

year later our Hooperating advanced to 40. The NBC rating had dropped to 26. In the past year, WKY-TV News maintained a constant five-to-one ratio over all local competitors. A Telepulse poll last May ranked one of our big newscasts as the *top multi-weekly program* in our market, network originations included.

Another measure of success, and justifiably so, is the return on the financial investment in news. *Television news alone* cost our company in excess of \$85,000 last year. We are still investing in news. It is a profitable investment. We have no sustaining newscasts. I hasten to add, however, that we would emphasize news, even if this were not true.

In essence we found *where* we could hit news hard and well, and *how*. We concentrate on our own region. From September of 1954 to September of 1955, our staff and correspondents exposed a total of 288,392 feet of film. That is an average of approximately 25,000 feet a month. It is all processed, edited and scripted by our staff.

We try to take advantage of every story with a visual interest. We use the station's art department consistently. Almost any important story with related facts and comparisons can be illustrated graphically. We use film animation on occasion. In other words, where there is a story that deserves telling and where there is no "hard" visual element, we look for ways to "produce" that story. If it's a crop estimate, skillful use of film material, such as fields of grains and elevators, with animated figures and comparisons, will leave our viewer with a concise, interesting and even entertaining understanding of that story. Properly done there is no better presentation.

On good stories considerably out of our coverage area, we occasionally order film direct from the area. Some of these we staff with our own people. In the past year, we have had men in Europe, New York, Washington, Las Vegas and numerous other cities in the western half of the country.

We try, and I think we have succeeded, in identifying our station with news. We like to feel that the two are synonymous. Our people are known personally by every news source in our immediate area. Two men are covering these sources every morning, afternoon and night, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

On a recent assignment, one of our photographers, who is also an airman, jumped from a 50-foot fire-drill tower to a net held by firemen below. He made the jump, on his own initiative, with the camera running. One of our men covered a plane crash at night a few weeks ago. It was raining and muddy in the wheat field. He lost both shoes, but waded around barefoot for over an hour in 40-degree temperature to get the story.

In the news business there is always a deadline, of course. But we try to cut ours as fine as possible. One time we demonstrated our speedy handling of publicity. We filmed the beginning of a 20-minute news program on stage, processed and edited the

film for presentation before the show was off the air. We try to have all our film processed within an hour of air time, but expect to handle several rush assignments a week.

There was a story in Dallas last year we followed closely. It involved a man accused of murder in Oklahoma. The film of the suspect's arrest was to arrive in Oklahoma City aboard a commercial plane at 5:30 p.m. The municipal airport is over 20 miles from our studios on the opposite side of town. We chartered a private plane from a private field a few miles from the station, met the airliner, flew it back, had the film in the processor five minutes before show time and on the air before the end of the news.

There are a number of challenges that confront and plague those of us in television journalism. Perhaps for want of a better term the industry has categorized some of these as "Freedoms of Information" problems. Some of the liberties granted other news media but unavailable to television news are lacking because of outright reactionaryism.

#### WKY-TV's Method: Education

There are various methods of attacking these problems. Some concentrate attack upon the institutions and their guardians responsible. Others try surreptitiously to capture rights not yet recognized as theirs. Our method has been one of education.

Two years ago the news bureau was stirred by the feeling that television newsmen were not being allowed the opportunity to report public court proceedings. A murder trial presented itself at this time and we decided on this case as our maiden attempt to break precedent. Our presentation to the judge was that television news was being denied the free access of information; that the public was being deprived of the most accurate representation of news events possible—that secured by modern camera equipment.

We were fortunate to be involved with an open-minded, interested, intelligent and fair jurist. To the jurist this problem involves two constitutional concepts—freedom of speech and fair trial. We convinced this judge there would be no danger to a fair trial as the result of television coverage. Since it was the first attempt, we went to great lengths to maintain the dignity and decorum of the court as it is presently known. A specially constructed booth, entirely enclosed, was located in the rear of the courtroom, and a cameraman stationed inside.

We secured sound-on-film testimony, the verdict and sentencing from the booth.

It was an encouraging start. To the best of our knowledge, it was the first time such a district court proceeding had ever been covered by television news. [Editor's Note: Another chapter in tv coverage of courts was written last fortnight when KWTX-TV Waco, Tex., covered a murder trial live (B•T, Dec. 12).]

This was the beginning. Other judges were contacted and convinced. In these contacts we spare nothing to impress the jurists that we are aware of our responsibilities in

assuring a fair trial. We have never had to use the special booth again. But we always use an Auricon camera that makes no noise, and we never use lights. In over 60 court proceedings in the past year, we exposed approximately 12,000 feet of silent and sound film.

There was a much-publicized torture-robbery trial in Oklahoma last year. There were two trials—the first ended in a hung jury. On that first trial we exposed 1,350 feet of film. We hit it hard, but not sensationally. Following the trial, Clarence Mills, the presiding district judge, took note of our coverage and issued this statement:

"The constitution and laws, since our nation began, provide that the peoples' court shall at all times be open to the public, as a necessity of due process of law. Modern means of news coverage have made possible a more adequate extension of this great right. The courts must keep in step with such means. The coverage of this trial, a very important one for this city, county and state, has been accurately, carefully and considerately done by these fine, courteous newsmen. We are all indebted to them."

A few weeks ago two persons were killed within twenty-four hours at a dangerous intersection just outside Oklahoma City. We did a good feature on it. The next day all the signs conceivably necessary at the intersection were present.

A constable with a criminal charge pending against him defeated an opponent in a primary election last summer. We concentrated on the story. He was overwhelmingly defeated in the general election.

A few motorists told us of some loosened spikes at a railroad crossing, causing a hazard to automobile tires. We ran a story, and the railroad crew was out the next morning.

A woman was burned out of her home two days before Christmas last year. We filmed the event and stated simply that for any who cared to contribute to a happy holiday for this woman and her family, we would handle the arrangements. It was a happy Christmas.

Weather is an adjunct of our news bureau. WKY-TV a few years ago led the way in getting the weather bureau to publicize specific tornado warnings. Tornado warnings take precedence with us. They are aired immediately and frequently. News and weathermen are required on duty during the extent of an alert.

Last spring a tornado struck Blackwell, Okla.—taking 22 lives and devastating 30 city blocks. Blackwell got its only warning from television and radio. The same tornado struck Udall, Kan.—a community of some 1,500. In Udall, where there was no warning, there was comparable damage, but *three times as many fatalities*.

Perhaps some of us in this business helped save some lives. Things like these, that make up the television news business, make work, and life, a little more worthwhile. And of one thing I am convinced. An aggressive, competent news establishment can make a television station individually outstanding.