weeks before he would be ready to race, and this meant that the match could not take place at Suffolk Downs.

Once again there was suspense. What track would get the

race? Would it be an NBC or a CBS plant? Pimlico was finally selected, and that meant an NBC exclusive.

The race really took place this time, and it proved to be one of the most thrilling in the history of the sport. Royal had his hat carefully wrapped and sent over to Lowman by special messenger with the suggestion that thorough mastication might minimize the distress the rival vice-president would experience in consuming it. To this day we do not know whether Lowman lived up to the contract. The hat disappeared, but this does not prove that Lowman ate it.

Royal demanded affidavits signed by witnesses. These Lowman was unable to produce.

Royal, after considering taking the matter to the courts, decided to drop it when he learned that Lowman was not looking well. But I still insist that does not mean that Lowman ate the hat. We had landed the race and he had every reason in the world to look and feel sick.

The CBS-NBC sports feud reached another climax when Columbia discovered they had "bought" so many sports events they could not put them all on the air. They wound up giving some of them away to WMCA and WHN and other local stations in New York. They had sewed up a great many major and minor sports, and at the moment I do not recall whether fly-casting, bowling and badminton were among them.

Not to be outdone by CBS, the trivia division of our News Department dickered successfully for the rights to broadcast the automobile races at the Roosevelt Raceway, then a new Long Island track. Our announcement must have made this sound like an important coup, for Columbia lost no time in making up its mind that it also had to broadcast the Roosevelt Raceway events. They were determined about it, too. In fact, they pulled the airplane act,—hired a plane that was equipped for broadcasting to cover these races for the CBS network. This was a new high (no gag intended) for competing for a dud. The doings at the Raceway did not make good radio, consequently our broadcast did not amount to much. But it

was a masterpiece compared with the imitation of it by CBS. If there is anything worse than a fundamentally lousy broadcast, it is a misguided attempt to duplicate it.

For the record, however, it must be admitted that on occasion we have made the same mistake.

As we had the broadcasting rights to all the big fights, when the Braddock-Schmeling match took place we had every reason to believe that we were going to have an exclusive.

One of the small local stations had different ideas. They rented an apartment overlooking the Yankee Stadium and set up broadcasting facilities. Armed with a tremendous spy-glass their sports commentator did a running story of the fight.

We toyed with the idea of turning powerful floodlights on the bootlegger to prevent him from seeing. When this idea was abandoned, we solemnly considered a proposal to explode smoke bombs that would completely obscure the view of the buccaneer in the apartment.

Before long we saw, however, that there was nothing we could do to prevent our uninvited guest from getting the broadcast. So we decided to rationalize and be indifferent about the whole thing. After all it was a dinky station. Shucks! You can't bother driving off every little puppy that insisted on snapping at your heels.

A few days before the fight took place we had succeeded in beating off a much more important raid. Transradio, which feeds its news to a big list of stations, had announced that they would supply their clients with a blow-by-blow account of the battle. Here was a case where it was obvious that steps should be taken.

Mike Jacobs, promoter of the bout, was as worked up as we were. His lawyer and a member of our Legal Department got together and the first thing you know they had drawn up a temporary injunction.

Such matters are handled promptly in the courts, and in no time at all we found ourselves telling our story to Mr. Jus-

tice Pecora in the Supreme Court of the State of New York. Transradio's lawyer announced that they would broadcast the fight without swiping it; whereupon Judge Pecora said, "I will give you until ten o'clock tomorrow morning to come in with your plan."

Ten o'clock the next morning came and the promised plan was not forthcoming, so Judge Pecora granted the injunction.

The plan for bootlegging the fight involved having a man at the ringside equipped with a small battery transmitter by means of which he would be able to short-wave an account of the fight to a near-by apartment for rebroadcasting.

This, incidentally, was important, as it set a precedent. Future tickets for fights held in the State of New York bore a brief notice warning the purchaser that broadcasting a fight, or any portion thereof, was illegal. This legend is still to be found on the back of all New York State fight tickets.

Perhaps if we have enough of these vendettas sufficient legal precedents will be established so that in time we will become an orderly industry.

But do we want that? Can we afford to lose all of our colorful chaos?

As radio's most amusing feuds have been tiffs over sports events, I have confined myself to sports in this chapter.

I wish the reader could take a quick glance at the scrapbook that lies open on my desk as this chapter is written. Headlines such as the following from the newspapers and the trade press leap up at one:

SPORTING EVENT EXCLUSIVES STEAM
UP NBC AND CBS SUMMER RIVALRY

ANOTHER SPORT EVENT
IS SNATCHED BY CBS

NBC STEALS A TRICK

FIGHT ON FOR SPORTS NEWS SCOOPS

Networks Are Seen Engaging In Heated
Battle For The Exclusive Airing
Of Important Special Events

WABC SAYS "FORE"
TO WJZ

Pays Fancy Price For Exclusive Broad-
cast Of National Open Tourney

FROM PERCH ON CHURCH
RADIO LADS SEE MEET

Captain Husing, on the Outside Looking
In, Roosts High To Win A Track
And Hot Air Victory

FOURTEEN BIG SPORTS EVENTS
FOR NBC EXCLUSIVELY

There are whole columns of juicy reading under those headlines. To be sure that all of those involved do the proper amount of blushing in public, I am quoting from two stories in the *New York World-Telegram* which echo events with which the reader is already familiar. Here they are:

THAT SPORT BROADCAST FEUD AGAIN

Yesterday WABC issued bulletins on how it had shouldered NBC out of the National Open golf tournament this week-end and how good the broadcast would be. Today NBC comes back with counter bulletins on what NBC stations are doing on sports events that WABC can just try and get into. Starting with the Louis-Braddock fight June 22, NBC lists everything down to a dog sled derby up in Canada next winter.

This battle to get exclusive rights to sports events is one fight, for a change, from which listeners will benefit. The fan will be assured of coverage on one network

and the non-fan won't find his whole radio schedule cluttered up with golf or cornhusking on all the stations.

TWO CONFLICTS AT POUGHKEEPSIE

Along with the battle of the crews at the Poughkeepsie regatta tomorrow afternoon, NBC and Columbia are making a radio duel of the broadcast. Columbia reserved broadcast rights on the judges' float and the observation train for WABC, with Ted Husing as principal observer. WEAJ is stationing several announcers along the route, including Graham McNamee aboard a Coast Guard cutter anchored at the finish line. A plane also may be used to follow the shells down the course.

The inter-network rivalry on sport broadcasts is becoming increasingly bitter. Ted Husing and Bill Stern (NBC) exchanged heated words interspersed with threats of 'wire cutting' during the Princeton track meet Saturday. The argument occurred between microphone sessions.

It is fun to be known as a young industry, but it is obvious that we will have to tack on a few years.

Boy, pass the long pants!

XXVI

Secret Sidelights

FROM exclusive personal sources I learn that German chemists will soon announce the perfection of what in time will become the deadliest factor in the war in the air. It is a gas, which when properly released, stalls the engines of aircraft in flight. It is unnecessary to elaborate on the importance of this secret weapon.

From reliable informants whose confidential advices are available only to me I hear that the British have been tipped off about this German anti-aircraft gas and that their scientists are feverishly at work trying to develop a means of meeting the new Nazi threat. Cedric Erunam, one of Britain's leading poison-gas authorities, in a talk with a close friend of mine who cleverly contrived to get the information to me, declared that he had definitely fixed upon the chemical principle that would ultimately nullify the new German threat. Erunam, however, frankly admitted that considerable experimentation would have to be done before his antidote could be relied upon to function successfully with any degree of regularity.

Great secrecy is being observed in securing the volunteers needed to make the dangerous tests—in actual aircraft flying at high speeds—that will have to be made before Erunam's antidote can be perfected, according to my source, whose identity I must conceal to protect him.

Incapacitated members of the R.A.F. will be used,—men who have recovered from their injuries but who are no longer fit for first-line air patrol. Thirty-nine of these men have offered themselves as guinea pigs in tests in which a gas of Britain's own invention that is said to have an action similar to the German anti-aircraft gas will be employed to see if it can actually stall an airplane motor in mid-air.

The good friend to whom I am indebted for one of the most astonishing confidential tips of the war is relying upon me not even to hint at his identity. To do so would be to jeopardize his safety, which, of course, no one would want me to do.

On April 16th, my informant continues, the world will be startled by revelations involving this most spectacular of Nazi secret weapons. Be prepared, among other things, to hear that the amazing Nazi plane-stalling gas was originally an English invention. A British fifth columnist—a respected member of Parliament by the way—is responsible for the fact that the invention, and all the secret documents and chemical formula connected with it, are now in German hands.

When the full story is spread on the record these revelations will also rock the North and South American continents. Among those unpleasantly involved will be a former United States senator whose last name begins with an "S" and a former president of a South American Republic whose wife is the daughter of a third cousin of the former German Kaiser. My source would like to be more specific, but obviously the situation is too loaded with dangerous potentialities. . . .

You have just been listening to Harold Hearzall, veteran foreign correspondent, now serving the All-American Broadcasting System as chief interpreter of news from foreign lands. Mr. Hearzall supplements the press association news made available to him by A-ABS with remarkable sources of his own. A natural-born news-hawk, Mr. Hearzall during his many years of service as a foreign correspondent in all the important cities of Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, established important contacts—many of them ripening into close personal friendships—that he has maintained ever since. Mr. Hearzall will be heard again Thursday night over these same stations in another of his "Lifting the Curtain" news broadcasts.

Scotland Yard is looking for a diminutive well-dressed old lady with a slight limp who greeted General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the French Government in Exile, as he

stepped out of an automobile in London the other day and almost lured him to his death.

Speaking flawless French, the old lady addressed the General effusively as she took a letter out of her handbag and asked him to read it. The letter, written in French and purporting to come from her grandson in Paris, had recently been smuggled out of France, she said. Her grandson told how he and a great many other young Frenchmen were quietly organizing resistance to the Nazi régime in the French capital.

As the General stood reading the letter a hand grenade, evidently meant for him, was thrown out of the third-story window of a near-by office building. Miraculously the instrument of death landed on the roof of an empty bus that was going by. The explosion shattered the public conveyance and sent scores of people scurrying to cover.

When the excitement was over the little old lady had disappeared. General de Gaulle, unhurt except for a minor cut on the right cheek caused by a bit of flying glass, has given the authorities a detailed description of the Frenchwoman or French-speaking Englishwoman—he is not sure which—who tried to lure him to his destruction.

While the old lady's French was perfect, the General thinks he detected a suggestion of over-precise pronunciation. This leads him to believe it more likely that she was a cultured Englishwoman with a gift for the French language than a Frenchwoman. Scotland Yard thinks it probable that the De Gaulle theory may provide the clue that will lead to the apprehension and arrest of the frail little wisp of a woman who tried to lure him to his doom by collaboration with a mysterious accomplice. Two men and a woman in the building from which the hand grenade was thrown are being held for questioning.

De Gaulle made the interesting statement that the old lady's limp might not prove a clue. There was something about the way she carried herself that made him wonder whether the limp was not a simulated infirmity designed to confuse the police.

It will be denied but it is nevertheless true that the United States is turning over sixty-eight over-age destroyers to the British Admiralty, not the fifty reported.

It will be recalled that originally the United States and British Governments worked out a deal that called for our exchanging fifty destroyers for naval bases in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana, and that when this country issued the official announcement of the transaction we declared that Great Britain had added naval bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland as a "gift." In other words, we received eight naval bases instead of the six stipulated as the *quid pro quo*.

So far so good. But Interplanetary News has long been skeptical of too great a show of generosity on the part of a nation or an individual, and we decided that this situation called for a thorough investigation.

England, it must be admitted, took her chances, but it was not a serious gamble. The worst that could happen would be that the British subtlety would not get a rise out of the United States, in which event this country would establish air and naval bases in Newfoundland and Bermuda, territory she would be in no position to defend if Hitler's threatened invasion of England succeeded. England knew she could trust us and she preferred letting us move in, knowing we would strengthen defenses of these possessions, to running the risk of having them fall into German hands.

As a result of this investigation we are able to announce that the British "gift" of two extra naval bases was not in reality a gift but a daring payment in advance against the hoped-for delivery of eighteen additional destroyers.

Here's how things worked out. Originally Great Britain wanted to make a deal for sixty-eight destroyers. Informed that we could not part with more than fifty, Britain proceeded with the transaction and, after the details had been worked out, cleverly informed President Roosevelt that she would *give* the United States two additional bases. This was a deftly planned

move designed to get us to loosen up and match the British generosity.

Knowing that the United States has always been an old softie in international affairs, she wisely figured the chances favored our loosening up and making a reciprocal "gift."

That's just what Uncle Sam did. And that's how John Bull got those eighteen extra destroyers.

Fifty years from now the history books will confirm this inside story, one of the most important we have presented to our listeners on the Secret Sidelights program in recent months.

Now it can be told,—the real story behind the abdication of King Carol.

It's the old, old story of *Cherchez la femme*, and in this instance one does not have to look very far. The woman, of course, is the titian-haired Jewish charmer, Madame Magda Lupescu, whose hold on the ill-starred former King of Rumania is well-known to our listeners.

Rumania, long a Nazi vassal state, had been warned that if her ruler, already in Hitler's doghouse, further incurred the Fuehrer's displeasure, Carol would be marked for exile.

Secret Sidelights is now able to report on the highest authority that Hitler decided that Carol must go when Gestapo operatives learned that so great was Madame Lupescu's influence over the Rumanian Monarch that she had persuaded him to turn non-Aryan. Carol denied the charge, but the prying eyes of the ubiquitous German police discovered a copy of the Talmud on Carol's night-table. Further search disclosed that the Rumanian sovereign had been attending a Bucharest Hebrew school and that he had secretly observed Passover, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

In return for a guarantee of huge quantities of Rumanian oil, the German Chancellor had originally agreed to void an order banishing Lupescu from Rumania, but it was distinctly understood, Interplanetary News learns from unchallengeable sources, that Lupescu had agreed to renounce her faith and adopt Nazism as her religion.

"Not only has Lupescu failed to carry out the terms of the agreement but she has added insult to injury by her brazen attempt to convert Carol," a Nazi spokesman told a representative of I.N. in Berlin today.

"Carol encouraged Lupescu in her violation of a solemnly covenanted pledge. The Fuehrer had no choice but to notify the Rumanian Government that Carol was no longer acceptable to the Reich and would have to be deposed."

There you have the inside story of King Carol's abdication, a story that comes to you through the unremitting efforts of the worldwide staff that gathers the news for this unexampled program of inside stories.

One of the most puzzling manifestations in connection with the conscription bill now before Congress is the enthusiastic endorsement of this legislation by two well-known fifth columnists,—one a prominent member of the German-American Bund, the other an official of the Christopher Columbus Post of the Young Fascists of America.

These two men—we'll call one Mr. A, the other Mr. B,—did everything in their power to help pass the conscription bill, so many versions of which made their appearance in the House and Senate. Investigation reveals that Messrs. A and B endorsed every version of the bill that emerged, and, on behalf of their organizations, wrote their Congressmen endorsing—I now quote—an effective conscription bill of some kind for patriotic reasons. That ends the quotes.

This, of course, has been puzzling to the G-men who are familiar with the subversive activities of Messrs. A and B, whom they were about to arrest. These Government sleuths have documentary evidence that the two men have been urging the sabotage of American industrial plants by members of their organizations strategically employed in factories producing airplane motors and propellers for the United States Navy and for the British, and also munitions, rifles and machine-guns being manufactured in great quantities for the two democracies.

One of Interplanetary News' crack reporters was assigned to investigate this contradictory situation and he reports that Messrs. A and B *are* fifth columnists and that they *did* work hard to bring about conscription.

Here's the story: Berlin and Rome have instructed these and other Nazi and Fascist operatives in the United States to help put over some form of conscription,—first, because it puts them in a patriotic light and confuses the G-men and others investigating their activities; and, second, because the German and Italian propaganda experts claim conscription, cleverly used, can be beneficial to their cause. They argue this way: since the Nazis and Fascists could not possibly stop conscription the best course open to them is to support it and figure out ways of capitalizing it.

Dr. Goebbels argues that one advantage of conscription is that it brings big groups of men together in barracks. He points out—confidentially, of course, but our reporters know how to dig out these confidences—that Americanized Nazis will enlist and by hearing the men talk among themselves will be able to appraise the different ones and get a good idea as to which of the enlisted men are fertile soil for Nazification. Ultimately those so appraised will be selected for the difficult assignments involved in the various types of inter-army sabotage that are being planned and blueprinted well in advance. These plans include the destruction by fire of army warehouses storing uniforms, medical supplies, etc., the pollution of drinking-water sources at army camps, etc.

Our congratulatory fan mail, which has reached a new peak in recent months, would swamp us even more than it has if we could tell you in detail about the ingenious manner in which our news detectives collected the information on which this remarkable inside story is based. . . .

You have been listening to Sidney Scent whose voice—the hallmark of behind-the-scenes exclusiveness—comes to you nightly on the Secret Sidelights program, a copyrighted feature of the Cosmic Broadcasting System. Nightly Americans are keeping well informed by hearing Mr. Scent tell the story

behind the story. The unusual information presented on Secret Sidelights is gathered by Interplanetary News from confidential sources all over the world.

In the summer of 1940 I had an interesting talk with a friend for whom I have a high regard—we'll call him Mr. Y—on the general subject of news as it reaches the listening public.

Mr. Y teaches in a school of journalism at a first-rate university. He was one of the first journalism teachers to see the importance of radio news coverage and to urge the inclusion of this subject in the regular course, which originally was confined to newspaper journalism. A man with an ear as well as a nose for news, he succeeded in getting attention for radio news as an accredited subject long before it occurred to anyone connected with the radio industry to recommend such a thing.

I therefore listen respectfully to anything Mr. Y has to say on the subject of radio news. On this particular occasion he was discussing the rise of what he termed Sub Rosa Journalism.

"There is a growing radio tendency," he said, "to capitalize the streak in human nature that makes people love being in on a secret. In the past year or two a great deal of news of dubious origin has been broadcast.

"You know how people love to repeat so-called confidential information. The radio news programs purporting to dish up information from secret sources—information not even available to the worldwide press associations—are perfect conversation-makers for such people.

"As you know, I have never made a practice of Viewing with Alarm. And I have no intention of starting now. These programs that pretend to lift the curtain so that the public may see what is *really* going on will not undermine radio journalism or anything like that. But they *are* a bad influence.

"The trouble is that when one program in this category succeeds there are bound to be imitations. There is only one thing worse than the prototype of bad journalism and that is something aping it. And then there is the imitation of the imi-

tation. And so it goes, with each variant a little worse than the one before.

“Paradoxically enough, these imitations, each sillier than the one preceding it, will kill off journalism of this type; for eventually a thing of this kind gets so bad that it collapses and the whole nonsensical business disappears until someone thinks it’s time to start it again.

“But must we wait until it gets that bad? Think of the suffering that intelligent listeners would be spared if something could be done to bring about some public ridicule of the confidential boys. It might be argued that no one is compelled to listen to them, but I contend that some of us who no longer listen suffer to think that such programs still exist.

“What an assignment for Westbrook Pegler! I hope some day he gets around to doing a scornful piece about the confidential boys. His is the type of treatment that might laugh these people out of the studios.

“In a show put on by our journalism students last spring there was a burlesque of the type of unhealthy radio journalism to which I refer. I had nothing to do with the show, incidentally. The skit was their own idea.

“I’ll admit that a few times in class I’ve spoofed the confidential boys, but the students think these things out for themselves and they must consider this type of radio journalism as childish as I do, or they would not have handled the theme with the gusto that characterized their satire.

“But public satire is what is needed. What students do in a college romp does not reach many people.”

I was relieved when my friend assured me that he knew of no regular NBC program that went in for inside-the-inside-story-of-what-went-on-behind-the-scenes-in-the-secret-conference-room journalism. But we were not entirely guiltless, he pointed out, and named a few NBC broadcasts that belonged in this category. “There may have been others,” he said, “but there could not have been many or I would know about them.”

XXVII

Chase the Premier

IN JULY of 1938 when Premier Mitchell Hepburn of the Province of Ontario and stock-broker Ben Smith of New York, who had set off from Dawson to Juneau, Alaska, by air, had been unreported for fifteen hours, I got in touch with C. B. Arnold, Manager of Station KINY in Juneau. The newspapers were playing up the story of the missing premier and his friend and there was much speculation as to whether they had come to grief.

"Are you game for a tough assignment?" I asked Arnold. Arnold said, "Sure."

So it was decided that Arnold was to charter a plane and set out in quest of Hepburn; with the idea of interviewing him over the air if we were lucky enough to locate him. Arnold and I agreed that a top-flight pilot was needed and accordingly he hired a nervy and resourceful chap named Simmons. The plane we chartered was a six-passenger cabin job,—with plenty of room for Hepburn and Smith if we had an opportunity to pick them up.

I also wanted Smith on any program that could be arranged. Smith, a colorful character, known in Wall Street as "Sell 'Em Ben," had made ten million dollars on the bear side of the market during thirty days of the 1929 crash, and had been lively copy ever since.

In 1932, when the United States Senate Banking and Currency Committee investigated the 1929 market crash, Smith was questioned for hours in an attempt to force an admission that he was a "bear raider." He said he wasn't, that he was "a big short operator." His friends explained that he was merely

“resourceful,” and that bear trading was as important to a stable market as bull trading.

Here is Arnold’s story of his experience, as told to me sometime afterward:

“One of my first problems was the limited facilities for communication. Understand, we have no wires in the interior of that neck of the woods,—in other words, no telephone or telegraph. All communications designed to reach remote places in the interior are handled by the U. S. Army Signal Corps. Short-wave transmitters, which operate on a fixed schedule, are set up in the larger towns.

“My first move was to send out a lot of inquiries via short-wave. Before much time had elapsed we received a message from the White Horse and Yukon Pass Railroad informing us that Ben Smith had set his plane down in Carcross, Canada, and that he and Premier Hepburn were there. This is the historic little railroad that runs from Skagway up to Dawson over the route taken by the Klondike gold-rush boys.

“No information could be secured at that time as to what they were doing in Carcross, whether they had lost their way, whether they had been forced down, whether their plane had been damaged, or what.

“Carcross is a town well up in the Yukon territory in Canada. I was still in Juneau; in other words, two hundred miles away from where Hepburn and Smith had come down,—perhaps a little more.

“I decided to fly to Carcross at once. First I dispatched a message to Premier Hepburn telling him that NBC wanted an interview. There had been a great deal of excitement since he and Smith had been reported missing, I pointed out, and an interview would clear everything up. My message stated that I expected to be in Carcross in an hour and a half at the very latest and I hoped the Premier would wait for me. . . .

“Vincent Craft, our engineer, was to accompany me, and we hoped to broadcast from the plane, which was equipped with a short-wave transmitter. I arranged to get a message off to the Federal Communications Commission in Washington

applying for permission to broadcast from the plane. I understood that in an emergency all you had to do was to make it a matter of record that you had sought the necessary permission.

"My message dispatched, I was all ready to hop off for Carcross when a hitch developed. Pilot Simmons apparently had not understood we planned to do our broadcast from his plane. When he fully understood my plans, things started occurring to him. He was a conscientious chap and wanted to be sure he was operating strictly within regulations. The more he thought about our plans for a broadcast, the more worried he became, and he finally decided that he had better get definite permission from Washington before setting off. He was afraid he might lose his license if he used his transmitter for an unauthorized broadcast.

"Of course, while there were no telephone facilities in the interior, it was a simple matter to put in a call for an NBC official. I decided the best bet would be to call someone on the West Coast. So I telephoned Don Thompson in your San Francisco office.

"Thompson assured me it was not necessary to wait for a reply from Washington,—that in a situation such as ours the mere filing of an application was interpreted as sufficient indication of good faith.

"Simmons was still skeptical. He was really a most co-operative person but he was the soul of fussiness about regulations and you could understand that, but I was beginning to grow restless. We were using up valuable minutes.

"I asked Simmons whether a telegram addressed to him over the signature of an NBC official would satisfy him. This wire would be dispatched and would be in his hands on our return for use by him if any difficulties arose,—although Thompson assured me that comparable situations similarly handled had caused no trouble for the pilots involved.

"Simmons was not yet satisfied. I finally persuaded him to accept Thompson's verbal assurances over the telephone, which were to be supplemented by a wire and a letter citing prece-

dents for the course NBC advocated. The pilot finally decided to take a chance. I then got off a message requesting NBC to sew up the radio short-wave facilities from Juneau to Seattle in order to have them available for the broadcast circuit in case I was lucky enough to get the interview.

"The idea was to broadcast to Juneau from the plane at Carcross, and then do a relay job from Juneau to Seattle for coast-to-coast rebroadcast from there. That prevented any similar communication between Alaska and the United States until we released the wire. To play it safe, we sewed up this wire for ten hours at \$3 a minute. You felt this Hepburn excitement was a good story, and your West Coast associates, realizing the news possibilities of what you were after, co-operated in every way. Allowing a guy to sew up telephone facilities for hours at three bucks a minute is my idea of co-operation.

"Simmons, Craft, and I then climbed into the plane and we hopped off for Carcross.

"The plane was a pontoon ship, so we worked out a route that gave us plenty of water for emergency landings. We took a course down around Taku Glacier, up the Taku River, and followed the Atlin and other lakes in British Columbia. This course had the added advantage of enabling us to avoid the coastal fogs.

"Pilot Simmons put on his earphones as we started down Gastineau Channel and up Taku Inlet past Norris and Taku. Then we headed up the Taku River, where glaciers come down in every direction, into the wilderness over the Moose Country, where moose and bear run wild.

"Did we have the right to cross over into Canada? Sure. The minute I learned that Hepburn had come down in Canada, I got my passport out of the files, and as soon as Simmons and Craft were in the picture, I arranged to get emergency passports for them.

"Due to the ear-splitting din of the motor and the ceaseless vibration of the plane we were unable to carry on a conversation. So Pilot Simmons and I conversed by means of notes scribbled on a pad.

"Our first job, of course, was to see what information we could get by radio about Premier Hepburn's movements.

"We were roaring down a lake whose name I don't recall when Simmons jotted this down in a scrawl that was almost made illegible by the movement of the plane through bumpy air: 'My hangar tells me Premier Hepburn has taken the train for Skagway. They will leave from there for Prince Rupert on the steamer *Princess Alice*. What shall I do?'

" 'Head for Skagway,' I wrote.

"Immediately Simmons cut back and started on a shortcut for Juneau. This meant cutting across a mountain range. We were well on our way when we suddenly flew into heavy cloud formations. A few minutes later, looking straight ahead, I saw an opening in the clouds. And through this window in the clouds I saw smack in front of us a sheer perpendicular granite wall.

"Without any hesitancy or the slightest show of nervousness, our pilot, who worried more about the regulations than the mountains in his path, banked the plane in a backward loop upward and over and just missed splattering us against the mountainside.

"My mouth, which was evidently wide open, suddenly snapped to and it's a wonder I didn't lose some of my pet teeth. My head also snapped backwards and forward and sideways, and my stomach turned a complete flipflop.

" 'Phew!' I scribbled on the pad, adding, 'Nice work.'

"Laconically Simmons placed ditto marks under the first word. Then he raised one hand to his forehead, went through the motions of wiping off perspiration with his fingers, and brought his hand down with a quick snap.

"Craft felt he ought to get into the conversation too. He placed ditto marks under 'nice work' and added the word 'thanks.'

"Simmons decided the best bet would be to round the edge of the ridge we had almost kissed and then head into Juneau by way of Gastineau. He scratched off a note saying that the *Princess Alice* was not due to arrive in Skagway until 4 P.M.

Her departing time, he thought, was seven o'clock. We had plenty of time to come down at Juneau, get the latest weather report, and have some lunch. How did this sound?

"By now I had developed a clipped style. 'O.K.,' I scribbled under the pilot's message. And soon we came down.

"At the restaurant where we ate I started inquiries for messages. Before we had finished our meal I was handed a message from Premier Hepburn saying: 'Have received your wire. All this publicity is foolishness. I do not want any such notoriety and I refuse to give an interview on anything to anybody.'

" 'I guess maybe he doesn't want to talk,' I said, as I handed the message to Craft.

"Craft read it and went through the pantomime of weighing and considering its contents. Then, turning the message upside down and examining the reverse side, he gravely said, in the manner of a judge rendering a decision on a highly debatable question, 'I have now studied this from every angle, and I think there's a good deal in what you say. In fact, I am practically ready to state flatly that the Premier has no enthusiasm for our plan. Let's have a drink.'

"Well, that was that. I got on the telephone circuit which was still being held open exclusively for NBC calls and telephoned the San Francisco office via Seattle. I told them about Premier Hepburn's refusal. The man at the other end of the wire said, 'Wait a minute. I'll phone Schechter in New York and see what he wants us to do.'

"Some minutes later he was back on the phone and said, 'New York wants you to keep after Hepburn just the same. They say everybody is in a fog about the Premier's disappearance, there are conflicting reports, and they want to clear up the story. The best way to do it, they insist, is by having Hepburn himself tell what happened. They want you to stay on the Premier's trail. They don't take one turndown seriously. The worst that can happen is that you get turned down again.'

"I said, 'O.K., if you say so. You're paying for it.'

" 'If you can't get Hepburn to go on,' was the parting shot

from San Francisco, 'try to land Ben Smith. Schechter knows him. Tell him Schechter wants him to do it.'

"Before hanging up, of course, I got the basic information I needed about the proposed broadcast. If I got Hepburn or Smith to go on, we were to have fifteen minutes for a detailed interview in which the Premier or Smith (or both) told how they got lost or why they were forced down at Carcross, or whatever it was that happened. Sometimes a broadcast of this kind proves to be a thriller. Sometimes it proves a dud. It's one of those chances you take. The fact remained that an important Canadian had been reported missing for fifteen hours, the news of his disappearance had evidently been featured all over the United States (judging by what I learned over the telephone) and had even been flashed to the most distant points of the British Empire.

"If we were unable to get an interview, I was to dig up all the facts and tell the story myself in five minutes. The interview or five-minute report—whichever it happened to be—was to start at 6:45 P.M., New York time.

"A heavy gale was blowing up the channel as the three of us climbed into the plane again and Simmons pointed her for Skagway, which might be described as the neck of a funnel-like opening between two mountain ranges. Usually all winds from the south seem twice as strong in the Skagway area, and, as the weather reports we picked up in Juneau were uniformly unfavorable, we did not expect our trip to be a cinch.

"In fact, Simmons made no definite promise that we would be able to land. 'I have often had to turn back at Skagway because of the boiling whitecaps that came crashing in,' he said. He made it plain before we started that while he was willing to try we might as well be prepared to be told that a landing could not be made. I had told him to go ahead anyway and he got going jauntily, seeming to feel better now that it was definitely understood he didn't have to guarantee a result.

"We came into Skagway at 10,000 feet. At that altitude you can't tell whether water is choppy or not. As a matter of fact,

there was no suggestion of motion in the water, and I got the impression it was pretty calm.

“As we circled downward, however, the illusion of calm disappeared and you could see the churning whitecaps come slapping in. Our pilot took to his pad and pencil again. He wrote: ‘Can’t land here without capsizing.’

“‘You’ve got to land somewhere near here,’ I replied.

“Our pad-and-pencil system was proving inadequate. Simmons beckoned to me, and I gathered he wanted me to place my ear up against his lips so he could yell a message too long to write.

“Here’s what he yelled into my ear:

“‘There is only one place I can think of, and no one has ever landed there. It is a narrow strip of water 1500 yards above the town alongside the mountain. It is less than a stone’s throw wide and less than half a mile long.’

“He had his earphones on, so I couldn’t yell back. I wrote, ‘See what you can do.’

“Simmons seemed to be heading straight for the mountain, and just as I expected to crash into something hard and strong, he banked sharply to the right and swooped down into a narrow stretch of water that wound along the mountainside, with cliffs rising on either side. The air pockets were tremendous and it was only because our pilot was so expert that we didn’t flatten ourselves against a granite ridge. We would drop and sideslip as we skirted the mountainside, and then Simmons would step on the gas and we would veer toward the center of the water again.

“Once when the pontoons did not seem to be over thirty feet above the water, he suddenly roared up over the lake’s end, down over the cliff, over the dock and the town, and immediately back into the same hole again for another try.

“I looked out the side windows and watched the pontoons as Simmons took a second shot at it. We dropped precipitously and I heaved a sigh of relief as we eased out of our sharp descent and seemed about to touch the water. But there was more to be learned by looking straight ahead than by looking

down at the pontoons. When I looked up and straight forward, I suddenly became aware of the danger of our position. Directly in front of us was the rim of the lake, with its rocks and trees. I braced myself for the crash, thinking it was all over.

“And how you remember little unimportant things that somehow become a part of the bigger ones. I recall how as I brought all fours into play in bracing myself, my eye lit on my last written message to Simmons: ‘See what you can do.’

“Well, our pilot was seeing what he could do. Just as I thought again that we were about to touch the water, he stepped on the gas and sent the plane straight up in the air.

“‘Phew!’ I scribbled on the pad once again as I released my right hand which I no longer needed as a brace. I added, ‘Much obliged’ as a concession to Craft’s earlier concern over the amenities. Limply silent, Craft had taken in our predicament with fatalistic calm.

“Simmons was too preoccupied to look at the pad. So my last notation was wasted.

“Once again our pilot swooped down over the town and straight back into the same hole. This time he pancaked the plane right down on the water, and when he brought it to a stop we were not more than fifty feet from the lake shore.

“So narrow was this lake that it took ten minutes of maneuvering to get the plane turned around on the water. When we had taxied back to the far end of the lake I jumped ashore on a rock, caught hold of a wing and pulled the plane in. As we stepped out the pilot said, ‘You two stay here a minute, I want to reconnoiter,’ and started gently taxiing around the curving shoreline.

“About this time men and boys began to appear. One of them said, ‘How did you get here?’

“‘By plane,’ I said.

“‘You’re crazy,’ one of the youngsters said.

“He was probably right, all things considered, but we *had* flown in.

“‘No kidding,’ I said, ‘we just flew in.’

“‘That’s impossible,’ said another member of the group. ‘No plane could possibly land here.’

“‘One just did,’ I replied.

“‘Where is it?’ was the next question.

“Craft and I were beginning to enjoy ourselves as much as you can when you’re in a race against time.

“The last question was a honey. After all, *where* was our plane? We didn’t know for sure at that particular moment.

“I thought it would be fun to say flatly that I hadn’t the faintest idea where our plane was. That would make us seem crazier than ever. ‘I don’t know where it is, but if you’ll stick around’—

“I was interrupted in the middle of a sentence by Simmons’ sudden reappearance. We hadn’t heard the sound of the motor for several minutes when suddenly the plane came roaring back and made another landing. The bystanders looked on in astonishment.

“This was my first realization that Simmons had taken off again.

“‘Where in the world have you been?’ I asked him.

“He replied, ‘I had to see if I could take off from this lake. If I couldn’t, that meant you wouldn’t be able to broadcast. I find I can.’

“Before we got too much comfort out of this he added, ‘But I can’t take anybody off with me. I’ll have to go it alone. And if the wind dies down I may be stuck here for good.’

“I was itching to set off in quest of the steamer *Princess Alice* and Premier Hepburn, but we would have to figure some things out before there would be any point in doing that.

“Simmons was convinced there wasn’t enough runway to enable him to get into the air with Craft and me aboard. ‘I don’t think she’ll lift,’ he said, ‘if I carry any passengers.’

“As Simmons would be unable to handle the broadcast (we were still hopefully expecting to stage one) we were up against it.

“A local pilot had recognized the plane and drove over in

his car to see what was going on. 'What are you fellows trying to do,' he asked, 'commit suicide?'

"We told him our story. Then we all talked matters over and concluded that our only chance for a broadcast (assuming we could line up Hepburn) was to get this local pilot, who flew an amphibian, to take off with the Premier, travel seven miles down the channel into a bay that went in behind glaciers and mountains where we would probably find shelter from the wind, land there, meet Simmons, who would take off alone, transfer the Premier (and as many of his party as we could carry) from the amphibian to Simmons' ship, fly up, let out the antenna and broadcast. All very simple! All I had to do now was find the Premier.

"I checked with the Canadian Pacific Lines and found that the *Princess Alice* was at her pier.

"The local pilot (whose name I have forgotten) kindly drove me over in his car. I dashed up the gangplank and made for the purser's office. A telegraph messenger was there ahead of me. He was awkwardly carrying the two biggest stacks of telegrams I have ever seen. He was trying to hold them in place with his chin.

"Evidently the boy's instructions were to deliver these messages (which I afterwards learned were largely of journalistic origin) to Premier Hepburn in person.

"The purser asked the boy to leave the messages. The Premier would receive them, he assured the youngster.

"The messenger boy stuck to his story. His instructions were to place the messages in the Premier's hands. The purser was just as firm. The boy finally left with his mountain of messages, one stack bulging out dangerously and threatening to spill all over the place. I often wondered whether the Premier ever got his telegrams.

"Having witnessed this scene, there was no need of asking the purser whether Premier Hepburn was scheduled to sail on the *Princess Alice*. So I merely asked if I could see the Premier.

" 'Premier Hepburn is not seeing anybody,' was the answer.

"The purser realized this amounted to admitting the Premier was on board. He tried to cover up by making some remarks intended to counteract his admission. This was amusing as he seemed to forget, or to be unaware, that I had witnessed the scene involving the telegraph messenger.

"I left in a manner suggesting I was giving up, then tried to find someone elsewhere on the ship who could give me the Premier's stateroom number. But I couldn't learn a thing.

"I finally gave a steward a dollar and asked him to page Ben Smith all over the ship. 'Look for him everywhere,' I said.

" 'He's not on the ship, sir,' the steward reported after a hurried canvass of the small vessel.

"I left the ship and looked things over on the dock for some sign of my quarry. Time was passing rapidly, and if something didn't happen soon there would be no broadcast that day and therefore probably no broadcast at all. I figured the world would survive this, but I'd gone to a hell of a lot of trouble and I was now determined to make something happen if it was humanly possible.

"I suddenly became conscious of the fact that I was nervously pacing up and down the dock and that people were watching me. In a strained effort at leisureliness, I sauntered over to the street end of the long dock. Just as I reached it a big limousine drew up and two men stepped out.

"I had seen pictures of Premier Hepburn in the newspapers but he was not the kind of man you can easily recognize from a news photo. Well, anyhow, I addressed the one I thought might be the man I sought.

"I wasn't sure how you addressed a Canadian Premier. After a 'beg pardon' I asked him—not too bluntly, I hope—if he was Premier Hepburn.

" 'Yes,' he replied.

" 'My name is Arnold,' I said, 'I represent KINY in Juneau. NBC has asked me to interview you about your airplane trip.

"He said, 'Are you the person who sent me the wire?'

“‘Yes,’ I answered in the defensive manner of one expecting a kick from behind.

“‘Well, you got my reply,’ he continued. ‘Wasn’t it plain enough, or can’t you read English?’

“The Premier’s wrath did not annoy me. Frankly, I felt a bit foolish about dogging him so relentlessly, although I had no intention of showing it. In fact, I went into quite an impassioned harangue. It went something like this:

“‘Your message was plain enough, and I can understand your thinking I’m a pest. Nevertheless, you must not overlook the fact that your friends are worried about your safety. They think you have crashed. Word has gotten out in the United States that you have been found, but this has been published as an unconfirmed report. In Canada you are still reported missing. In fact, as far as the United States is concerned, you are still reported missing, since there has been no official confirmation that you had been located and were safe and sound. The Carcross business has not got beyond the “unconfirmed report” stage. The quickest way to end the speculation and the whole hullabaloo is to let your friends and others hear you tell the story yourself over the radio. The publicity, which you object to, will end then and there.’ (I inserted the salutation ‘Premier’ here and there in the course of this major effort, although I haven’t the faintest idea whether that is how one addresses a man of Mr. Hepburn’s rank.)

“Surely this masterful plea, with its emphasis on what the Premier owed to his frantic friends, would get results. . . .

“‘I will give no interview’ snapped the Premier as he moved toward the gangplank.

“Three times I stopped him long enough to get in a few more of my forceful sentences, and once I thought I had almost persuaded him.

“The Premier, feeling more cheerful now that he had jumped on me, listened attentively, even smiled faintly, nodded sympathetically as I made one of my most powerful points . . . and walked up the gangplank.

“Ben Smith was about to follow suit. As pleasantly as one

can do such a thing,—with a bow and a smile, as I recall it—I placed myself between Ben Smith and the gangplank.

“Smith, of course, had heard the exchange between Hepburn and me. When I tried a new version of my flawless logic on him, he merely said, ‘It’s up to the Premier. What he says goes.’

“‘Can’t *you* go on for us?’ I asked, doing my best to sell Smith the idea.

“‘Not without the Premier’s approval,’ he replied. ‘You’ve got to get past him.’

“‘I decided to try a new attack. . . . ‘I understand you know Abe Schechter of NBC,’ I asked.

“‘That’s right,’ said Smith.

“‘He’s been on the telephone all day inquiring about your safety,’ I replied.

“‘That was very nice of him,’ Smith added.

“‘I told him I had heard reports you were O.K., although I had not seen you and could not personally confirm the information.’

“‘Schechter said, “That sounds as if he’s safe. When you track him down—and don’t give up until you do, for there’s been a lot of speculation about his safety too—tell him I’m off him for life unless he gives us an interview.” The last time I talked to Schechter, which was a little while ago, he wanted both you and the Premier on the air.’

“‘Did he say that?’ said Smith, giving me a searching look.

“‘That’s just what he told me,’ I replied.

“‘Well, come on board,’ said Smith, ‘and let’s see if we can’t change the Premier’s mind.’

“Smith took me to the Premier’s stateroom. As I entered, His Nibs gave me one of those are-YOU-in-again looks.

“‘I’ll say this for Smith. He was now in there pitching for me. I don’t recall all the things he said in his effort to help me make a sale, but I recall this one: “This fellow has something. Let’s give him a break.’

“The Premier now gave definite signs of breaking down.

'What is entailed in broadcasting this interview?' he asked. 'Be explicit about what I would have to do.'

" 'Explain all the steps,' said Smith, 'so there will be no misunderstanding.'

"So I explained how simple it was. First we would all get in a car and drive to the local airfield. There we would get into the amphibian, take off and be met by Simmons, who would be watching for signs of us in the near-by waters where he was waiting. Simmons would take off immediately, join up with us and lead the way. Then the two planes would fly some seven miles down the channel, go in behind the glaciers and light on an unknown lake or bay. Then we would transfer the Premier to Simmons' ship, which had the transmitter for broadcasting, and I would also switch to Simmons' plane so I could do the interviewing. Then Simmons would fly us up a thousand feet or so and let out the antenna. Then we would establish contact with NBC, stand by for the signal, 'Come in, Skagway,' and do our broadcast. Then we would transfer the Premier to the amphibian and fly him back to Skagway.

" 'It sounds like too much trouble,' said the Premier. 'I'm staying right here on this ship.' I could hardly blame him. I didn't know how good a Premier Mr. Hepburn was, but he certainly knew how to withstand the assaults of the most pestiferously determined one-man pressure-group I know,—myself.

"But I had not given up entirely. 'How about granting me an interview now,' I asked the Premier. 'Tell me what happened and I'll report it myself. I can just about get back in time to broadcast.'

" 'You win,' said the Premier, smiling broadly for the first time.

"The Premier told me the story of how they had started from Dawson for Juneau in Ben Smith's private plane; and of how as they neared Juneau they encountered a dense fog bank at the face of Taku Glacier. The pilot was the same one who had flown Smith to India the year before, a hazardous undertaking from which this airman had emerged with flying colors. In addition to having plenty of nerve, this flyer was a realist,

and he advised Hepburn and Smith that only luck would enable them to get through the soupiest fog he had ever encountered. 'We'd better turn back,' he said. So they turned around and flew back into Canada and landed at Carcross. There was real drama in the pilot's decision that he could not be responsible for the safety of Ontario's Premier in the dirtiest weather of its kind he had experienced in his career as an aviator.

"The interview over—and Hepburn worked in some swell human-interest touches that made first-rate radio—I started for the gangplank. Ben Smith followed me out and made this sporting proposal, 'If it means a lot more to have one of the principals on the air I'll give you a break. Promise to get me back here in time to sail at seven and you can broadcast an interview with me. Let's go out and talk to your pilot. If he thinks it can be done I'll take a chance.'

"We quickly talked it over with the pilot of the amphibian. 'It can't possibly be done,' he said with finality. 'We haven't enough time. You'd miss your ship.'

"So that was that. 'Good luck,' said Smith as we left. 'I did all I could for you. Say hello to my friends when you broadcast and tell 'em to stop worrying about a guy who's got a safety-first pilot.'

"With that, Craft and I hopped into the waiting car of the amphibian pilot and we sped through the streets of Skagway for the landing field. We warmed up the amphibian, climbed in, took off and flew to the approximate point where we were to look for Simmons. There was no plane in sight. And we didn't have many minutes to spare if we were to make a 6:45 broadcast.

"Just as I began to fear that perhaps Simmons, whose luck so far had almost been supernatural and seemed too good to last, had had a mishap in trying to get out of the lake, he popped up from behind the mountains. He circled around us and sped away down the channel.

"We followed him. Reaching the bay, we went in and made a landing. We were trying to ease the planes toward each other

but the gentle kind of jockeying we tried to accomplish was out of the question because of the strong swirling wind that moved the planes toward each other too rapidly and threatened to make them collide.

"Standing on the pontoons and catching the wing ends, it was all we could do to keep the ships from banging together and damaging each other. By sheer exertion of every bit of muscle we possessed, we finally got the ships clear of each other at a point where they weren't far apart.

"Then Simmons discovered, to our horror, that he was stuck fast in the mud. He reached into the cabin for a canoe paddle and tried desperately to push off. He couldn't make it. 'How much time have we left?' he yelled.

"I looked at my watch and yelled back, 'Four and a half minutes.'

" 'It can't be done,' he said.

" 'It's got to be done!' I shouted. 'Start your engine and give her the gun. I'll get in and rock the plane.'

"After a little of this rocking, with the engine roaring, we slid off the mud and took off with the wind, not taking the time to go to the opposite end of the bay.

"About 300 feet up we hit an air pocket or something and almost dropped to the surface of the water. But Simmons' luck held and he managed to climb again. We banked straight into the wind and up we went. As Craft unreeled the antenna, I began to wonder what I was going to say without notes to fill up five minutes.

"Simmons, the earphones on, quickly established contact with Seattle. His ever-present pad handy, he scribbled, 'You're to have ten minutes instead of five. Hold the mike close against your mouth so they don't get too much motor noise. I'll signal you when to start.'

"I nearly died when I learned my time had been increased to ten minutes. What was I going to say to fill all that time? Never did ten minutes threaten to seem more like ten years.

"The hand cue from Simmons came a few seconds after my watch said 6:45, the time we were scheduled to start.

“‘Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience,’ I began, ‘you are listening to a broadcast from a plane flying over the glaciers of Alaska.’

“I never had a weirder sensation in my life. I couldn’t hear a word I was saying. It’s a strange feeling,—going through the motions of speaking and not being able to hear your own voice. It was completely drowned out by the roar of the motor and I couldn’t help wondering whether the radio audience was hearing anything besides motor revolutions.

“But I kept on talking. My larynx and lips were working—I was reasonably sure of that—but it was all like one of those nightmares when you try to scream and cannot utter a sound.

“I kept at it. I described my meeting with Premier Hepburn and Ben Smith, and told what had happened. Having secured permission to do so, I quoted the Premier extensively and thus gave the report a good personal slant. Needless to say, I did not overlook the opportunity to tell the radio audience of the aerial excitement involved in making the broadcast possible. After all, we had had some real thrills and it would give the show an extra wallop if I gave the listener some idea of the preparation, strenuousness and excitement entailed in making this broadcast possible. I also explained, of course, why the limited radio facilities made it necessary for us to broadcast from this transmitter-equipped plane and why we couldn’t broadcast from the plane while it was sitting on the water and had to get into the air and let out an antenna.

“It was a good show, I perspiringly figured, if it was getting through to Seattle clearly and onto the network. . . . Still, these modern mikes were marvelous and maybe this one was picking up my voice despite that damned motor. More than once in a broadcast I had heard an individual voice stand out clearly against the roaring of a big crowd, so I was hopeful.

“God! what a job I had on my hands! I had told the Hepburn story in five minutes and I still had five minutes to go.

“One thing I was tempted to say was, ‘Why doesn’t someone strangle Schechter? What a spot he’s put me in!’

“I was never so mad in my life. I felt that the first five min-

utes made a good show, if anyone could hear me. Now, what would I say? . . .

“Instinctively I found myself launching a plea for greater governmental aid for flying in Alaska. It was an old theme of mine and the words were on the tip of my tongue. I pointed out that Premier Hepburn would not have been reported lost—in fact, he would not have set out from Dawson to Juneau that particular day—if Alaska had the facilities for full weather reporting, including weather broadcasting, if we had radio beacons, emergency landing fields, and other essential aids to safe flying.

“Alaska, I pointed out, was even more air-minded than the States in terms of available statistics, yet up to that time there had been no federal aid for flyers.

“My watch showed I had about a minute and a half to go. Having done my bit for Alaskan aviation, I now had a chance to do something for the Alaska scenery. It’s first-rate scenery, you know. Our travel bureau boys are better equipped than I to immortalize it, but I decided to see what I could do. My best passage featured ‘the towering glaciers which seem to pour out of the sky itself and to flow like crystalline rivers into the blue of the water beneath us.’ I had another thirty seconds to kill, so I gave the rest of the panorama—the breath-taking cascades and waterfalls, the majestic forested mountains, and other standard features of the travel leaflets—a break. After all, it *is* magnificent scenery.

“Of course, it had nothing at all to do with the fact that Premier Hepburn had been reported lost, although this *was* the scenery people would see more of if Alaska’s aviation facilities were brought up to date.

“It developed that the roar of the motor had not drowned out my voice,—that, in fact, it had helped the broadcast. The radio audience knew we were broadcasting from a plane in mid-air and it seems just enough noise came through to provide a natural sound-effect background.

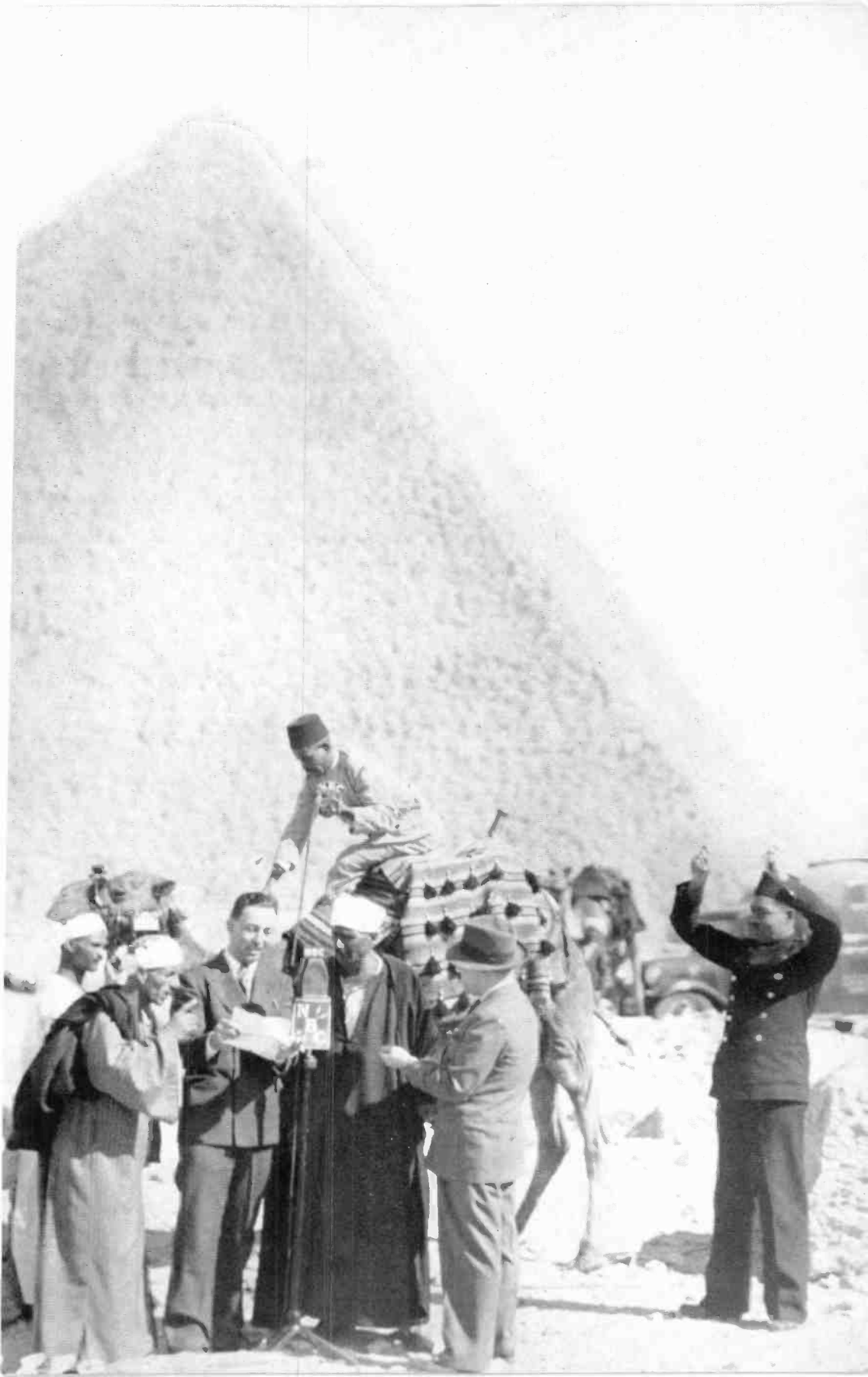
“It is too late now, however, to claim I planned it that way.”

Picture Gallery

A rehearsal of the first broadcast from the Great Pyramid at Gizeh, Egypt, on the outskirts of Cairo, as described in Chapters II and III.

Because of the difference in time, the hour scheduled for the receipt of the program in New York for re-broadcast throughout the United States necessitated our doing the actual broadcast at night.

However, we did our rehearsing in the daytime. Here you see a rehearsal in progress. At the microphone are some of the native chanters described in the chapters just mentioned, Ed Chorlian of the Egyptian Radio Station, and the author (in felt hat) who left his stop-watch in his hotel and is using his wristwatch to time the proceedings. One of the best shots extant of the author's rump.



Rex Keating broadcasting from inside Cheops tomb in the Great Pyramid outside Cairo. This was part of the program from the desert described in the preceding caption.

At first my suggestion that we broadcast from inside the tomb was considered sacrilegious. However, a combination of persuasiveness and luck enabled me to convince the Egyptian Government that there was nothing impious in our proposal.

I'll admit that Keating, with his legs crossed, looks a bit nonchalant for a man in the tomb of a dead king but even the fussiest blue-nose in Cairo could not establish this as a profanation.



Broadcasting at night from the base of the Great Pyramid, as described in *Come in, Cairo*. For "atmosphere," native workmen chanted the weird hymnals they sing as they swing blunt-edged pickaxes at the various excavations and "diggings" in the desert run by archæologists probing for lost cities and buried treasure.

Much red-tape was entailed in getting the Egyptian Government to consent to the broadcast. There were many delays and I had to figure out a way of sending a radiogram to our office so they would understand the postponements,—a message couched in language that would not offend some official in the Government office in Cairo where such communications were filed. I finally sent this radiogram: "Delayed by WEAFF network tape." WEAFF is our Red Network station in New York.

The broadcast—the first one from the pyramids—proved a success and justified my protracted struggle to get an okay from the Egyptian Government.



Captain Waldo E. Wallaston, Skipper of the American freighter *Flying Fish*, which was in Bergen when the Germans invaded Norway, in an interview over the Red Network.

The *Flying Fish* was one of the first ships to return to the United States from Norway after the invasion. Members of the crew stand by as the captain, interviewed by representatives of our News and Special Events Division, gives an eye-witness account of the German seizure of the Norwegian port.



Singing mice waiting to be auditioned for the National Singing Mouse Contest. (See Chapter XII).

The mice seemed to get more fun out of life when we kept them in boxes with open tops equipped with wire "ladders" like the one shown in the photo. These ladders enabled them to scamper up and down and look the premises over, in the process getting the type of exercise recommended for them. However, to keep the rodents from getting under foot we retained the services of the canine mouse shepherd shown blocking the path of a little white warbler bent on doing some exploring.



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At 1:13 P.M. EST, on January 21, 1939, the giant Imperial Airways flying-boat, *Cavalier*, New York to Bermuda, hit the rolling Atlantic swells and started to sink. Less than twenty minutes later the first of a series of bulletins flashed over our networks, inaugurating the coverage of a dramatic story that kept us busy for many hours.

Steamships, cutters and patrol boats sped to find and rescue the survivors, and we kept in constant touch with their progress. Ten hours later we announced the rescue by the tanker *Esso Baytown*. We chartered a sea-going tug, equipped it for broadcasting, and sent it panting out into the open ocean, where it was the first to meet the *Baytown* and to go on the air with the details.

The picture shows Ben Grauer reporting to the networks as the tug accompanied the tanker back into harbor. Other programs covering the story were carried from the deck of the Coast Guard Cutter *Champlain*, from the dock where the tanker landed, and from our studios in Radio City, where some of the *Cavalier's* survivors were interviewed.



A broadcast of a famous American casting his ballot on Election Day.

In answer to the stock question as to his name, which the clerk is required to ask, the well-known American replies, "Franklin D. Roosevelt."

In reply to a second question—"Occupation?"—the voter replies, "Farmer."

Judging by the fan mail that resulted, this program from Hyde Park, New York, amused a lot of people.

With the President is Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.; to the left the President's mother, Mrs. Sara Delano Roosevelt.



When events of tremendous importance take place, such as a Presidential inauguration, a lot of time on the air has to be filled with interesting material when nothing is actually happening. The inaugural ceremony and the address of the President take a comparatively few minutes, for example. Yet the radio public is anxious for every detail and is prepared to spend hours at the loudspeaker on inauguration day.

To satisfy this desire, we try to figure out as many angles as possible. Commentators in mobile broadcasting units tour Washington describing the sights, and actually ride near the head of the processions. Others, microphone in hand, cover hotel lobbies, the Senate and House, interviewing celebrities, and still others fly in planes and blimps over the city.

Here Hugh James of our Washington staff is shown as he broadcast a bird's-eye view of the proceedings from the tower of the Washington Monument. His description, combined with those from lobbies, streets, planes and other places, supplied the variety required to give color and pace to a broadcast which covered several hours.



In Chapter XXV I tell how Ted Husing of CBS bootlegged the broadcast of a championship track meet that NBC had sewed up "exclusively."

Our exclusive became most unexclusive by the time Mr. Husing and his resourceful henchmen got through rigging up a broadcasting unit on the roof shown in the picture.

For the small sum of \$50, a man, who had heard the day before the track meet that we were having fits because of the brazen manner in which Mr. Husing had stolen our thunder, offered to sneak up on the roof and turn loose on CBS's popular sports announcer the contents of a hornet's nest. We can't deny that we considered the proposition but our better nature vanquished the evil demons that kept telling us it would be a public service to put a lot of bees in Husing's bonnet.

As we sit up nights figuring ways and means of imparting public-service angles to our efforts, the temptation was great, and Husing will never know, unless he reads this book, how narrowly he escaped.



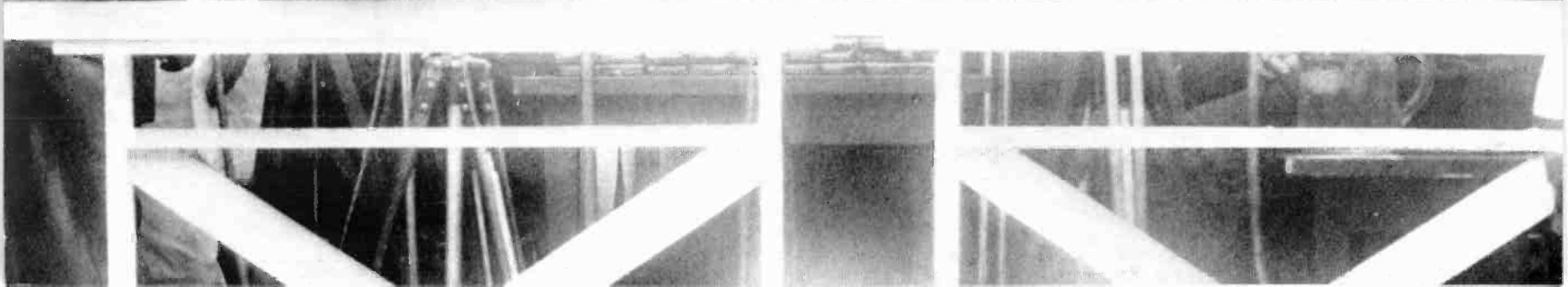
The picture might be titled "Keeping an Eye on Yourself." It was in March, 1940, that NBC, RCA, and United Airlines co-operated in a unique experiment. A plane was sent up containing a newly developed lightweight television transmitter. Another plane (the one shown here) was equipped with a television receiver and went aloft with a group of aviation and radio writers aboard.

The first plane transmitted television pictures of the second plane, which picked them up on its receiver, and so here the passengers are shown watching their own flight. O. B. Hanson, NBC chief engineer, termed the experiment "little short of astounding," and predicted that "an entirely new field for special events pick-ups will be opened to us."



In the early days of nationwide broadcasting, microphones were as big as soup plates. Our photo files of the period from 1928 to 1930 are jammed with pictures of celebrities well concealed behind jumbo mikes.

You will have to turn to the next page if you want to learn the identity of the man who, with hands clasped, is standing at the microphone welcoming Admiral Byrd (left) back to the United States after two years in polar regions.



It's Jimmy Walker! (See text accompanying preceding photograph.)

The NBC camera man, realizing that most of his shots—there are five such in our files—confine themselves to excellent views of the coat, vest and pocket handkerchief of New York's former Mayor—decided he'd better try to figure out a way of taking a picture of Walker in which Jimmy's face also showed. Such a photograph, at a time when mike-hiding of celebrities was common practice, was bound to be received as a novelty, and widely used.

To complete the day's trail-blazing our photographer later took a revolutionary picture of Admiral Byrd (left) at the microphone in which the Admiral's features were given equal prominence with the over-size mike.



Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, overlord of the German Navy, in an exclusive broadcast from Berlin arranged by our ubiquitous Max Jordan. The broadcast, arranged to coincide with Undersecretary Welles' visit to the German capital, took on added significance when Raeder agreed to answer questions as to policy on neutral shipping.

It was during this broadcast that these memorable exchanges between the Admiral, and Jordan, who interviewed him, took place:

JORDAN: . . . The sinking of English fishing vessels by German naval forces has met with strong disapproval in the United States and elsewhere. It is not easy to see how civilians, such as British fishermen, can have anything to do with military operations.

RAEDER: You are mistaken, Mr. Jordan. . . . Fishing vessels are well suited by their sturdiness as patrol boats or mine sweepers.

JORDAN: The neutrals feel that they are the innocent victims of this War which they did not bring about and in which they have no desire to take part. Shouldn't the belligerents, therefore, respect the rights of neutrals as far as is humanly possible?

RAEDER: Yes, indeed. But such respect should be reciprocal. The neutrals should maintain an effective neutrality. . . . The Captain of the *Altmark* (German prison ship which a British destroyer seized on the Norwegian coast, releasing many British prisoners) has shown how far Germany is willing to go. He could have defended his ship successfully, for the British destroyer would hardly have been able to open fire on a shipful of British seamen. . . . Our main consideration was respect for Norwegian sovereignty.

(This was shortly before the German invasion of Norway.)



utbroadcast, New York: Großadmiral Dr. h. c. Raeder

I once heard a jockey give a spine-tingling account of how it feels to go tearing down a race-course on a fast horse's back.

Such an account, in the form of an action broadcast, would thrill radio audiences, I thought. Obviously it would be impossible to arrange for the broadcast by a jockey of a race in which he was a participant. The next best thing would be to strap a pack transmitter on the back of a jockey with the gift of gab and have him describe the sensation of thundering down the stretch at top speed.

The photo shows how we carried out the idea. The broadcast, timed for the eve of a big race that attracted nationwide attention, resulted in suggestions for a number of novel sports broadcasts, most of them impossible of execution, some of them feasible.



The text accompanying the preceding photo reminds me that, as exciting as horse-racing is, it presents many difficulties from the broadcasting standpoint. The best horse-race is over in a few minutes, which means that when you have a big race to broadcast you've got to sandwich the brief drama between two layers of "features." The program is rounded out in one way or another,—descriptions of the crowd, a digest of the records of the horses in the race, predictions of the experts followed by a consensus of opinion, et cetera.

To take the routine edge off these "fillers" an effort is made to add some new twist. For instance, before the famous match race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit, at Pimlico, we presented a broadcast from the stables that housed the contestants.

The photos show Announcer Bob Evans "interviewing" Seabiscuit (top) and Jockey Kurtsinger "interviewing" War Admiral.

Neither horse would talk. However, such trivia as descriptions of the horses, their living quarters, their "mike presence," and other odds and ends that belong in the Human Interest Department combined to make an amusing prelude to the great race.



It was the night before Christmas in 1937 that these Indians from the deepest jungles of British Guiana put on an act for American radio listeners. We had made a tie-up with the scientific expedition headed by Dr. William Hall Holden of the American Museum of Natural History before he left New York. He carried with him specially designed RCA short-wave transmitters and receivers which greatly increased the possibilities of exploration by allowing him to maintain contact while far from his base camp.

They also enabled him to send us some very unusual programs for the networks, of which this was one. It has become traditional that on Christmas Eve we carry special broadcasts from all parts of the world—from every continent, from ships at sea, from planes in flight, and so on.

This pick-up from the deep interior of British Guiana, in which we presented Indians who never before had seen white men, added an unusual note to the holiday programs. Incidentally, in addition to providing us with programs, the radio equipment proved of tremendous value to the expedition.



Flood coverage is described in Chapter XI.

We assigned twenty-three broadcasting units—a total of eighty men—to cover the great floods of 1937.

In the photo one of these crews is shown broadcasting by short-wave from a flooded street in Portsmouth, Ohio. At the microphone is Tom Manning, well known Cleveland announcer.

A dog and a young lady look on with interest from above.

UPTOWN
LUNCH



Max Jordan, our continental European news chief, who might better be described as our roving European reporter, has probably talked his way into more places where reporters aren't wanted than any other man in radio.

Here you see Max looking things over at the Siegfried Line shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War prior to Telling All over the radio. . . . Well, not *all*. Note the reed and straw barriers designed to keep a few things secret.



Max Jordan, shown in the preceding picture on a personally conducted tour of the Siegfried Line—or that part of it he was allowed to see—discusses with German officers the broadcast to the United States he is about to deliver.



On the first anniversary of the Second World War we presented a round-up of opinions on the situation in Europe by the group of distinguished commentators shown (left to right) in the photograph: Lowell Thomas, Thomas R. Ybarra, John Gunther, H. R. Baukhage, Earl Godwin, Major General Stephen O. Fuqua, U.S.A. (ret.), H. V. Kaltenborn, and John B. Kennedy.

This round-table was an unrehearsed program. Lowell Thomas, resourceful veteran, kept the program moving by asking questions, calling upon speakers and tactfully giving the sign to quit when he thought the radio audience had heard enough of one commentator and was ready for another.

The guy standing behind Earl Godwin is your humble correspondent, who organized this program and helped Thomas keep it from becoming a "clam-bake." One of the chief problems involved in round-table broadcasts is the possibility that two or three commentators (each used to talking alone and anxious to give his views) will talk simultaneously and confuse the radio audience. This is what we mean by a clam-bake.

This program "baked" only twice in the course of a half-hour discussion, and then only briefly.



William Hillman, NBC London commentator and European director of *Collier's Weekly*, watching an air raid from the roof of the American Embassy in the British capital.

Asked to describe the setting in which he and other American commentators stationed in London make their broadcasts to the United States, Hillman wrote, "The London *Sphere* has told the story. Believing in labor-saving devices, I am sending you a clipping."

The following is taken from the *Sphere's* story:

The little room in which the Americans work is far down under the ground. First you pass into the cage erected in the British Broadcasting Company's front hall, past the steel-helmeted sentries. Then you are shot down by lift, to leave which you must step through the first of many steel doors. A Home Guard, wearing his helmet, even at this depth, puts his double-barreled gun under his arm to examine your pass. More steel doors and a strange feeling that you are walking about the seamen's flats of a battleship; and finally the room in which the Americans work. It is scarcely a studio. The furniture scattered about gives it the appearance of a small attic. A green curtain is strung halfway across its width, and in the shelter thus made is a table on which stands the microphone. No flowers, no pretty pictures, no shaded lights, none of the B.B.C.'s drawing-room camouflage, so conducive to calm accents and Oxford poise.

Although not hot, all the men as they enter the room immediately take their coats off and roll up their sleeves. This seems to be the American approach to work of any sort. The censor, catching the spirit of the thing, removes his coat too but does not roll up his sleeves.

Photo © Keystone Press Agency, Ltd.



When NBC learned that Max Gene Nohl, professional diver, planned an attempt to break the depth record of 306 feet we got in touch with him and placed before him a plan for a broadcast over our coast-to-coast networks in which he would describe the underwater scene as he descended lower and lower.

Nohl liked our idea and decided to see if he could make it work. In this picture he is shown aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Antietam* getting ready for his descent.



In this picture (see preceding one) Diver Nohl is being lowered for what proved to be a successful attempt at a new depth record.

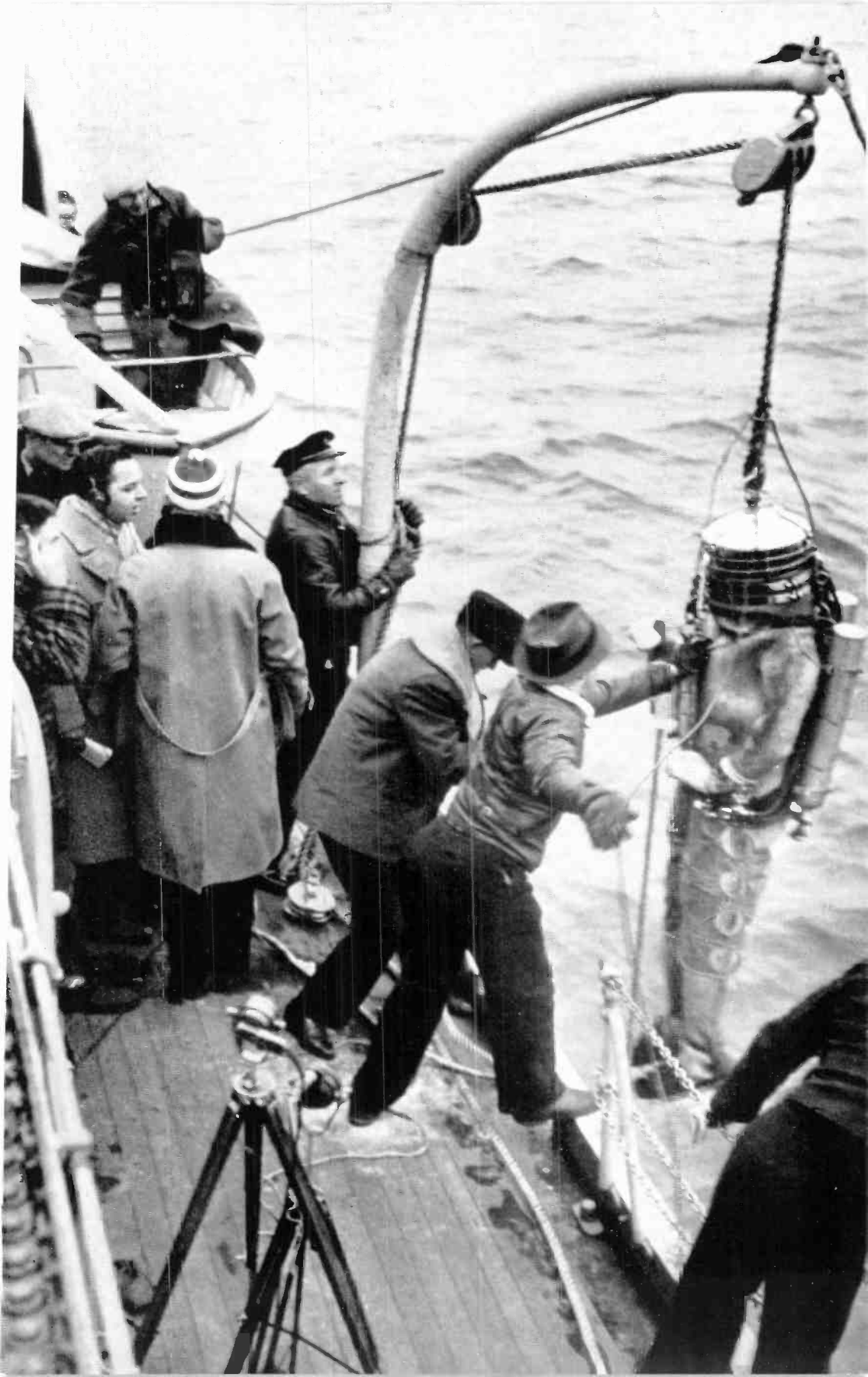
"I'm having trouble with my ears, hoist me up," Nohl shouted when he was one hundred feet down.

After being hoisted thirty feet Nohl asked to be lowered again.

At frequent intervals Nohl instructed those on board the Coast Guard cutter *Antietam* to "slacken my life-belt," "ease up on the telephone line," and "the telephone cables are becoming troublesome now."

Nohl reported that he was given considerable trouble by his telephone cables when he was at the bottom. The cables, he said, coiled around his diving suit and made both descent and subsequent rising difficult.

Our broadcast of the new diving record was heard throughout the nation by short-wave radio equipment set up on the Coast Guard cutter. The new record was made possible through the use of a new mixture of helium and oxygen which allows the diver extended use of his facilities despite the pressure of the cold waters.



The corn-husking championships, staged annually somewhere in the corn belt, draw tremendous crowds. In recent years the event has drawn an attendance of 100,000 or more.

This makes an ideal broadcast for our well-known Farm and Home Hour. The circle at the extreme right indicates the NBC broadcasting booth.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Farm and Home Hour is that city people are just as interested in it as the farmers, for whom it is primarily intended. Judging from fan mail, there are as many urban as rural listeners to this daily program, which the editors of the *March of Time* selected as the outstanding contribution of American radio to improved methods of farming. Although the program serves in many ways as the farmer's equivalent to the businessman's ticker tape—quoting current prices, supply, demand, and other facts that affect his economic status—it also tells listeners the newest method of roasting a turkey, how to secure a Government loan, how to make the garden thrive, and how to coax Biddie into laying more eggs.



Our experience with the Farm and Home Hour shows that farmers are intensely interested in what other farmers have to say about farm machinery. On the other hand, they are not interested in ponderous discussions of such equipment by so-called experts. What appeals to them is a simple first-hand account of another farmer's experience.

The United States Department of Agriculture is NBC's chief co-operator in presenting the Farm and Home Hour.

The program was originated by NBC Vice-President Frank E. Mullen, formerly our director of agriculture.

The farmer at the microphone and the Lincolnian type standing beside him, ready to go on the air next, mean more to the Farm and Home Hour's basic rural audience than all the textbook theorists in the land. The latter have their place, but they mean nothing to the vast majority of the millions who listen to this program, unless our mailbag is deceiving us.



Department
Unit No 1

The strangest arrangements we were ever called upon to make for a so-called "special event" were those necessitated by a demonstration of Hindu fire-walking which was to be described on Bob Ripley's *Believe It or Not* program.

The records of the News and Special Events Division show that our "essential props" included a pit ten feet long, three feet wide, and four feet deep; five cords of oak logs; a permit to build an open fire; two New York City firemen; an ambulance; and a group of doctors and scientists.

All day long the logs were fed to the flames and by the evening of the broadcast the pit was a solid mass of white-hot oak.

The picture shows Kuda Bux, Hindu mystic, after a trial walk across the bed of burning wood. The doctors and scientists who examined the mystic's feet after the broadcast found no blisters or other signs of injury.

This was a duplication of the Hindu's performance in London a few years earlier before 250 members of the British medical profession. The British were perplexed, so was the American committee, and so is your humble correspondent.

Note the floor microphone to the left of Kuda Bux.



Edward Tomlinson, South American authority, in a broadcast from Lima, Peru, in the series called *The Other Americas*.

Here Tomlinson is shown in a "customs of the country" program after he had finished the more serious business of interviewing South American diplomats and other officials at the Pan-American Congress.

Tomlinson (wearing the béret) is telling the American radio audience about a group of Peruvian Indian musicians, their music and instruments after the group had played one of their strange native melodies.

The man looking over Tomlinson's shoulder is Dewey Sturgell, NBC engineer stationed in Lima.



When Ragosa Kota, chief of the Solomon Islands, visited New York he called at our Radio City studios and was keenly interested in what he saw.

The chief informed us that if we ever needed anyone to broadcast from the Solomon Islands he would be glad to oblige.

When he indicated a desire to stand before a microphone and say a few words we accommodated him. The chief was charmed with a recording of his voice and we presented him with a pressing of the disc as a souvenir.



Scene aboard the U.S. Destroyer *Kane* as Samuel Wetherill, Associate Editor of *Yachting* (in shirt sleeves, at mike) broadcasts a description of one of the international yacht races, between the craft owned by Messrs. Vanderbilt and Sopwith, representing the United States and Great Britain respectively.

Next to Mr. Wetherill, and also wearing headphones, is Announcer George Hicks.

Some of the sailors aboard the *Kane* were a bit irreverent about yacht-racing. Looking out at the deluxe racing craft, one of them remarked, "If I owned a fast motorboat I'd want to race it. But if I owned one of those slow tubs I'd just go fishing."



Birling, or log-rolling, is the sport devised by lumbermen in their off hours and calls for two men wearing hob-nailed boots or shoes to tread a whirling fourteen-foot log in the water and to try to dislodge each other.

Legend has it that Paul Bunyan, mythical colossus of the Northwest, trod one end of a log for three weeks and three days before dislodging his opponent, who was Satan himself.

Here we see a log-roller dislodging a foeman in a trial joust from a log that was too submerged as the picture was taken to be more than faintly outlined in the water. The NBC crew is accustoming itself to the conditions of this little-known sport so that they will be able to do a good job when the official contests get under way in a national birling contest at Escanaba, Michigan.

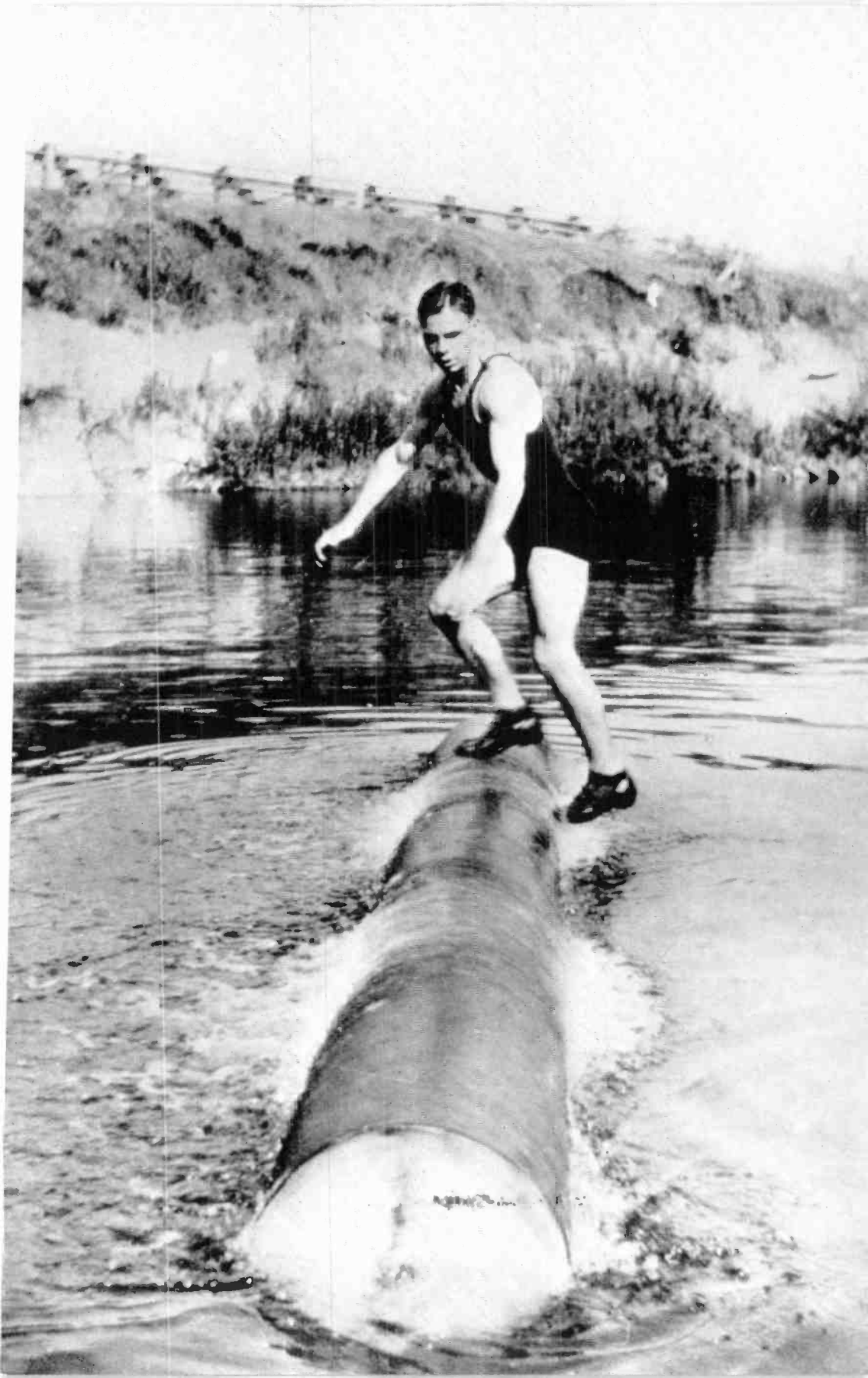


Wilbur Marx, winner of more birling titles than any other contestant since the first national championship held at the Lumbermen's Exposition in Omaha, in 1898.

Marx had just dislodged his opponent when this picture was taken. The loser's point of departure is indicated by the strip where the log, roughened by his hob nails, picks up the water as Marx spins it rapidly. The same action can be seen under Marx's hob nails. The loser's destination is shown by the bubbles rising to the surface of the water just to the right of the log.

What happened in this birling contest, and a number of others, was broadcast over a radio hook-up covering territory in which log-rolling is followed with avid interest. It is radio's job to cover so-called sectional sports as well as those of national appeal.

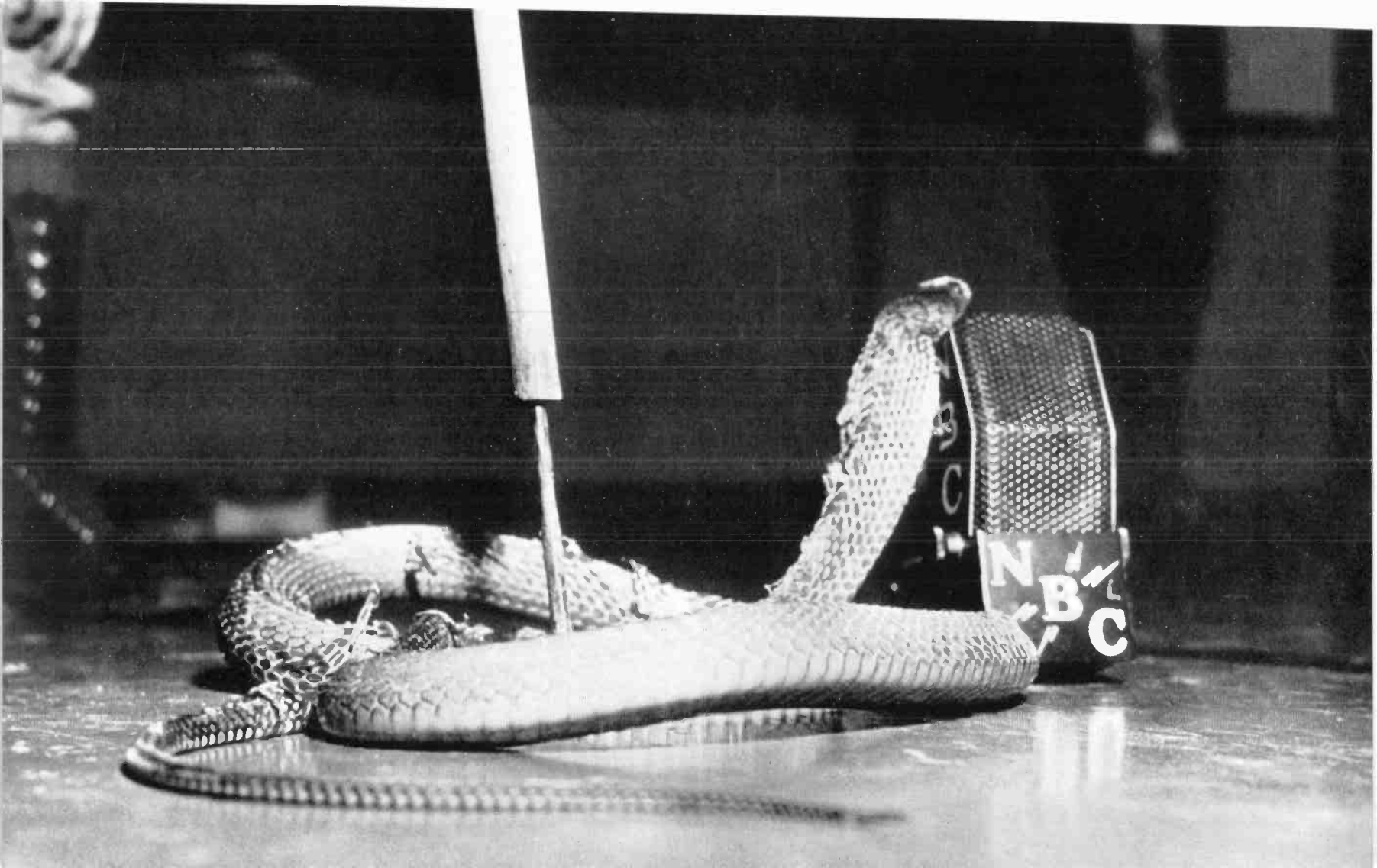
In the text accompanying the preceding photo the technique of birling is briefly described.



You see, it was like this. Someone told us a story about how cobra venom, for use in making snake-bite antitoxin, was extracted from the poison sacs of the reptiles. It sounded interesting. So interesting, in fact, that ambitiously "News and Special Events" decided to see if there wasn't a lively broadcast in a venom-extracting party.

The first thing you knew we were staging a program based on the idea. Dr. Carol Stryker, Director of the Staten Island Zoo, and a staff of assistants, selected as the star of the show an eleven-foot king cobra. Stryker "milked" the snake while his assistants held its wriggling body. Clifford H. Pope, Assistant Curator of Reptiles at the American Museum of Natural History and Harold J. O'Connell, Vice-President of the Staten Island Zoo, did a "blow by blow" broadcast.

The snake, eager to express itself, hissed into the microphone several times. The effect was largely lost because the reptile insisted on "crowding" the mike. A studio wag gave the hand cue which means, "You're too close to the mike, step back." Usually when a speaker or performer does not pick up this cue someone walks over and gently moves him back a little. In this case we overlooked this little formality and allowed the reptile to drape itself all over the mike.



Three men in a balloon, the setting of one of the most dramatic broadcasts in history. (See Chapter XVII). This is the National Geographic Society stratosphere balloon as it reached 30,000 feet, rising at 600 feet a minute. The picture was taken from a plane which had reached its ceiling at 25,000.

Almost six miles down is the sun-lighted surface of South Dakota, just above it, the haze-laden horizon. The balloon itself is strongly lighted by the sun, but the stratosphere air just beyond it—clear, thin and free from moisture and dust—does not affect a photographic negative as does air near the ground.

Photographically, the scattered light gets weaker and weaker toward the zenith. At 60,613 feet the balloonists reported by radio that the sky was black to the eye as well as to the camera, when looking almost straight upward. At 45 degrees upward the sky was a deep, dark blue.

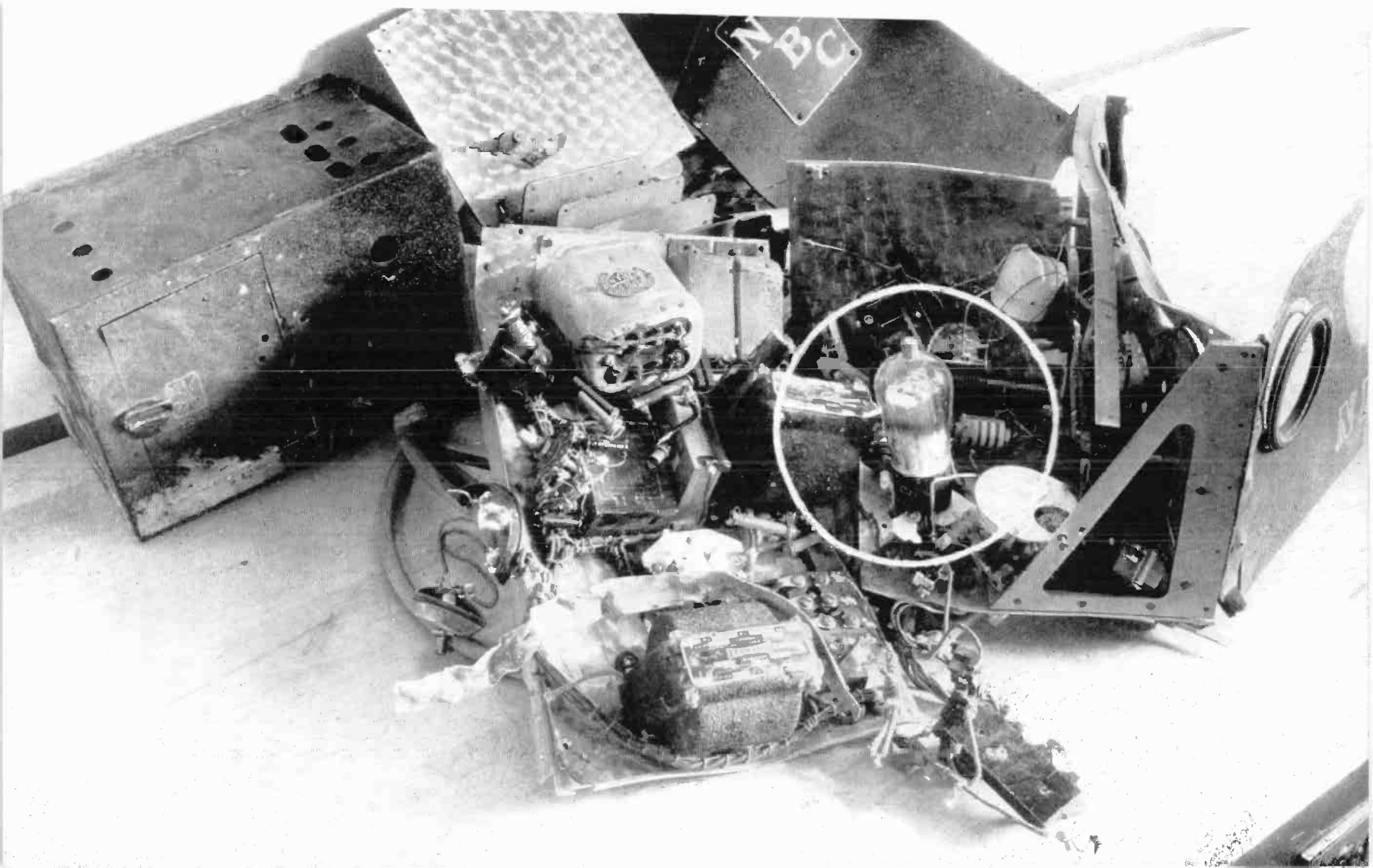
Not very long after this picture was taken the bag ripped and started downward, the balloonists escaping at the last minute by parachutes.

Photo © The National Geographic Society, and used by their consent.



A drop of 5,000 feet wrecked our stratosphere transmitter in the crash of the National Geographic Society-Army Air Corps gondola when it landed in a Nebraska cornfield, as described in the chapter called THE FOURTH CHIME. Miraculously one tube (shown in circle in the photograph) remained intact.

The wrecked transmitter is on display in our "radio museum" in Radio City, New York, which is annually visited by many thousands of people.



Here is Meshie, chimpanzee raised from babyhood by Explorer Harry C. Raven who picked her up in Burma as a mascot in 1928. Years later when Meshie, who had been reared with Raven's children, was a grown young lady, Raven was compelled to seek a home for her when he decided to leave on another exploration trip.

Raven and the chimpanzee were interviewed over the air by Hans Adamson of the American Museum of Natural History. Raven told how gentle and intelligent the chimp was while Meshie emitted simian grunts of approval for the benefit of the radio audience.

We were swamped with offers from all over the country from individuals and institutions that wanted to adopt Meshie. Eventually she went to the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago.



When wars and disasters come too thick and fast, we can always call on the Lighter-Side-Of-Life Division of the News and Special Events Department. This division is constantly on the alert to provide a laugh for relief and one of its ideas which drew a wide response was the National News-hawking Contest, to find the newsboy who did the best job of hawking his wares.

One contestant who placed in the finals is shown here. He was not judged best, but he was among the loudest. He really put his lungs into his work and the engineer riding the "gain control" was worried for fear the tubes would be blasted.

There are many schools of news-hawking, we discovered. This gentleman relied on volume. He came from Brooklyn and bragged that he could outshout the elevated trains on Fulton Street, where he peddled the *Times Union*. Naturally he felt very superior to his competitor on the next page.



This entry in the great National News-hawking Contest also came from Brooklyn, where he ably represented the *Daily Eagle*. But he disdained mere volume, (it's whispered he worked in a quieter neighborhood) and relied on a persuasive quality of voice. He is the only man I ever met who could enunciate "Troops Charge Pickets" with his mouth wide open. As can be seen, he's doing just that in the picture. His clarity was his pride, whereas the gentleman on the preceding page held to the sales theory that a string of out-size sounds, containing only one or two real words, engenders a curiosity on the part of the potential customer which causes him to reach for his pennies.

Court Orders Strikers Out of Auto Plants
New York
DAILY EAGLE
TROOPS CHARGE PICKETS

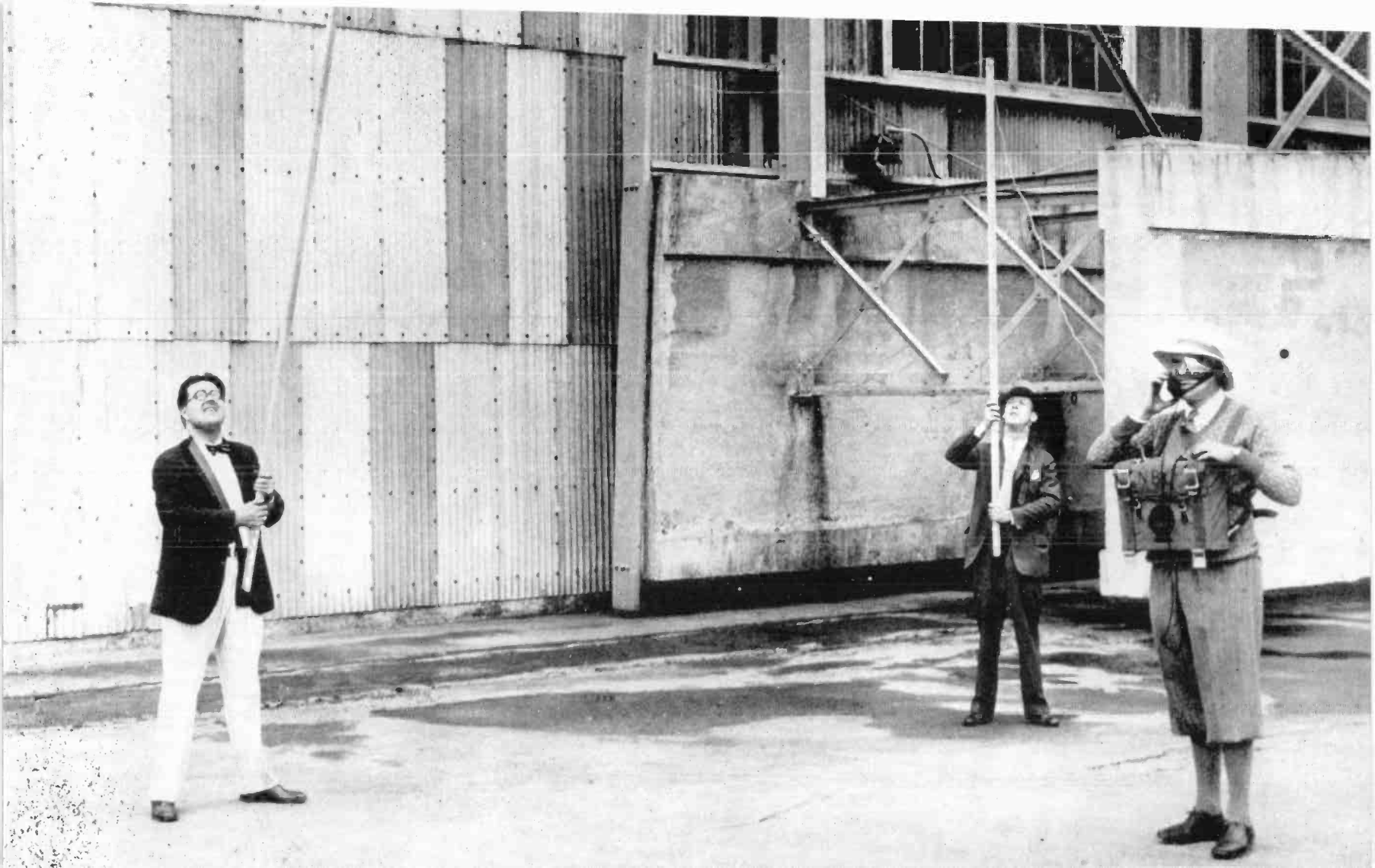
NBC
NBC



No story of news on the air could be complete which didn't take into account the activities of these three gentlemen—G. W. (Johnny) Johnstone, William Burke (Skeets) Miller, and Floyd Gibbons, reading from left to right.

Johnny, long-time Publicity Director for NBC, then Director of Publicity and Special Events for Mutual, and currently Radio Director of the Democratic National Committee, is one of the most popular men in the industry, and rightly so. Skeets, my predecessor as Director of Special Events for NBC, was the pioneer in that field and probably was responsible for more "firsts" than any other man in the business. He's now our Night Program Manager. Gibbons was a famous newspaper correspondent before taking to the air, where his rapid-fire delivery and colorful style established him as the first nationally known news commentator. Floyd died shortly after returning to the United States from Ethiopia, where he covered the Selassie-Mussolini affair.

The three veterans are shown as they broadcast the arrival of the Graf Zeppelin at Lakehurst, N. J., in 1929. The fancy and effective mobile transmitters of today were unknown then. Johnny and Skeets are holding the antenna up on a couple of poles while Floyd, a pack-transmitter strapped over his shoulders and a microphone strapped to his face, is describing the big airship's arrival. The pack-set was regarded as pretty ultra in those days.



Former Heavyweight Champions Max Baer and Jack Johnson with Sports Announcer Clem McCarthy on the *Parade of Champions* broadcast described in Chapter XVI. Baer (left) has just reminded Johnson, who was about to light that big cigar, of the sign on the wall prohibiting smoking.

Johnson injected a second cause for laughter by requesting a plug for a nursing-bottle thermometer that he sells for a living. At first McCarthy thought it was a gag. Then, when he realized Johnson was in earnest, he figured out a way of mentioning the product which the former heavyweight champ insists is the best nursing-bottle thermometer in the world.



SMOKING PROHIBITED
IN THESE PREMISES
MR. J. M. ELLIOTT

Jimmy Bowen, hatless and facing the sea, holding the microphone into which he spoke, in a voice throbbing with excitement, the words that thrilled millions of listeners in the United States: "We have just seen the *Graf Spee* explode five miles from the coast. The ship has been scuttled!"

The smoke above the horizon at the left of the wire-photo is all that the camera could catch of the doomed pocket battleship as it settled in the water off the Montivedeo shoreline.

Powerful glasses, not visible in the photograph, brought the scene much closer and enabled Bowen to deliver his famous broadcast,—one that belongs on any list of the ten greatest of all time.

Bowen's remarkable feat is described in Chapter X.

Observers stationed along the shoreline at intervals of a mile and equipped with the best fieldglasses Bowen could buy or borrow, were hooked up with him by telephone and supplemented his own observations. Bowen also got reports from a lighthouse that we took over temporarily as part of our plan.

Luck, of course, was with us. Regardless of how ingeniously we planned, we could not hope for an eyewitness account of whatever was destined to happen unless it took place within a certain area.



Parrots suffering from various types of frustration complexes were given a chance for self-expression when NBC staged its National Talking Parrot Contest.

It is not enough for a parrot to talk to the limited family group that house it as a pet. It must have a forum by means of which it can reach millions and feel it is a factor in modern life. Such a forum was our contest, and a great many parrots expressed themselves.

Thus radio becomes a force in the feathered realm as well as in the world of man.

Parrot-fanciers, it develops, are sensitive to sloppy phrasing involving their pets. A statement in a publicity release to the effect that parrakeets, cockatoos, and macaws would be eligible as well as parrots brought forth a number of protests informing us that parrakeets, cockatoos and macaws *are* parrots.

A minor reference to all parrots as subsisting on fruits and seeds elicited a scholarly and lengthy rebuke calling our attention to the fact that the *kea* parrot of New Zealand attacks and tears the flesh of sheep.

The parrot on the microphone is being auditioned. The others are waiting their turn.



A short-wave mobile unit stationed near the scene of the blaze enabled us to present over a nationwide network eye-witness broadcasts of the great Chicago grain-elevator fire of 1938 in which eight lives were lost.

The broadcasts were made despite damage to the top of the mobile unit caused by falling embers.

Norman Barry, NBC announcer (shown at the microphone), who described the scene and interviewed members of the fire department, and Rev. William Gorman, fire department chaplain, were drenched when firemen momentarily lost control of a hose in the midst of the first of two broadcasts.



Broadcasting an account of the arrival in the United States for the first time of the German dirigible *Hindenburg*. The program is short-waved from the NBC mobile unit in the foreground to New York for rebroadcast throughout the United States.

In the next picture, a great shot taken by a *New York Daily News* staff photographer—



We see the great balloon go up in flames. A combination of luck and resourcefulness, as described in chapter XVII, enabled us to broadcast a thrilling eye-witness account of the worst catastrophe in the history of aeronautics.

Contrast the drama of this photograph with the calm of the preceding one.

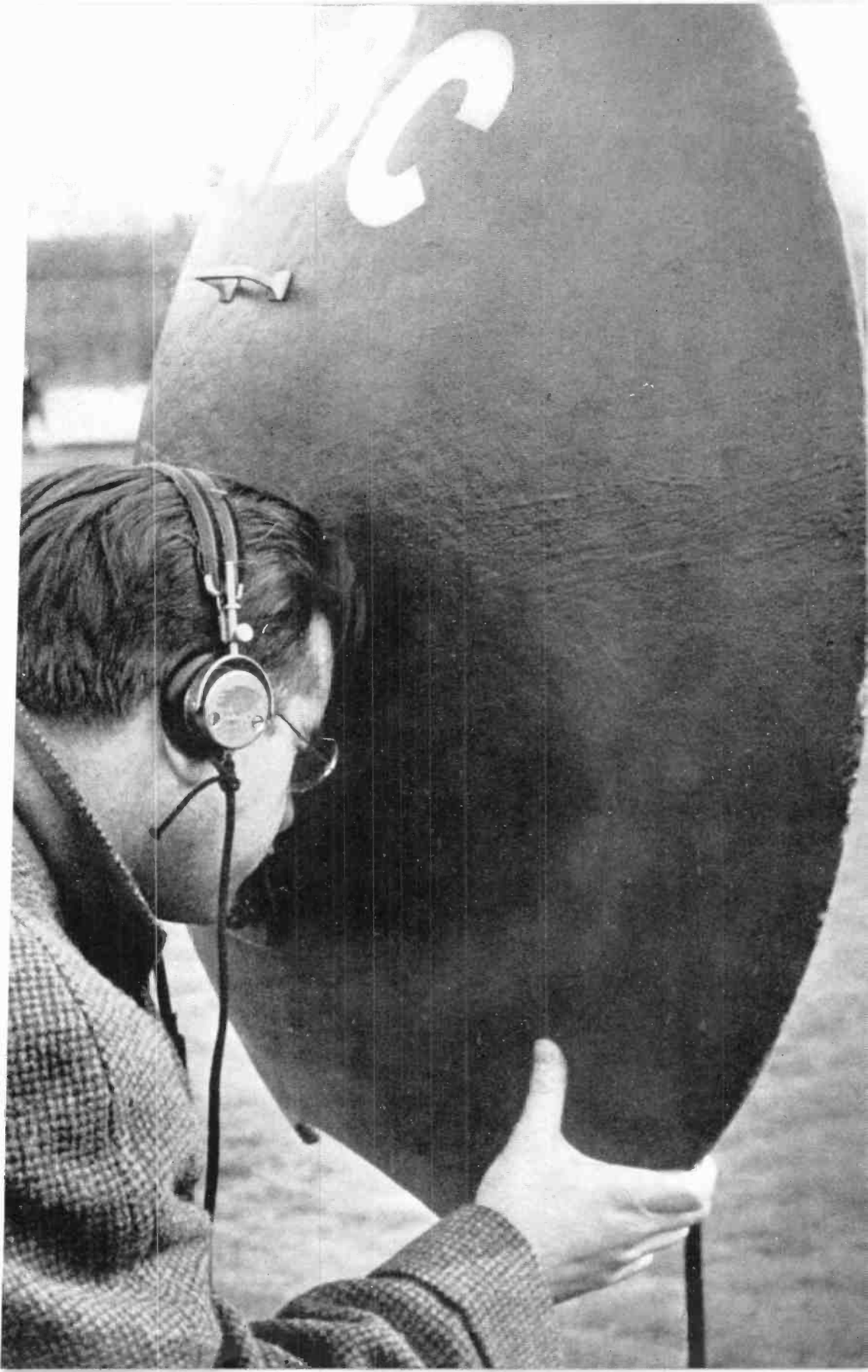
Herbert Morrison's description of the terrible tragedy depicted in this picture is still regarded as one of the most spectacular broadcasts in radio history.



The top-hat transmitter, first introduced in the coverage of an Easter parade on Fifth Avenue, is a complete miniature broadcasting station; and as such has its own call letters and license. George Hicks, veteran radio reporter, is literally talking through his hat. Elsa Maxwell just manages to get into the picture.



The picture shows a parabolic microphone which picks up sound at a distance. Reid Davis, NBC engineer, is shown aiming the mike at a marching military band during a review of troops at Governors Island, New York.



Minus royal raiment, and against one of Buckingham Palace's simplest settings, a king of England, now Duke of Windsor, tells the people of Great Britain, and the additional millions that make up the British Empire, of his decision to abdicate the throne.

The broadcast also had a tremendous audience in the United States and elsewhere. In fact, this history-making address was transmitted to the entire so-called civilized world via NBC's powerful short-wave stations, and is generally conceded to have had the largest audience that ever listened to a broadcast.



Not so long ago my friend Tom Beck, President of the Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, had a novel idea for stimulating interest and confidence in air transportation. (Tom will talk aviation at the drop of a hat and won't even stop when you pick it up again.) He suggested taking up the entire high-school population of a city in a transport plane, about twenty at a time, giving them an instructional flight, fitting them out with earphones so that they could listen to the radio beam, the plane-ground conversations, etc.

TWA agreed to provide the ship, personnel, instructor, in fact the works. Albuquerque was decided upon for the experiment because it was about the desired size, and it had a beautiful new airport which had not yet gone into service, thus being free for our purposes.

NBC co-operated by putting broadcasting equipment in the plane, and broadcasting a coast-to-coast program, including interviews with the youngsters while aloft. The whole experiment was a great success, went off without a hitch of any kind, and helped to impress a lot of skeptics with the fact that air transport is now a standard method of transportation.



Max Jordan, our Continental European News Chief in his quarters overlooking Vatican City, where he and an assistant kept a twenty-four-hour watch for the signal to broadcast to the world the news that a new Pope had been elected to succeed Pope Pius XI.

The election is indicated by white smoke arising above St. Peter's from the stove in which the ballots are burned. Indecisive ballots are indicated by black smoke.

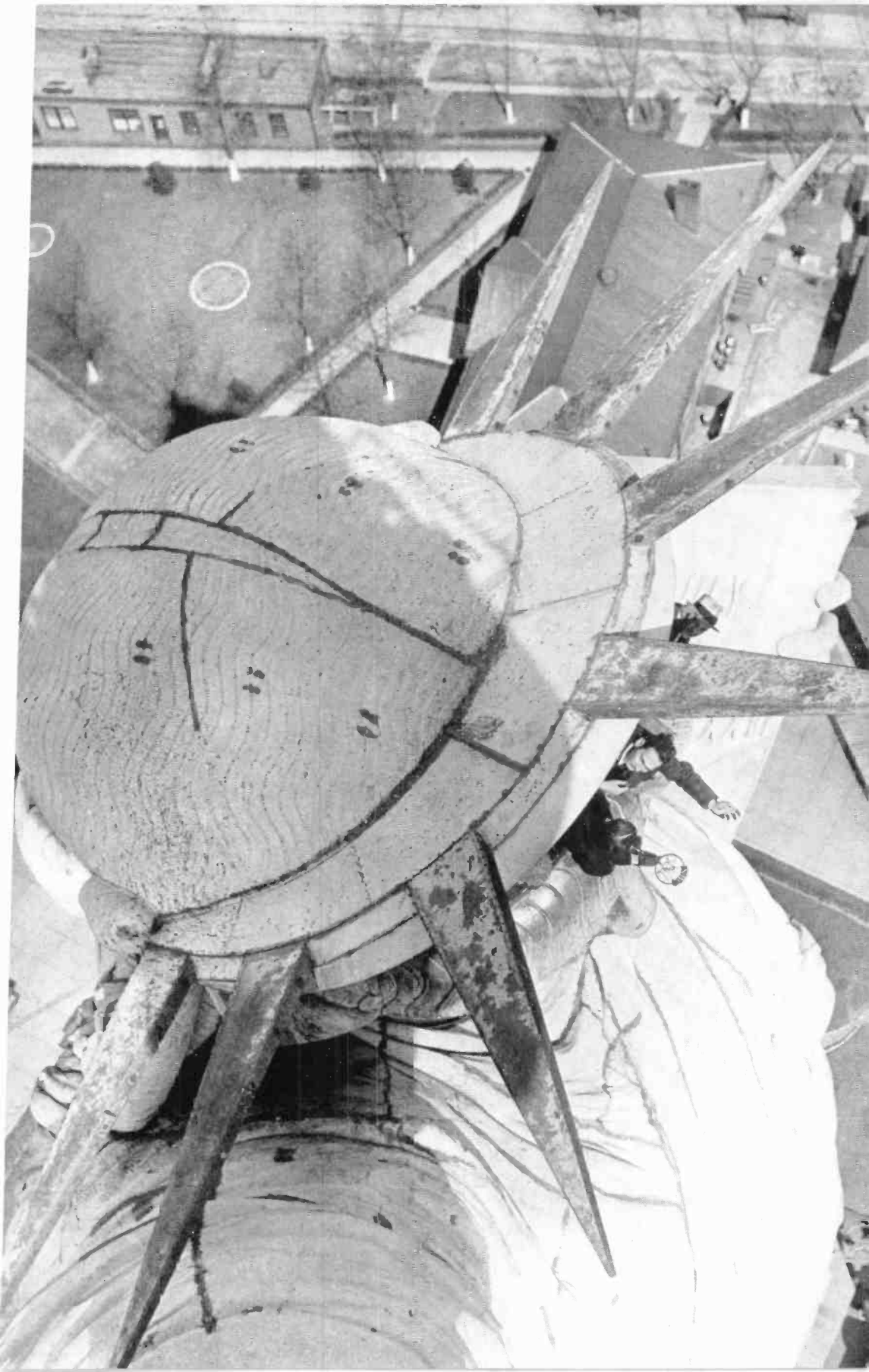


Announcer Clem White proclaiming the winners of NBC's annual thrilling stitch-by-stitch-and-no-holds-barred description of the National Crochet Championships.

Earlier in the proceedings—that is, during the final round—Clem “One Stitch” McCarthy and Bill “Purl One and Drop One” Stern, who qualified for the exciting assignment by covering championship prize-fights, Army-Navy football shindies and the Olympic Games, paced the contestants inch by inch and yard by yard with a running fire of comment as the needles flew.



An Independence Day broadcast from the Statue of Liberty. This photograph was taken from the upraised arm of the famous statue.



Accuracy and authenticity are things we constantly strive for in our radio reporting, but they are not always easy to achieve, especially in extemporaneous reporting of events as they occur. Therefore, whenever possible, the commentators bone up beforehand on every bit of information which might come in handy on a program they are assigned to handle.

This is illustrated by the picture of Blevins Davis, NBC commentator at the coronation of King George VI. Before leaving for London, Blevins made a careful study of replicas of the crown jewels which he would have to describe during the ceremony.

The exact imitation of the coronation crown, known as Edward the Confessor's, is shown at the left. Davis also studied duplicates of the necklace made of various royal order pendants, the King's royal sceptre and the Rod with the Dove. He learned their histories as well as their physical details, and this information obtained in advance helped to add color as well as accuracy and authenticity to his broadcast descriptions.



When the Blue and the Gray—members of the Grand Army of the Republic and the Union of Confederate Veterans—met at Gettysburg for their seventy-fifth re-union, NBC was on hand to present eye-witness accounts of what went on. Photo shows General M. D. Vance, ninety-three years old, of Little Rock, Ark., and Henry Banzett, ninety-six, of Dover, Del., chatting, while Lambdin Kay, of Station WSB, Atlanta, holds up the microphone which sends their conversation to the nation.



Haile Selassie, deposed ruler of Ethiopia, broadcasting a message to the world from Station ETA, the only one in Ethiopia, as the Italians advanced on Addis Ababa, the capital. His press chief, Lorenzo Taezaz, looks on.

Station ETA is six miles from Addis Ababa.

When NBC broadcasts were heard in the United States from Ethiopia in the pre-invasion days, they were picked up from ETA by RCA Communications on Long Island and then fed to our networks.

While the broadcast depicted in the photo was in progress natives were feverishly constructing a big bomb-proof shelter on the grounds adjoining the building that houses ETA, as protection against air-raids.



Andrew Young operates the little one-man radio station on the lonely speck in the middle of the South Pacific known as Pitcairn Island.

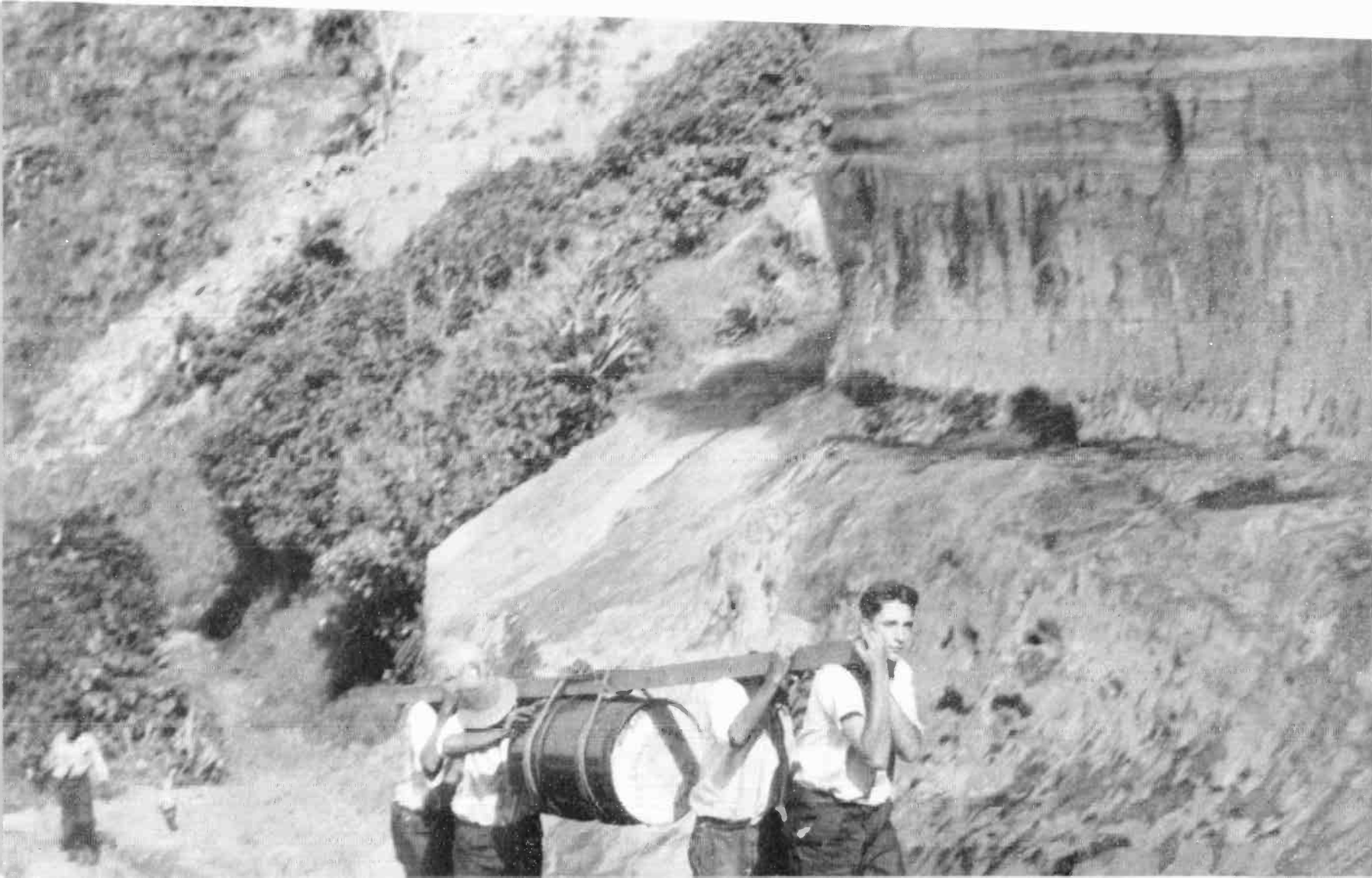
Young, a direct descendant of Edward Young, who deserted with the mutinous crew of H.M.S. *Bounty*, is shown standing beside the modern transmitter presented to him by Americans, as a tribute to his resourcefulness in keeping the outside world in touch with the little island by means of one of the crudest transmitters ever operated.

Young signals passing ships to offer, on behalf of his fellow Pitcairners, trades of rare fruits and curios for clothing and foodstuffs.



Primitive Pitcairn Island has no trucking facilities. The photograph shows a drum of gasoline being carried up a hill to PITC, the island's tiny radio station,—the most isolated in the world—where it will keep the station's generator going.

Station PITC's gasoline problem is discussed in chapter XX.



Explorer Clifford MacGregor, whose story is told in Chapter VI, is shown testing the radio equipment aboard his ship, the schooner *A. W. Greely*. A few months after this photograph was taken MacGregor was heard throughout the United States in a coast-to-coast broadcast that originated 180 miles from the North Pole.



Television at the 1940 Republican National Convention, gave the ticketless outsider a chance to see how presidential candidates are nominated.

The Republican National Committee made available to the Philadelphia public a battery of sixty receivers at South Museum, adjoining Municipal Auditorium. Admission was free.

The photo shows a television camera "picking up" a convention-hall scene.

The Democratic National Convention made a similar service available to the Chicago public, also without cost.

Thus the citizenry of two big metropolitan cities were not only able to hear the orators but could actually see them gesticulate, perhaps thus gaining some insight into how hard our politicians work to make America safe for Republicans and Democrats.

The series of booths resembling a railway coach (in the upper background) houses the convention staffs of NBC, CBS, and Mutual.



“I wonder,” wondered an associate of mine as he looked out of a window at a window-cleaner at work, “what a window-cleaner thinks about.”

One thing led to another and soon we were arranging a broadcast of a two-way conversation between two window-cleaners at work on the window sills of two modern skyscrapers—Richard Hart cleaning windows high up on the Empire State Building in New York and Alex Henderson similarly engaged on a window ledge of the mammoth Merchandise Mart in Chicago.

Henderson’s greatest thrill, he told the radio audience, came the time an “anchor” broke while he was cleaning a fifteen-story window. (The anchor is the little bolt by means of which the safety belt is fastened to the window. There are two anchors, one right and one left.) “The other anchor held, so I just hung there,” said Henderson, “till I got my breath back, then I crawled up and in the window.”

Hart had once had a similar experience. “No damage is done if only one anchor breaks,” he told our listeners. “If two broke at the same time—and I never heard of such a thing happening—a feller really would have something to think about.”

Hart said he wished his wife would not ask him to wash the windows at home after a week’s work. Henderson said he broke his wife of that habit.

Hart said the nicest thing about his job is a girl’s gym class that spends the afternoon on the roof of a near-by hotel on sunny afternoons.

The photo shows Hart on a window-ledge of the Empire State Building.

What is considered a good day’s work? Seventy-five windows a day, both men agreed.



GRANDMA: Come back by boat. Come back by boat. Did you hear?
Come back boat.

LANGFORD: She says to come back by boat, Douglas.

CORRIGAN: Yes, I know. She says to come back by boat.

That doesn't sound like a very exciting broadcast, but it brought us a tremendous mail response from all over the country. It shows what happens when you tie into a story that has caught the public's imagination.

Here we see Wrong-way Corrigan's grandmother and his aunt and uncle, in Los Angeles, talking to the flyer in Dublin, as millions listened in. To the left is Clinton Twiss, NBC special events man on the Coast, who lined up the relatives for us.

Everyone got a lot of fun out of Douglas's famous flight, but both he and we got plenty tired before the chapter ended.



Everyone's interested in getting his own food regularly, so why shouldn't he be interested in the dramatic story of how New York City's seven millions are fed every day? That thought resulted in a program called *Feeding the City*, which serves as a good example of the type of broadcasting that has educational as well as human-interest value. But we mention the educational angles only in whispers because of the cockeyed notion some people have that such programs are necessarily dull.

We set up microphones in dairies, huge model henneries, produce markets, storage plants and on railroad floats and docks. Here is an announcer, surrounded by sides of beef by the score, interviewing a butcher on the subject of handling meat in trainload lots.



The docks, where freight cars loaded with fruits and vegetables are brought across to Manhattan on floats, gave another angle on feeding the city.

P.R.R. 534

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21488

WOMAN-DE
STADT
AMMERS
LAWSON
1900



Novelty was added by a pick-up from a hennerly, where thousands of chickens spend their lives eating, drinking, laying eggs and—listening to the radio. Here the loudspeaker has just been shut off to allow the hens to be performers instead of audience, and they're protesting.

These and other pick-ups gave a well-rounded and dramatic picture of the tremendous task involved in providing New York with its daily three meals.



Most people do not realize how swift was the transition that brushed aside peace-time pursuits and made an armed camp of Europe. My records show that not many months before the outbreak of the Second World War we announced that all our plans had been made for covering the Olympic Games at Helsinki, Finland.

Our announcement said in part: "NBC has installed an elaborate broadcasting booth, has facilities reserved and lines ordered. . . . Bill Stern, ace sports reporter, will give eye-witness accounts of all important events. . . . Broadcasts from the Olympic Stadium will begin with the colorful opening day ceremonies on the afternoon of July 20, 1940."

The arrow points to the NBC broadcasting booth in the ghost stadium that was to house the worldwide sports events supposed to symbolize international good-will. Upper left, Bill Stern.



