

by LEO KOVNER



Uhf Faces A Test: Los Angeles' 7 Vhfs

A modern-day Daniel reads his uhf for competition in a den of seven currently-operating vhf outlets in Los Angeles. Here he gives his long-range reasons on why he believes he will succeed.

TODAY's television counterpart of Daniel entering the lions' den is John Poole, 36-year-old California broadcaster who is putting a uhf television station into operation next fall in vhf-saturated Los Angeles.

There are seven pre-freeze vhf stations in that market. A reported five out of seven were still losing money at the end of 1952.

It was faith that enabled Daniel to survive. If faith can do as much for Mr. Poole, he as well as has it made with KPIK(TV) which is scheduled to begin operation within a couple of months on Ch. 22. However dim others may think his prospects are, Mr. Poole is not at all discouraged.

"People ask me why I'm building the station," he has told B•T. "I have faith in the future of television and of Los Angeles. Statistically speaking, enough people move here every year to support the addition of a new TV station annually," he explains.

In radio "all my life," Mr. Poole built his first ham station at 14. Before the war, he shipped out as a Merchant Marine radioman and from 1940 to 1945 served in the Army Signal Corps. Afterward he acquired and operated KSMA Santa Maria, KALI Pasadena and built KBIG Avalon. John Poole Broadcasting Co. now owns KBIF Fresno and KBIG and holds construction permits for Ch. 46, Sacramento, and Ch. 53, Fresno, as well as for KPIK(TV). Five years ago he established experimental uhf KM2XAZ (TV) Signal Hill, Long Beach, of which KPIK is the outgrowth. "So you can see this isn't a 'smart money' move, but part of a long-continuing program," he states.

The financial picture of Los Angeles tel-

evision isn't quite as grim as the FCC reports indicate [B•T, Aug. 3], in Mr. Poole's opinion. While apparently five of the seven stations are in the red, "some don't mind too much losing money now," he says. "They're doing things in the grand way to make a name for their stations. Meanwhile, their properties are becoming more valuable. Eventually, I think all the existing stations will solve their problems, or the problems will work themselves out, and they all will be operating at a profit."

"What Happened at Roanoke" [B•T, July 13] doesn't dismay Mr. Poole. There, uhf WROV-TV, in the face of increasing losses against the single vhf competition of WSLSTV, has turned Ch. 27 back to the FCC and entered a competitive application for vhf Ch. 7.

Cites Comparative Circumstances

"They're losing a lot less than many vhf stations," he says. "Of course, their's is a special case, but if a vhf channel weren't available for them to jump after, they might have stayed on uhf and made a go of it."

"It took the pioneers in vhf four or five years to get started," he comments. "They didn't have competition, but neither did they have the equipment, the services and the acceptance of the public and advertisers we have today."

John Poole Broadcasting Co.'s KBIG started operation last year and was showing a profit four months later, so Mr. Poole can point to this latest in a number of successful projects to back up his ideas on station management. To him, there are two major approaches to putting black ink on

the ledger of a uhf station entering a highly competitive situation.

One is a fast, intensive development, gambling heavy initial losses on high quality, exclusive programming with the hope of gaining quick audience acceptance and accompanying advertising revenue. Mr. Poole admits he did think of obtaining exclusive telecasting rights to certain athletic events. With Ch. 22 the only station to carry these, perhaps a high proportion of Los Angeles' more than 1,500,000 set-owners might have felt it worthwhile at once to invest the \$30-to-\$60 required to convert their receivers to one or more uhf channels.

But when KPIK's owner says, "I don't think uhf in Los Angeles will pay off in a hurry," he indicates that the station will follow the other approach, which can be summarized as keeping costs down, programming modestly, and gradually building up an audience.

"Uhf will develop, but not overnight," he opines. "The rewards will be the same as those of vhf, if the stations will only stick with it. We'll realize our returns, although perhaps a little later than the vhf stations."

The first part of the formula—keeping costs down—does present a lot of prickly problems and Mr. Poole admits labor costs are the prickliest of the lot. "If the unions will cooperate, we can keep our costs down and create new jobs in television. But if we're forced to operate on the costly labor budget of our vhf competition, KPIK may never become a reality."

Another problem is to create in the Los Angeles area's video audience a desire to