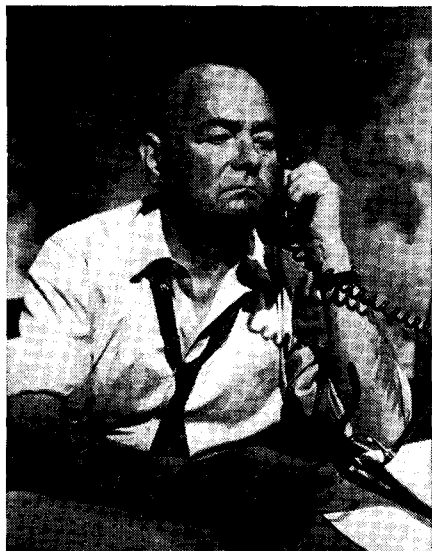


# Books in Communications



## The Common Touch



—From "The Day the Earth Caught Fire."

Arthur Christiansen — "Make the news exciting, even when it's dull."

ONE night during World War II, Nazi airmen dropped a land mine into Fleet Street by parachute. The mine, an ominous contraption of Storm Trooper proportions, came to a precarious rest in the telegraph wires just outside the *Daily Express* building. Because of the danger of vibration, the presses were stopped. The police advised that the building be evacuated. Inside, however, the editors and reporters preferred to deal with the crisis in their own way. They spent the night playing poker and drinking Scotch.

That was the only time during World War II that Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, the second largest newspaper in the English-speaking world, failed to reach all its readers. Under the editorship of a young journalistic wizard named Arthur Christiansen, it weathered the blitz, the loss of top editorial hands to the armed forces, and newsprint shortages—and through it all managed somehow to continue boosting readership at a dizzying clip. Not the least of its wartime distinctions was that the editor himself earned a position on Hitler's "death list," a roster of prominent Englishmen with whom Der Führer planned to settle personal scores when he invaded Britain. (More recently Christiansen has added another distinction to his record of achievements

by playing, of all people, the editor of the *Daily Express* in the movie "The Day the Earth Caught Fire," reviewed on page 35).

These and other times on the *Daily Express* are recalled by Christiansen in "Headlines All My Life" (Harper, \$4.95), a lively potpourri of reflection and anecdote that offers some surprising glimpses into the rowdy and romantic world of British journalism. The cast of characters, as colorful a lot as ever populated a city room, ranges from "the Beaver" himself to a vast swarm of reporters, each with his special crotchets and idiosyncracies. There was, for example, the film critic who, one day in 1935, was sent to Southampton to meet the *Aquitania* and its cargo of movie stars. Ten miles from port, however, the ship ran aground. At the *Daily Express* office, Christiansen, assuming the critic would hire a boat to get a firsthand report on the accident, awaited his dispatch. But when the critic got back to Fleet Street, he explained that he had been unable to interview the film stars and had therefore come home.\*

Christiansen's career as an editor began just after his sixteenth birthday, when he quit school and went to work for a weekly. In 1933, not yet thirty years old, he became editor of the *Daily Express*. By the time he retired from the post in 1957, he had doubled the paper's circulation (it stands at 4,200,000 today), created a new breed of journalism, and, through his special brand of editorial magic, made himself the highest-paid editor in Fleet Street.

While the names and places mentioned in "Headlines All My Life" are likely to be largely unfamiliar to American readers, the book as a whole is a valuable exposition of one man's attitude toward the craft of editing. Summing up, Christiansen writes: "That was the technique. Make the news exciting, even when it was dull. Make the news palatable by lavish presentation. Make the unreadable readable. Find the news behind the news. Find the news even before it has happened." And in one of the bulletins he wrote

\*A variation on the old yarn about the reporter who was sent to cover a wedding but returned empty-handed, explaining to his editor that there was no story because the church burned down.

every day for the *Daily Express* staff, he put his credo this way: "In the handling of every single story, whether it be high politics or broad humanity, we should never fail to have the *common touch*."

Christiansen's own prose, coming from an editor whose trade-mark was the kind of writing a man could read swiftly and easily while relaxing in a pub, is often curiously muted, his humor surprisingly underplayed. But at his best he has a deft touch with an anecdote, as when he tells of his boss, the forbidding Lord Beaverbrook, telephoning him one day after he had overslept and failed to arrive at the office until noon.

"What time do you get to your office in the morning?" Beaverbrook asked.

"It depends on what time I finish the previous night, sir," Christiansen replied.

"I did not ask you what time you finished. I want to know what time you come into your office in the morning."

"It depends on what time I finish. Sometimes it's 2 a.m., sometimes it's 3 a.m. . . ."

"I am not interested in what time you finish, only in what time you come in."

"Well, I must repeat that it depends on . . ."

At that point, Christiansen was cut short. "Give me a time," said Beaverbrook, "and I promise you that never, never, never will I call you before that time."

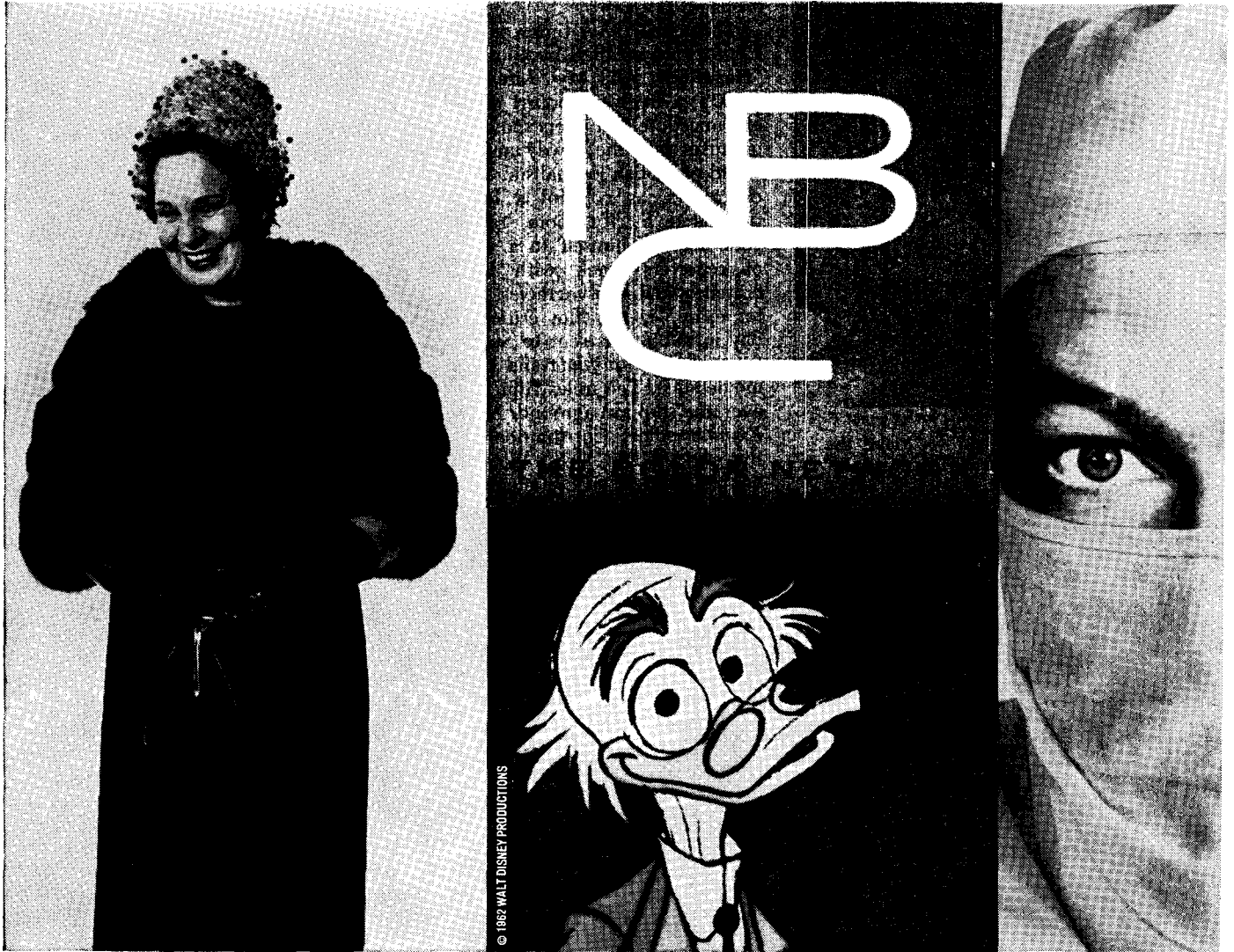
—J.F.F.

**MIXED MEMORIES:** Wherever parlor games are still played in our TV era, where good conversation hasn't already succumbed to the mechanical mass monsters, one surely successful conversation piece is: "If you could choose your own time on earth, what period of history would you have wished to live in?" And the answerers usually include a few nostalgic souls who think they would have been happiest between, say, 1890 and 1914. If these were not the good old days, they argue, then each man has to make his own definition.

Alan Valentine's "1913: America Between Two Worlds" (Macmillan, \$5) expresses the answer in somewhat different, if more realistic, terms. Similar in structure to Frederick Lewis Allen's fabulously successful "Only Yesterday," this new popular history gives us some startling clues why things are the way they are today. The diplomatic distractions of prewar America lived side by side with a few men who controlled large industry and were getting too high and mighty. Isolationism

(Continued on page 67)

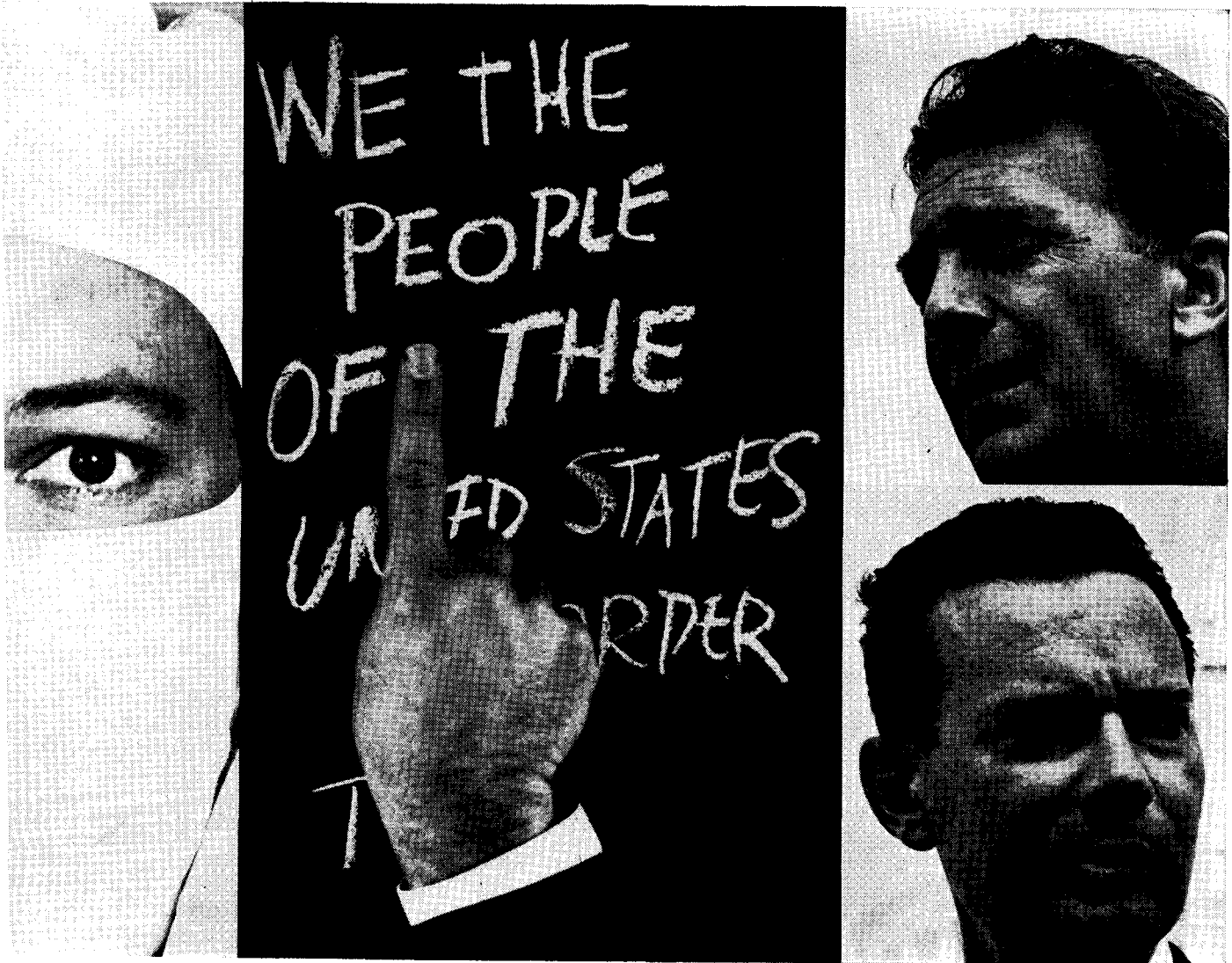
**A MAID NAMED HAZEL / A DUCK NAMED LUDWIG / A DOCTOR NAMED KILDARE / A COLLEGE COURSE**



**THIS IS NBC.**



**WHAT MAKES DEMOCRACY TICK / AND "GOODNIGHT DAVID" AND "GOODNIGHT CHET"**



**LARGEST SINGLE SOURCE OF NEWS, INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT IN THE FREE WORLD**

## How to Interview on TV

By RED BARBER

**W**ERE I to boil down thirty years' experience interviewing people in radio and TV to one word, I'd have to agree the Greeks have a word for it—*agape*—one of the most wonderful words man possesses. It means broadly "to have concern for."

Each of us does our work differently. Mine is a specialized field. I offer no criticisms; neither do I claim all the answers. I just wish to set down some notions I have, based upon a rather long experience.

There are two fundamentals: the philosophy, and the techniques. The first is singular, the second plural, and from the first the rest will follow. Experience brings the techniques.

Warren Giles, who was running the Cincinnati Reds in the late Thirties when I was broadcasting there, once said that if he were to select an announcer for just one game, he wasn't sure he'd pick me. But if he were to name a man for the entire season, he'd be certain I was the fellow. I've treasured his appraisal, for it sums up how I've tried to work. I've always considered my job to be a marathon rather than a sprint race.

This will be my ninth year at Yankee Stadium doing fifteen-minute TV interviews before each home game plus ten minutes afterwards. This means from three to five guests per day. Each Yankee player will be on several times a season, and last summer manager Ralph Houk was on six times. He rated it from every standpoint, for in addition to his ability and appearance, he was certainly the key spokesman for his ball club the first year he was the boss. Roger Maris simply booked himself again and again last September. The managers and the stars from the nine visiting teams were often repeat guests. In my field you're not doing one-shots. The climate must be so pleasant you can live with the entire league and, even more important, have the men wishing to do good shows, and wanting to be on again.

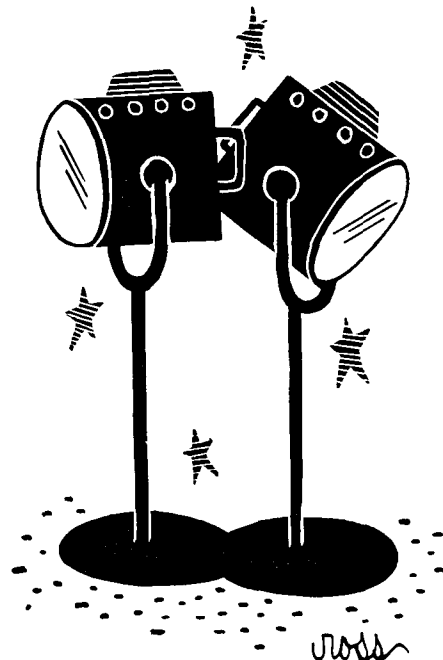
The word "guest" has by now become a key word. Every person who goes on with me is my guest. I appreciate his going on, that it takes something of his time, and very often gets in the way of his working routine.

Also, I well understand that the audience tunes in to see and hear the guests, not me. They want to see Howard and Skowron and Richardson, and hear what they say about their careers. They want Al Lopez to talk about his White Sox, Bob Scheffing about his Tigers. They want close-ups of Ted Williams, of Mickey Mantle, of Frank Lary. They want Whitey Ford and Louis Arroyo as a TV team. They want to hear from Roy Hamey why he has made thus-and-so a move for the Yankees. Paul Richards always speaks beautifully on any aspect of baseball. Jim Turner can provide a fascinating show on pitchers and on pitching. Yogi Berra has such humanity and humility. The fans in the bleachers bring forth the very pith of people. It was wonderful just to look at Casey Stengel, to say nothing of trying to follow his broken-field word-running.

**F**OR a variety of reasons, I want my guest to be at home. My medium is not his. It is up to me to put him, and to keep him, at ease. It is entirely my problem.

Jackie Farrell is my right hand at the Stadium. In the selection of guests for the dugout shows we meet two hours before the game to discuss whom we want for that day, never more ahead of time than that. Too many things happen overnight in this business. However, because of the physical requirements of TV, we do arrange days in advance such remote programs as going to the bleachers, to the press room, family day, etc.

Jackie always invites the guests, and for two reasons. First, he is very good at it; second, I think it is better for me not to make that early a contact. We don't want to make a production of it. I wander into the dugout ten to fifteen minutes before air time. The players are usually at work on the field. Should they come by, I merely say hello and how glad I am they are going to "prop me up" another time. They go their way. I rarely discuss with them what we are going to talk about. That is my problem. I've researched their careers, their home towns, what they've done recently. In fact, I am in the research business every day of the year, reading carefully the newspapers, *The Sporting News*, various magazines. I store these items



in my head against an interview months away. In time I get to know the established players well, and I make it my job to find out about the new men as soon as possible. The more leisurely tempo at spring training camp is invaluable for increasing background data.

The season begins. The show is on the air. Your first guest is standing to one side or sitting on the bench behind you. You sign on, identify who will be with you, and execute the opening commercial. Then comes your first brush with *agape*. It is what you are *not* going to ask your guest. What you *don't* ask is more important than what you *do*. Ask a loaded question, a touchy personal question, and your interview is in serious trouble. I certainly wouldn't relish being caught in front of a sound camera facing a topic that is my private business. Why should I think one of my guests would be happy in such a predicament, or that he'd wish ever to be on the show again? Further, ball players have the best grapevine in civilization.

**I** WANT the player or the manager or the coach to be himself. Should a player just have taken infield practice, I encourage him to keep his towel and rub the sweat away as the interview progresses. I like the players to hold something in their hands—caps, gloves, or, for pitchers, the ball itself. I don't want them to be conscious of the camera. I don't look at the camera, I look at them. Then they look back at me. A human being likes to stick his toe into water that isn't cold. I always start with a pleasantry. Maybe the guest was written up in a column that day. I either refer to it or, better still,