

Spot News

What Is a Special Events Broadcaster, and What Does He Do for His Pay? Here a Veteran Tells His Story

By Dave Driscoll

Of the Mutual Broadcasting System

THE year has presented more than the usual amount of spot-news broadcasting opportunities. In addition to the usual run-of-the-mill news broadcasts, this year has seen the following stories break broadcasting schedules into jig-saw puzzles—the Ohio and Mississippi river floods, the Coronation, the Hindenburg disaster and the first commercial transatlantic flight. Then, there was the amazing story of Edward, Duke of Windsor. Radio, in the closing weeks of 1936, covered the first chapter com-

She had flown through storms many times before. More than four hours later, at dinner, we dismissed her arrival and the subsequent storm, believing she was safely berthed at Lakehurst.

Suddenly the telephone in my apartment rang. The Hindenburg was on fire. In a few minutes G. W. Johnstone, head of the WOR Press Department, and Jerry Danzig, my associate, had dispatched a crew of engineers to the scene by motor car. Bill Maloney of the press department and I tried to fly direct to the Lakehurst field, but the Navy barred a landing and I was forced to drive the 80 miles from my home on



pletely and concluded it with the most dramatic broadcast ever heard.

Late in January the swirling waters of the muddy Ohio engulfed whole areas in the mightiest flood in American history. Never before had radio played a more heroic and important role in time of need. Stations in the stricken areas remained on the air as long as power held out, often feeding national networks dramatic stories of disaster.

In a total of six days I covered more than seven thousand miles of flooded area by air. We found it most practical to cover as much territory as possible by plane and then get back to Memphis and report our observations from the studios of WNER. There a small crew carried on valiantly.

There were times during these flights when my heart jumped up around my throat because our motor faltered as we swooped over a devastated area surrounded by miles of water, or because a mallard duck, encountered in flight, had slashed a hole in our wing with a sound like that of a wing breaking away.

A ROAR of motors overhead signaled the arrival of the Hindenburg over Manhattan. Because the great ship of the skies had been seldom seen over the city in daylight hours during its 1936 flights, we broadcast an announcement that the ship was visible over Staten Island and South Jersey. A few minutes later flashes of lightning danced off the Empire State Building tower as an electrical storm thundered over New York. No one thought of the Hindenburg at the time.

Long Island. Miles of roads were blocked in the area around Lakewood and Lakehurst. The curious were there by the thousands.

Unable to get near the field, at 10 o'clock we gathered a group of eye witnesses. A short time later we made our way to the field, set up short wave equipment. There followed a night of broadcasting, a night of watchful waiting at hospitals, that I shall never forget. I was not surprised when a picture taken close by the charred wreck showed my eyes popping out of my head.

THE round-trip transatlantic flight of Dick Merrill and Jack Lambie, the first commercial flight across that ocean, provided the most strenuous session of broadcasting since I have been on the air. It included three completely sleepless days and nights.

We were rewarded for our efforts because for the first time in the history of radio, listeners from coast to coast were privileged to hear the hourly reports of the fliers themselves as they winged their way across a stormy sea. To make it more interesting, this series of broadcasts was presented only by outwitting a rival network. The coverage of this flight was a throwback to the days of rough and ready newspaper reporting. That is why it was interesting and that is why Special Features to me is the most interesting job in radio.

It is rapidly becoming one of the most important phases of the industry and with the development of short wave and television it knows no barriers.



The life of a spot-news man: During a varied year Dave Driscoll tells the nation that (left) it's hot enough in New York to fry an egg on the sidewalk; that (above), from his vantage point with Beatrice Lillie the New York Easter parade looks pretty fine; and that (below) the airliner Hindenburg lies at Lakehurst in smouldering ruins before his anguished eyes.

