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THE GUY NOBODY HATES

BY JIM MARSHALL

PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S
 BY GEORGE DE ZAYAS



The story of an ex-reporter who made \$200,000 a year as a movie producer and who now chucks it all to go back to reporting—this time as a war correspondent

YOU can get fever out of your blood, and out of your blood you can get bricklaying or tree surgery. But printer's ink you get into your blood and it stays there. The ink that got into Mark Hellinger's blood during his years as a reporter, columnist, short-story writer and playwright has just yanked him away from a nice, luxurious job as a motion-picture producer at around \$200,000 a year and sent him back to his first love. He's out reporting the war under a steel helmet and over a portable typewriter.

Once a reporter... A few days before he went back to his first love, Mr. Hellinger was wandering about the set of *Doughgirls*, his last production job for Warners', calling everybody "Pappy" and "Darling," and being kidded because all his pals thought *Doughgirls* was frivolous for one of Mr. Hellinger's robust character.

The job was, in reality, no cinch, being worked at by the Misses Ann Sheridan, Jane Wyman and Alexis Smith, three young women of extraordinary vitality. The life forces of these three were being directed into artistic channels by Mr. Hellinger and his young director, James V. Kern, an ex-Yacht Club Boy making his first picture, and they had their hands full.

They had the advice of grips, light men, assistant directors, publicity men, script girls and a number of people whose education had not gone far enough to enable them to read "No Visitors" signs. The opinion of all these people was solicited by Mr. Hellinger (dapper in a dark suit, gray shirt, white tie, slouch hat and sunglasses) and compared with that given him previously by John the studio boot-black, two waitresses and a gas-station attendant.

"They," explained Mr. Hellinger, "are the people who pay money to look at movies."

The system, after all, is only a carry-over from his newspaper days, when Mark used to nose around Broadway and its cross streets, finding out what sort of Broadway news people wanted to read, and then writing it for them. He started doing this more than twenty years ago, when he became the first Broadway reporter. He was the son of a New York lawyer, and after floundering around three years at high school, he got a job as a waiter in the old Greenwich Village Red-head. Those were the dry days when cops strolled around with pints of hooch under their coats. As a waiter, Mark came to know the grim night world of Manhattan and he felt impelled to start writing about it.

His first scribbling job was on *Zit's*, a theatrical weekly. He became adept at ferreting out a three-line paragraph somewhere else and boiling it down to a full column. This skill stood him in good stead later, when he was turning out

whole pages of newspaper copy and trying to fill a ten-inch space with a one-inch idea.

About this time, the *Daily News* was getting under way, and the late Ph Payne was managing editor. Mr. Payne decided to cover Broadway as a news beat and picked Hellinger to do it.

Mark began to write the news of Broadway on a very simple system: Eve woman who walked past the New Amsterdam Theater was an ex-Follies girl; eve man who passed the Palace was a form star comedian. When any of these characters cascaded out of a hotel window, arrested for anything or otherwise did a act worthy of Mr. Hellinger's typewriter he or she was at once rubber-stamped one or the other. In one banner year, ex-Follies girls committed suicide in g filled rooms around Times Square, and others were found drowned in the Central Park lake. Life was very beautiful everyone.

Refugees from up the River

As the years rolled on, Mark started writing musical comedies and gathered an acquaintance among the top gangs of the day. He shot square and wasn't the make for side money, and various gangs began to use him as a mediator their territorial quarrels. When, occasionally, gangsters got caught and up the river, it was usually to Mark turned first when they got out—for an and cash—and he was extremely generous with both.

This sort of thing went on for six years until, in 1930, he quit the *News* and with Hearst on the *Mirror*. He was there almost a decade, grinding out millions of words. At one time he was running a daily column, writing plays, appearing once in a while in vaudeville, and putting out a complete Sunday page that included jokes, a short story and Hellinger's thoughts about books, politics and movies, plus a sports manual that predicted the outcome of fights, horse races, boxing matches



Mr. and Mrs. Mark Hellinger chat in the library of their Hollywood home before the movie producer leaves for the South Pacific as a war correspondent. Mr. H. calls everyone "Pappy" except Mrs. H.

Strictly speaking, Mark cannot be said to make money, although considerable bales of it flow past him all the time. He is seldom more than a few thousand ahead of the game, spending and giving away most of what Morgenthau lets him keep.

In the old Broadway days, Mark and Gladys used to eat at Dinty Moore's mainly, and between Dinty's and Times Square they walked nightly through a lane of expectant bums, to whom Mr. Hellinger slid two-spots, deftly disguising the deal in a handshake—lest the open conferring of largess injure the bum's feelings. Mrs. Hellinger, a generous soul herself, occasionally doubted the pressing need of some of the panhandlers but contented herself with the remembrance that two-dollar bills are powerful bad luck, and maybe it was better to be rid of them.

Mark is probably the only person of note in Hollywood whom nobody hates. This is not because he hands out two-dollar bills, but because he is a friendly, laughing guy who, at will, can bring out the gypsy in your grandmother.

He is scared of death of radio because of a tendency first to freeze up and then, when the pressure gets too high, to blurt out his innermost feelings, usually uncomplimentary, to everyone connected with the show, including the sponsor.

A Synthetic Hymn of Hate

His only ostentations are an aversion to white shirts and a retention of his New York license plate—MH-1. He is a bit proud of the fact that he started the first newspaper fake feud. This is a device by which two columnists on different papers apparently get good and sore at each other in print, thus drumming up trade by arousing reader curiosity to learn what repulsive aspects of their respective lives will be disclosed next.

Mr. Hellinger's play spat was with Mr. Paul Gallico. Readers took it so seriously that the boys almost wrote themselves into a public slugging match at Madison Square Garden. Since then, there have been other feuds, just as phony.

Mark probably works harder than any other producer in the business. He's down early and home late. He spends a lot of time on sets, chases along to locations to live and work with his players and gives the impression of getting a kick out of the whole thing—which he does.

He's more interested in the story than the actors, figuring a good story may make a star, but that a star can't make a bad story good. He didn't, for example, discover Ann Sheridan or Ida Lupino, but the stories he backed them with did a lot toward putting them up at the top.

Well . . . you can get fever out of your blood, and out of your blood you can get tree surgery and bricklaying, but making movies you get into your blood and it stays there, like printer's ink. After the Big Show is over, Mark is coming back to Hollywood—back to the office with the pictures on the walls and the story of the Broadway butterfly; back to Darling and Pappy and the shoeshine man and the rest; back to \$200,000 a year and broke half the time.

Once a producer . . .

★★★

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*F*or Growing Satisfaction. Three rows to go...pulling up weeds and tying up tomatoes. Time out to uncap a bottle of zest—cool, sparkling, delicious Canada Dry Ginger Ale. There's flavor satisfaction, buoyant refreshment in every glassful—pep to finish the job of digging and hoeing for Victory—it's invigorating!

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CANADA DRY "THE CHAMPAGNE OF GINGER ALES"

Mr. Davis Replies

Washington, D. C.

TO THE Editor of Collier's: Mr. Davenport's article on the Office of War Information in your June 3d issue contains a number of misleading statements which should be corrected in the public interest. I am sorry that in his lengthy discussion of things, most of which we don't do, Mr. Davenport could not find space to tell his readers what we were established to do, and are actually doing.

This is, at home, the furnishing of government information to the press, radio, magazines and motion pictures; and the organization and co-ordination of government information campaigns about what the home front is asked to do or to refrain from doing in order to win the war. Overseas our job is the providing of information about the American war effort to friends and neutrals, and the conduct of psychological war against our enemies. Mr. Davenport's statement that I have scores of bosses may be taken too literally by readers who do not realize that he meant would-be bosses. Actually our Overseas Branch is responsible to the State Department and, in theaters of military operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Secretary of State wrote me on April 19th:

"It is a pleasure to thank you for the valuable assistance which you and your collaborators in the Office of War Information have given the Department of State in recent months in paralleling closely in the field of propaganda the policies of the government in the political field.

"I have particularly in mind the close collaboration of your office with this department in respect of several delicate and important international relationships

which have required the most carefully integrated teamwork of the political and propaganda, not to mention the military, arms. I have found that I could count on the support of your office both in Washington and through your outposts in the far-flung corners of the earth. I look forward to continuation of this co-operation to the end that together we can meet the efforts of the enemy to divide us from our associates in the war, to inflame the neutrals against us and thwart our effort to maintain the good name of the United States among other peoples of the world."

The Chief of Staff of the United States Army wrote me, after the conquest of Sicily: "I desire to express my appreciation to the members of your organization for their excellent work in the field of psychological warfare during the Sicilian campaign." And later he added that "the efficiency with which the personnel of the Office of War Information co-operated with the War Department in connection with the operation in North Africa contributed toward its success, and is deeply appreciated."

These are the actual, not the would-be, bosses of our Overseas Branch. I believe your readers would rather take the word of Secretary Hull and General Marshall that we are doing a good job than that of the critics cited by Mr. Davenport.

As for the specific inaccuracies in the article, the most serious are:

1. At the end of the article Mr. Davenport cites what is ostensibly a typical instance of the operations of our Overseas Branch. "A proud piece, written with a view to placating the Arabs, has to be killed. The British have sent word that the piece is dangerous, must be withdrawn."

If this were true, whether literally or typically, neither I nor my colleagues would be fit to be officials of the government of the United States. It is not true. We do not take orders from the British or any other foreign government. Our Overseas Branch operates, as I have said, under the jurisdiction of the State Department, or, in theaters of war, of the Joint (United States) Chiefs of Staff. Within the limits of the policies which they lay down, we endeavor to harmonize our propaganda to enemy and occupied countries with that of our allies; but we make our propaganda policies or modify them under no instructions except those of American diplomatic or military authorities.

2. Mr. Davenport says that Robert E. Sherwood, director of our Overseas Branch, "believes that Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal are fundamental, that they cannot be separated from news and propaganda. To him, Mr. Roosevelt is America, and his policies are the formula for the postwar world."

This is not only untrue, but a very grave misrepresentation of Mr. Sherwood. In a hearing before the House Appropriations Committee in May, 1943, Mr. Sherwood made the following statement of OWI policies in dealing with election news, which is a matter of public record: "In handling the Presidential campaign in foreign propaganda, every attempt should be made to build up both candidates, with absolute impartiality, because one or the other of them will become the President of the United States, and it will then be our duty to convince the world of his good faith, his statesmanship, and his wisdom in the handling of all the manifold problems of the war and beyond the war."

This policy formulated by Mr. Sherwood with my full approval has been, is, and will continue to be the policy of the Office of War Information.

3. Mr. Davenport, in discussing documentary films about American life which we distribute abroad, says that "grudgingly, OWI officials admit that they might be New Deal propaganda." Passing up the question as to what end would be served by New Deal propaganda to foreign audiences who do not vote in American elections, I might say that I do not know what OWI official made this admission, but I certainly would not make it. Foreigners are more interested in the United States as it is today than as it was twelve or fifteen years ago, for the same reason that newspaper readers are more interested in today's news than in yesterday's news. If Mr. Davenport has seen any of our pictures that contain New Deal propaganda, he has seen one that escaped my notice.

4. As Mr. Davenport reports, we sent to Africa in 1942 some lapel clips with President Roosevelt's picture on one side and the American flag on the other, and inscriptions in Arabic identifying these pictures for the native populations. Mr. Davenport quotes one of our critics as saying that the soldiers don't want them but the Arabs do, and adds that "Mr. Davis is caught at a disadvantage."

I do not see why. The lapel clips were sent to the Arabs, not to the soldiers, few of whom read Arabic and all of whom may be presumed to know what the Presi-

dent and the American flag look like.

5. Regarding our Handbook of the United States of America, distributed to our outposts abroad as a reference work for their own use and for foreign officials and newspapermen, Mr. Davenport says that it "is being sold for two dollars by a private British publisher with the consent of OWI." So it is, but for clarity, it might have added that this sale is only in England, to a general public which we did not try to reach; and that the publisher could have gone ahead without our consent, since publications of the United States government are not copyrighted.

6. Mr. Davenport says our critics say that, compared to OWI, "the British Ministry of Information is a sparrow chirp, and Doctor Goebbels is just a trifling little one-lung liar. Mr. Davis stoutly denies this." The issue is not merely one of veracity between me and unnamed critics. British activities comparable to those of OWI are conducted by three agencies—the Ministry of Information, the Political Warfare Executive, and the European Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation. As the Political Warfare Executive budget is secret I cannot tell you exactly how much they all spend, but it is certainly more than we have available. As for Doctor Goebbels' activities, their cost is even harder to get at; but the lowest estimate I have even seen is \$220,000,000. The latest computation, by the London Economist, puts it at \$540,000,000. OWI is spending this year, at home and abroad, \$37,000,000.

7. Mr. Davenport speaks as if discussion of our domestic pamphlet, Negroes and the War, were a current issue. It was a lively one a year ago; but, conforming to act of Congress, we have distributed no copies of this or any other publication in this country since July 1, 1943.

8. Mr. Davenport speaks of our "overseas ballyhoo," and says that "much of it is straight evangelism, shy of facts but long on emotion." A Republican member of Congress who inspected an entire day's output of our New York Radio Bureau complained, on the other hand, that there was nothing in it but straight news—no propaganda. Our critics agree that we are wrong, but I wish they might come a little closer to agreement as to which way we are wrong.

9. Mr. Davenport is worried because we took him to see what he describes as "a completely superfluous Russian propaganda movie," and says that before he finished looking at it, he "began to suspect that OWI is completely out of hand."

I am sorry that our attempt to give him a little relaxation after a hard day's work went so sour; but I am compelled to point out that this Russian movie, whether superfluous or not, was no production of ours. It was produced by the Russian government film agency and sent over here in the hope that it might be distributed by the normal private channels of the American motion-picture industry. We happened to have a copy in our office and showed it to a few guests; but if it proves that something is out of hand, it is out of hand in Russia, not here. However, I am grateful to Mr. Davenport for providing so admirable an illustration of his own statement that "no matter what happens, someone is sure to blame it on OWI."

Very truly yours,

Glenn Davis

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

