

NBC Reporters Cover the War



CONTROL ROOM ENGINEERS (FOREGROUND) PUT NBC NEWS COMMENTATORS ON THE AIR AT RADIO CITY.



By Clarence L. Menser

*Vice President in Charge of Programs,
National Broadcasting Company*

WHEREVER MEN FIGHT in this vast global war—on land, on sea and in the air—there NBC reporters are on the job.

Never before in the history of man has a nation at war been so quickly informed of the cataclysmic fortunes of battle, thanks to the bravery, the daring and the intelligence of these NBC men.

These men have taken NBC listeners into the flame and fire of battle. They have ranged the world from Russia to Africa, from Iceland to Egypt, from Java to Norway to bring their listeners the story of the war as it unfolded from battle to battle.

NBC listeners still remember the first warnings of the war to come in the Pacific in the regular broadcasts from Dick Tennelly in Tokyo. It was NBC's

Martin Agronsky who brought them realistic reports of complacency and unpreparedness in Singapore, who fled before the Japs to Java and then to Australia. Few NBC listeners can forget the eyewitness report of the bombing of Manila by Bert Silen, Don Bell and Ted Wallace. And what NBC listener did not thrill to John MacVane's thrilling report of his participation in the recent raid by the Commandos and Rangers on Dieppe?

These are only a few of the more recent feats of a staff of forty reporters who have made the transmission of war news simultaneously with its occurrence.

The work of these men is a far cry from even the recent late 1930's when short-wave reporting was comprised chiefly of occasional addresses by various of the world's statesmen. Since then, wherever the crimson tide of war has spread, there NBC reporters were on the job.

The National Broadcasting Company began assembling its world-wide staff of reporters in the disturbed days before Munich. There was as yet no war but war was in the air. The first NBC reporters brought to their American listeners the day-by-day political and diplomatic maneuverings which were to end in war. As far as censorship permitted, they reported to American listeners the ominous rantings of Hitler and Mussolini. Because of their



IN TIME OF WAR, THE COPY DESK IN THE NEWS ROOM, RADIO CITY, NEW YORK, IS A SCENE OF MUCH ACTIVITY. LATEST NEWS REPORTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE RECEIVED HERE AND PREPARED FOR BROADCASTING.

work, American listeners were fully and realistically informed of the tragedy that impended.

As the war clouds gathered over Europe in 1939, NBC already had in operation bureaus in London, England, and Basle, Switzerland. From London, Fred Bate covered the British Isles. From Basle, Max Jordan covered continental Europe.

Jordan was directed to establish European-wide radio coverage for NBC as war became all but a foregone conclusion. There were in those days no tried and experienced radio reporters. Jordan began assembling a staff in the European capitals. He began from scratch. He taught his men how to talk into a microphone; when to talk; how to arrange broadcast facilities, and how to establish impregnable lines of communication. Meanwhile, he commuted by air between all the major cities of Europe, covering the news himself.

NBC's first major test was the Munich crisis in September of 1938. On the night of the signing of the Munich pact, September 29, 1938, Jordan scored one of his greatest NBC scoops. Over NBC facilities, he was the first to broadcast to America the full text of the now infamous Munich agree-

ment. He was a full hour ahead of his rivals.

In the days following Munich, Bate and Jordan worked night and day to establish a competent and comprehensive news staff to cover the holocaust that was to follow. The NBC bureaus in London and Basle were considerably



RICHARD TENNELLY



MARTIN AGRONSKY



JOHN MCVANE



PAUL ARCHINARD



ROBERT MAGIDOFF



JIM WAHL



SIDNEY ALBRIGHT



HARRISON FORMAN



UPTON CLOSE

enlarged. New bureaus were opened in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Ankara, Stockholm, Warsaw, Madrid and in the Balkans.

From these reporters, American listeners received an almost day-by-day report of Europe's march to war. NBC men flashed to the United States the first news of Hitler's march into Poland, September 1, 1939. Two days later, they flashed the news of the British and French declarations of war on Germany and Italy.

As the war burst into new fury with Hitler's conquest of Poland, NBC established schedules for European broadcasts. There were regular reports from London, Berlin, Paris and other cities.

NBC reporters brought their listeners a Christmas broadcast from a fortress deep within the Maginot line; also one from Hitler's Siegfried line. They gave their listeners the first sound of British airplanes taking off to meet Nazi airmen in battle.

Listeners to a broadcast by Paul Archinard, then in Paris, were startled

by the sound of an air raid warning. Archinard's regular broadcast from Paris was suddenly halted when the siren shrieked its warning. Archinard and the technicians hurriedly left the studio but the microphone was still "live." American listeners to NBC heard the eerie wail of the Paris air raid sirens.

What is probably radio's biggest news scoop, the scuttling of the German pocket battleship, the Graf Spee, was another NBC feat.

No sooner had a British cruiser squadron driven the Graf Spee into Montevideo Harbor than NBC's Jimmy Bowen was on the job. Bowen set up his microphone on the Montevideo waterfront. He broadcast several eye-witness descriptions of the Graf Spee's arrival. Then he stood by to bring his listeners a report of what was to transpire as the hour for the Graf Spee's departure under International Law arrived.

Bowen had just finished a dramatic on-the-spot account from the harbor and signed off as NBC continued its regularly scheduled broadcasting from New York. But, by what is known as a "cue channel," an open radio telephone circuit, contact was maintained between the New York news room and Bowen's position overlooking Montevideo Harbor.

A few minutes passed and then Bowen screamed over the "cue channel":

"Give me the air again! The Graf Spee has blown up! It is being scuttled."

In a matter of seconds, Bowen was on the air again to give American listeners the dramatic story of the scuttling of the Graf Spee in the harbor.

NBC scored another major scoop in the Spring of 1940, but unfortunately it could not be broadcast. Through his own sources of information, Jordan learned that Hitler planned to invade Denmark and Norway. But he couldn't publicly reveal his information.

So, he dispatched a routine radiogram to NBC in New York, announce-

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PETER BRENNAN



BJORN BJORNSON



CHARLES LARIUS



ROBERT ST. JOHN



DAVID M. ANDERSON



GRANT PASS



JOHN VANDERCOOK

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ing that he was going to Denmark to look for a story. No dullards, the New York news staff at once interpreted Jordan's cable as the tip-off of the forthcoming invasion. NBC reporters were quickly dispatched to the danger spots. The invasion came within a few days, just as Jordan had predicted. And our reporters were on the job in Norway and Sweden.

When Hitler smashed into Holland, Belgium and France, NBC's reporters covered the invasion from all fronts. They brought American listeners one of the last broadcasts out of Holland. They continued broadcasting from Paris until the Nazi troops took over. Helen Hiatt left the French capitol literally only a few yards ahead of the advancing Nazis.

With the fall of France, NBC expanded its news staff throughout the

Balkans. Martin Agronsky, the doughty Rutgers University graduate, who did his first broadcast for NBC in 1939 from Geneva, was sent to Belgrade and then to Ankara. Reporters were stationed in Bucharest, Budapest and Athens to cover the Balkan war.

At Ankara, Agronsky made radio broadcasting history. There, in virtually the last remaining neutral capital in eastern Europe, Agronsky found himself in a strangely advantageous position to gather news of all the belligerents. He could attend functions where Axis and Allied diplomats still rubbed shoulders. Agronsky's broadcasts were packed with so many daily scoops that they became "must" listening for American newspapermen and diplomats.

As exciting a reportorial life as Agronsky had at Ankara, it was dull compared to what he was later to encounter in Hong Kong, Singapore, Java and Manila. Agronsky was never a man to pull a punch. He may have angered some but he was later proved correct in his assertions that easy-going life in Singapore was not enough to stop the Japs. One of his broadcasts reporting that American warships in the Far East were using ammunition that had deteriorated through age aroused Congressional repercussions but resulted in an official acknowledgment of the accuracy of his statements.

When Hitler struck at Russia, NBC already was on the job. Robert Magidoff was in Moscow to bring American listeners the official Soviet reports of the progress of the war. When Moscow was threatened in the winter of 1941, Magidoff went to Kuibyshev with the official Russian government entourage. NBC in New York had meanwhile perfected arrangements through RCA Communications to bring Magidoff's voice to the United States either across the Atlantic or Pacific, by whichever route atmospheric conditions were better.

Magidoff is in the NBC tradition—he's no arm chair reporter. He has visited the Russian fighting fronts and seen for himself what goes on. He has brought American listeners the first reports of the prowess of American arms in the hands of Russian fighters. He is

frequently quoted by Red Star and other official Soviet publications, a tribute to his accurate reporting.

Incidentally, it was Magidoff who initiated the negotiations by which NBC obtained the Western Hemisphere rights for the first performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony by Maestro Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

As Hitler drove deeper into Russia and negotiations between the United States and Japan neared the breaking point, NBC eyes were turned to the Pacific. Late last fall, reporters were hurriedly dispatched to outposts in Java and Batavia to supplement the staffs in Chungking, Tokyo, Manila, Honolulu and Hong Kong.

Reporters Mobilized

Then came December 7.

Within seconds, NBC reporters at home and abroad, wherever stationed, were mobilized to report the latest developments, to analyze world reaction, and to report from the battlefronts.

Within an hour of the Jap attack on Pearl Harbor, we were receiving direct reports from Bert Silen and Don Bell in Manila and Jim Wahl and others at Honolulu. NBC men were rushed from Chicago, Denver and Hollywood to San Francisco to establish a fully-manned operating point for Pacific Seas operations. In the early morning of December 8, Army and Navy headquarters at Washington were manned by NBC reporters. A special 24-hour telephone circuit was established at Washington so that Army and Navy information could be got to the microphones within a matter of seconds after release.

On December 8, Silen made eight broadcasts from Manila, setting a pace which was followed until that hapless city fell to the Japs.

On December 9, Silen and Bell wrote another glorious chapter in the history of NBC broadcasting with their eyewitness description of the bombing of Manila. American listeners heard the crack of bombs and the rattle of anti-aircraft fire as Silen and Bell, assisted by Wallace, stayed on the spot to describe what their eyes saw.

These men stuck to the last, spurning chances for evacuation. Bell was reported bayoneted to death by the Japs by the late Melville Jacoby of Life magazine, himself a former NBC reporter. Silen is a prisoner of the Japs in Manila. And Wallace was last heard from retreating to the hills beyond the city with American troops.

A letter which Silen wrote to NBC in New York last November tells the story of this NBC man's devotion to his duty better than anything anyone else could write.

"Arrangements completed," he assured NBC. "I can broadcast at any time, even during actual bombing, unless main power supply is destroyed. Will use special bomb-proof broadcast site. Have made arrangements for anti-aircraft guns to protect our position."

On that fateful day of December 7, NBC reporters all over the world reported to America. Wahl and Loren Thurston were heard from Honolulu. Then followed Sidney Albright from Batavia, John Young from Singapore, Harrison Forman from Hong Kong and Ed Mackay from Shanghai. Mel Jacoby spoke from Chungking. Dick Temnelly in Tokyo had already been interned. He has since arrived in this country. But Mackay is still interned in Shanghai at last reports.

Scoop on Dieppe

NBC's newest scoop was the raid on Dieppe. Five days before the raid Robert St. John in London notified the NBC news room in New York not to expect any reports from MacVane until further notification. The reason was apparent when the radiogram came that MacVane had arrived at an unidentified British port and was ready to report on Dieppe. The report of the Dieppe foray by MacVane was heard on NBC and repeated on the Blue Network. MacVane was the only American radio reporter to accompany the Commandos and Rangers.

NBC reporters have done a magnificent job but there's a bigger one ahead. That job is to report the remaining days of the war without bias, without prejudice, without fear and without favor.

And when the war is finished, there's the peace to be won.

Niles Trammell, President of the National Broadcasting Company, has already envisaged the possibilities of reporting the peace by radio. Mr. Trammell believes NBC microphones should be at hand to report the negotiations from day to day to the American people. In such a way, he believes, lies assurance for a free peace, written by free people, for a free world.

The radio of the future will be even more world-wide in scope. Our coverage of the news internationally will be intensified and only the limits of the globe will bound the peregrinations of our reporters.

New Ideas Come out of the Blue

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our schedule. Raymond Gram Swing, the distinguished news analyst, was added to our group of newsmen, and with such noteworthy commentators as Dorothy Thompson, Walter Winchell, Drew Pearson and Earl Godwin we are in a position to offer our listeners the best in this type of informative broadcast.

At the time of our separation from NBC, 116 stations were affiliated with the Blue Network. Since then, 18 new stations have joined the Blue and 5 have been lost to other networks. We haven't many 50,000 watters, but those we have are located in the places where they are really needed and where they fully justify their cost. The Blue gives a primary coverage of 47 out of 50 leading markets, and serves a total of more than 21,000,000 radio families across the nation, approximately 71 per cent of the radio homes in America.

Since the first of the year, the Blue has added 23 advertisers to its list of sponsors, more than any other network. Outstanding in interest to the advertising business, in addition to the Blue's signing of the first seven-day-a-week sponsored program on record, was the largest time sale in point of hours-per-week to any individual sponsor.

NBC Program Ratings Climb

CROSSLEY RATINGS for NBC programs, in the first seven months of this year, show a material increase over the corresponding 1941 period. Total ratings of all NBC programs are 6.8 per cent better than last year, while the average NBC program rating has gone up from 13.7 to 14.9, a gain of 8.8 per cent.

Blue Gets Legion Award

THE BLUE NETWORK on September 21 received the American Legion Auxiliary's seventh consecutive Radio Award as the network which has made "the greatest overall contribution to our war effort."

The award, an engraved plaque, was presented to E. R. Borroff, vice president in charge of the BLUE's Central Division, by Mrs. Eben P. Keen, chairman of the Auxiliary's National Radio Committee, at the Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City.

Each of the four national networks competed for the award by submitting the names of radio series, consisting of four or more programs, which would tend to "awaken the complacent, inspire confidence and increase production for the war effort."

RCAC in Bermuda Circuit

DIRECT RADIO TELEGRAPH SERVICE between the United States and Bermuda, one of the key Atlantic outposts of the nation's armed forces, was inaugurated August 10 by RCA Communications, Inc.

The new radio message circuit linking New York and Hamilton is operated at this end by RCA Communications and in Bermuda by Cable and Wireless, Ltd., which also is RCA Communications' correspondent in Great Britain and in a number of other foreign lands.

Operation of the circuit greatly facilitates the handling of message traffic between the two points. In the past, telegraph service with Bermuda was operated by wire and cable via Canada.