



'Hot Line' for Hot News

WHEN an excavation wall collapsed on a construction crew in Little Rock, Arkansas, recently, NBC reporter Jim Harper was on the telephone to station KARK in Little Rock within minutes after the first bulletin. He talked to KARK reporter Les Bolton, who had just returned from the scene of the accident, and got from him a clear and detailed account of it. Harper had the phone call recorded on tape and quickly edited. Then he switched on the NBC "hot-box", which connected him immediately with affiliated stations all over the country. For two minutes he "talked up" the story — summarizing it as he counted off the seconds before the tape would run, giving the stations time to decide whether to put it directly on the air or record it for later broadcast. When the two minutes were up, the spot was fed out, bringing NBC affiliates the first eye-witness account of the accident and the first accurate report of the casualties.

This and other news beats in recent weeks are the direct result of NBC Radio's new "hot line" system which enables NBC to service its stations across the country on news breaks, even when they are not in network program time. The scope of the service is seen in the three main categories of "hot line" news — the "spot report," which involves news important enough to break into regular programming and is used several times a day; the "bulletin report," which covers the kind of major news break that might occur only half a dozen times a year; and the "emergency alert," which would be used only in case of enemy attack or a disaster of equal magnitude.

News as it Breaks

With the "hot line," the first such service ever attempted by a radio network, NBC News can contact the stations instantly and bring them the news as it is breaking. The service, in effect, gives each of the affiliates a world-wide news-gathering organization staffed by expert reporters and commentators. For their part, the affiliates often cover news stories in their own areas for the entire network.

Since the service began, in mid-January, NBC newsmen have scored a whole series of exclusives. Bryson Rash, for example, had the first story on Dr. Paul Dudley White's examination of President Eisenhower.



Chet Huntley (left) and David Brinkley, two of the brightest stars of the NBC radio and TV news team.

Welles Hangen was hours ahead of other reporters with an account of Egyptian Army units rioting in the streets of Cairo. In addition, NBC commentators have drawn on their years of experience for background and interpretive pieces.

The "hot line" provides two other services. It brings the stations the actual voices of top people in the news, whether President Eisenhower at his press conferences or Prince Rainier announcing the birth of a daughter. These are edited down to three or four-minute segments which are "hot lined" to the stations for use either on a "live" basis or in regular newscasts. In addition, the "hot line" is used for interviews with NBC correspondents like Irving R. Levine when he returned from a long tour of duty in Moscow, and Pat Trese arriving back in the United States from his trip to the Antarctic.

The NBC affiliates have been quick to pitch in with suggestions for pickups and with solid reporting when asked to cover spot news. Among the outstanding jobs of radio reporting were those turned in by KDYL in Salt Lake City on the riot at the Utah State Prison;



NBC's Radio Central is one of the points of origin for "hot line" news broadcasts.

WSAZ in Huntington and WIKE in Pikeville, Kentucky, covering the recent floods; and WSB in Atlanta with a report on the Georgia State Senate declaring the 14th and 15th Amendments unconstitutional.

A few excerpts from the "hot line" log of a single day indicate the flexibility and speed of the service:

9:07 A.M. — Spot report by Ed Newman, London: Duncan Sandys reports to British Cabinet on United States defense mission.

9:41 A.M. — Spot report by Welles Hangen, Cairo: exclusive on Egyptian officials' concern over situation inside Gaza.

1:53 P.M. — Spot report by Bob Schumacher, WBRE, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: colorful on-the-scene story of fire in one of the city's largest churches. The story was on the air even before it appeared on the wires of two of the press services.

5:45 P.M. — Spot report by Lee Nichols, Los Angeles: major gas explosion.

6:07 P.M. — Special service "feed" from Washington on Secretary Dulles' press conference with tape excerpts of the Secretary's remarks.

The "hot line" is one of two major innovations designed to strengthen network radio news. The other is the five-minute, on-the-hour newscast which NBC now provides for the stations seventeen hours a day, Mondays through Fridays.

Altogether, the NBC News Department now broadcasts over twenty hours of regularly scheduled network

radio and television news programs per week, according to William R. McAndrew, Director of News.

Five years ago, there were nine Monday-through-Friday network radio news shows per day, seven on Saturday and six on Sunday. On the present schedule, there are twenty-four radio network news shows per day Mondays through Fridays, seventeen on Saturday and sixteen on Sunday. In combined radio and television network time devoted to news, NBC now broadcasts three-and-a-half hours more scheduled network news than it did five years ago. This does not include specials and the "hot line" service.

To provide NBC radio and television audiences with the most comprehensive coverage possible, NBC News employs more than 300 reporters, cameramen, commentators, and writers, and hundreds of top news "stringers" around the globe.

Between 20,000 and 30,000 feet of news film a week is sent into NBC News headquarters in New York. There it is processed, screened and edited for use on network and local television shows. NBC started its own TV news film operation in 1944, ten years before its competitors.

Permanent foreign bureaus are maintained in London, Paris, Rome, Beirut, Bonn, Berlin, Cairo, Tokyo and Hong Kong. The coverage provided by these wide-ranging correspondents is supplemented by stringers and reciprocal agreements with foreign newsreel concerns. In the United States, NBC News has national bureaus in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas and Atlanta. The trained news staffs of NBC affiliated stations provide thorough coverage on the local level.