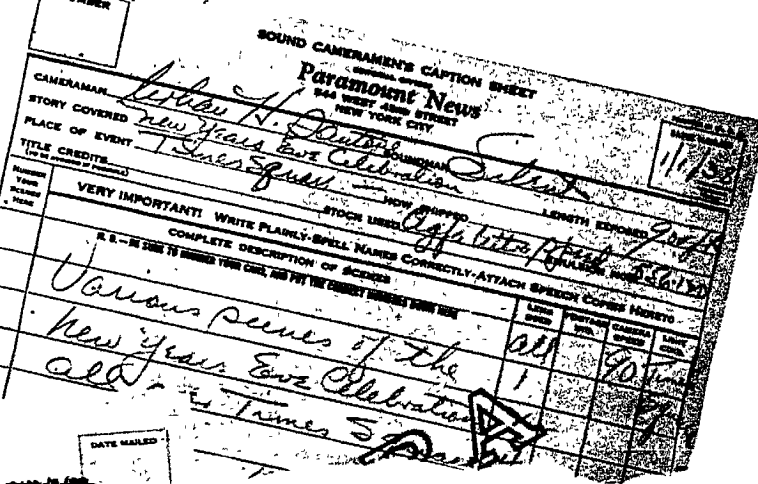
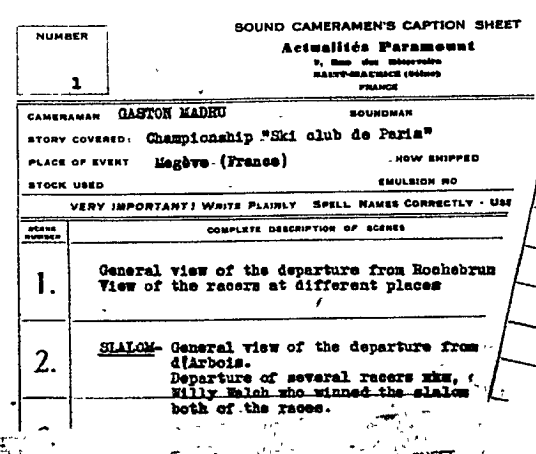
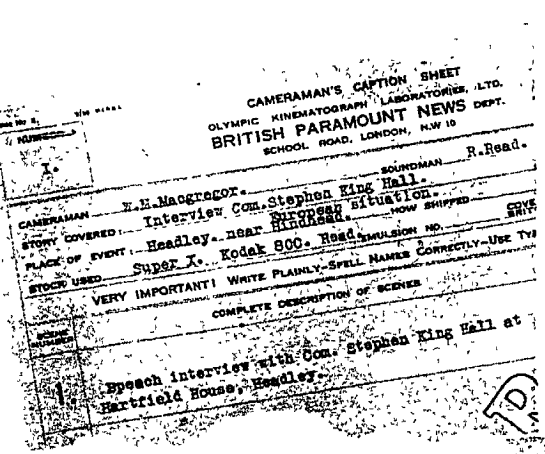


News About the Newsreel

From All Parts of the World Bits of Film Are Brought Together, and Experts Work Through the Night to Prepare Ten Minutes of "Actualities" for Millions to See

By Robert W. Desmond



MIDNIGHT STAINS Manhattan's Hudson River wharves, and the traffic in adjacent streets has ebbed. On an upper floor of a near-by building, however, a group is gathered in a small room. On the wall they watch the movement of strange shadows—the shadows of men and women who have made news throughout the world during the last week or so.

These men are the editors of a newsreel which tomorrow will be showing in theaters up and down Broadway, perhaps as far away as Chicago. In a day or two it will be showing in San Francisco and Vancouver, in Havana and Mexico City. Within a week, 17,500,000 persons will have seen this newsreel in the United States alone, and within five weeks it will have been seen by, from 35,000,000 to 55,000,000 persons in every sort of theater and hall, in three or four languages, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Five weeks—that is the life of the average newsreel, and two editions are produced each week.

Most of the newsreels seen in the Western Hemisphere are prepared in New York, often in buildings near Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, not far from the docks where the luxury liners arrive. The center of activity is a small projection room, a room with scarcely more than a dozen seats, before some of which are small desks with dim lights, a telephone or two, buzzers to the operator of the projection machine, dials which measure sound intensities from the speaker, and other equipment needed by the editors.

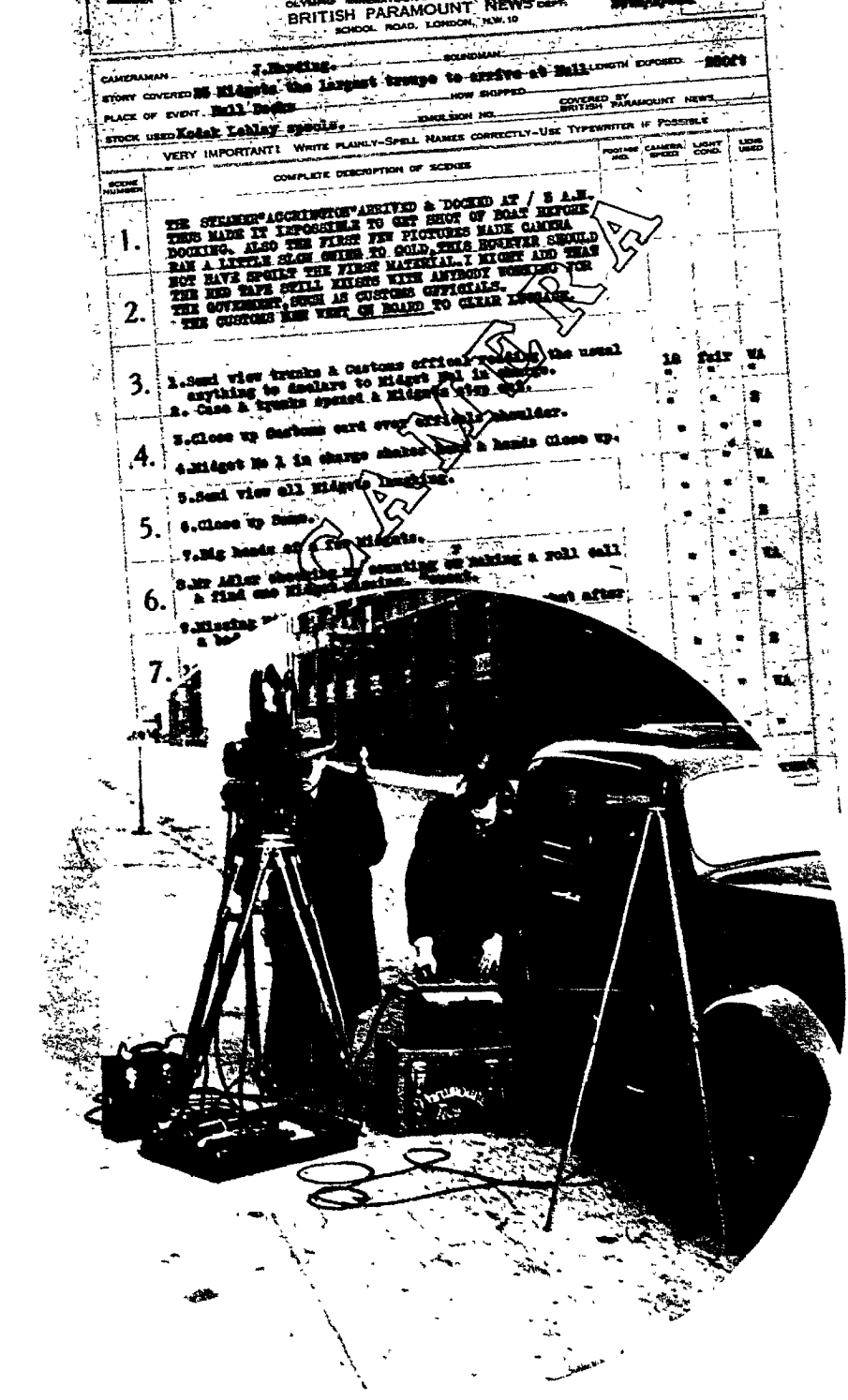
On this Monday, as on every Monday, a luxury liner has delivered several cans of film from Europe. These negatives, "blues," as they are called, along with the pictures of American subjects, are screened on a white wall in the New York projection room. In most cases, the print is reversed from what it will be in final theater projection, so that the whites show black, while the blacks show white. Strange shadows! But the editors are accustomed to this inverted view of things and they can read true values into the pictures.

As the new and uncut film is shown for the first time, script writers, make-up editor, editor-in-chief, assignment editor, perhaps a sound man and a commentator or two, all concentrate on what is being unreeled. The occasion is strictly informal, but businesslike, and there is a running fire of comment, all of which contributes toward the selection of the pictures which go into the final reel.

Let's look at a recent issue of the Paramount News being prepared. The projection room is darkened, and a new subject appears. Listen to the conversation.

"What's this? . . . It's an earthquake in Greece—nonexclusive . . . You can get a flash out of this. Call up that Greek newspaper and get somebody to tell you about it . . . We don't even know the name of the town where it happened, or the date. . . . I'll call Atlantis and get the date. . . . Now, this is Queen Marie's last ride. . . . Notice the positions of the sentries. . . . How do you spell 'Sinaia'?"

"Here's the Morgenthau visit in Paris. That's a pained look on Bonnet's face; they must be going to drop the franc again. . . . That's a pretty fancy



Paramount News
 THE SHOT THAT MAY BE VIEWED AROUND THE WORLD
 Or it May Land on the Projection Room Floor, But the Cameraman and the Sound Man Think Only of Recording the Event Above, "Dope Sheets," on Which the Cameraman's Notations are Entered, Accompany Films Arriving in New York and These Notations are Used in the Preparation of the Script from Which the Commentator Reads His Lines

banquet; wonder how much that's going to cost us? . . . It runs 176 feet . . . all this back-patting. . . . I don't want the banquet at all

"There's just 50 feet of Corrigan chinning with Kennedy. . . . That 50 feet is only 33. . . . Sure, that's the President of Ireland he's describing. . . . It's a shame there isn't sound with that! . . . We want one shot of that other guy for the contrast of his accent.

What would you do, open with Kennedy? That's all silent. . . . I'd run

it fairly full. I'd let him climb down from the big plane, and you can explain that it's the big British transatlantic plane. Don't cut that last scene. . . . No, no, run it in full!"

Always the films arriving in New York are accompanied by "dope sheets," as they are called, on which the cameraman has entered his notations. Attached may be clippings from newspapers relating to the matter photographed. These dope sheets and clippings are

used by the editors who prepare script from which the commentator at the studio reads the lines theater audiences hear as they watch the completed newsreel, sometimes fondly imagining that the commentator was on the spot as the picture itself was made. But not at all.

"What else have we got coming up?" asks the make-up editor. There are other pictures, but at last there comes the announcement, "That's the end of the shipment."

"All right. What are your nominations?"

"If we're too long, let's hold the Greek earthquake. . . . Marie is 96; it ought to come down to about 45. . . . I'm going to close the reel with Corrigan. Never mind the King and Queen; we'll just flop it and start with that. . . . We could, if you want, pull China down before Corrigan. . . . All right. I think it would strengthen the reel at that. . . . We could lead with an American flash, like Ford, and put Marie down here. . . . That gives us eight stories. We could run with nine, but eight is enough. . . . In Marie, we can open with the procession, fade, and superimpose Bucharest. And don't let them put organ music on that outside stuff. . . ."

And so, cutting here, holding there, eliminating some parts entirely, the order of the reel is arranged. Some of the shots have been made on assignment, for the assignment editor has a full Associated Press service available, follows the news, and directs his cameramen the world over by telephone, telegraph, and cable. Other shots come from free-lance cameramen, or from regular men who know pictures when they see them.

It costs thousands to prepare a 10-minute newsreel. One company estimates that two releases each week represent an expenditure of about \$25,000—or more when some especially expensive picture is included. Cameramen in the war zone of China are insured, and Lloyds asks \$100 per month premium, equivalent to \$6,000 a year. A brief shot of the bombing of Hankow may cost \$5,000 to get, while pictures of the Panay bombing last winter cost \$25,000 before they reached New York, having been rushed across the Pacific by the China Clipper, and by special planes across the United States.

A picture like that of the Panay bombing, or the landing of Howard Hughes after his world flight, or of Douglas Corrigan in Ireland, is rushed to the theaters as quickly as possible—by air express if necessary—and is advertised as a "Special." When the pick-up plane arrived in New York from England recently it brought newsreel films, and they were on display in Broadway theaters within three hours. That means very fast work, because not only must the pictures be edited and prints made, but script and music must be arranged, and the sound recorded.

That is a story in itself. The writers prepare the scripts to fit the number of feet in each shot, and there can be no trial and error about it; it is done in advance. These script writers have, also, to verify their facts, they have to indicate correct pronunciations of such

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rowboat crossed in front of the camera!

After the acetate has been made on the first regular effort, there is a "playback." That is, the film is shown again, with the voice, music, and sound all mixed for relative volume, as it will be heard in the theaters—if it is approved. The editors and writers and commentator and sound man, all of whom had a hand in making this particular picture, are called in to listen and criticize.

"How do you like this?" the editor-in-chief is asked after one playback of a light sort of subject.

He shrugs in reply. "We certainly need it," he says. "Fires, funerals, earthquakes!" he adds eloquently.

"Who wrote the lines?"

"Joe did."

"You satisfied, Joe?"

Joe shrugs, too. And so the subject is shouldered into the reel. The voice-music-effects business is done over twice more for recording on the film, and then the sound man shouts, "In the bag!"—meaning that subject is finished, and the next may be made. In some theaters, certain subjects may not appear on the screen at all, because the local managers can, and often do, cut the newsreels for reasons of their own.

It is very late when the staff finishes work on the newsreel which will fit so briefly across the screen. Yet it is history in vivid form. It has involved arduous and patient work. And after it is all over, after it is "in the bag" in every respect, the editor can only say, "Well, that's that! Now I'm thinking about the next issue!"

Everyone who has seen a newsreel—and who has not?—has seen a picture of a big fire somewhere. They are all much alike, and the fire in the newsreel we are seeing made resembles the others. The picture begins with a printed caption and what we might call "fright music"—music that is ominous and threatening, carefully selected from the record list! This is a waterfront fire, so there are sirens, supposedly on the fireboats. But this siren came out of the sound library, and really was the siren of an Italian naval destroyer. A record of a waterfall became the sound of firehoses pouring water onto the burning structure. A record labeled "Metallic Crashing," from the division on manual labor sounds, was synchronized with a picture of girders crashing. And a record of a steamboat plowing through the waves was used as a

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words as "Sinaia," and they have to be quick, interesting, and accurate.

Usually, after the general content of the reel has been laid out, with footages carefully indicated, activity shifts to the sound department, where the magicians of music and voice and effects do their parts toward preparing the finished newsreel.

A library of records contains music and sound effects of nearly every sort. These may be combined to suit almost any occasion. The music records are divided roughly as follows—and newsreel devotees will realize immediately that they have been hearing music from these shelves often enough: Oriental and primitive, U. S. A. martial, British martial, German martial, French martial, Italian patriotic, folk music, sacred, Russian, Belgian, Latin-American, Greek, Swiss, Philippine—with subdivisions and titles under each.

Then there are sound effects, again roughly classified, but with a long list of varieties and modifications under each. These include airplanes, motors and mechanical; manual labor sounds, crowds, traffic, animals, horns, whistles, sirens, chimes, bells.

One of the editors lays out

the music and sound effects, and, with a sound technician, plans the setup. The sound man has a "mixer board," containing 24 dials, each of which will control the volume of sound from some record, or other source. These sounds he mixes skillfully to form one sound track. Not that he works so many, but to manipulate even three to six dials is busy work. In a small studio, equipped with screen, loudspeaker, and microphone, the commentator reads his script into the microphone while the picture unreels before him. Like an actor, by inflection and emphasis he gets the utmost in effect from the lines. In an ad-