

Assignment TV

By TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY

Only a handful of veterans now stand at the very top level of television newscasters covering the American scene. In relation to the vastness of the video medium, the number is very small indeed.

There are the gold-dust twins, Huntley and Brinkley, a kind of father-son, Dr. Casey — Dr. Zorba combination, pleasant, trustworthy and bored. There is Eric Sevareid, the almost-professional liberal, who has become farther and farther removed from the action as he climbs the stairs in his ivory tower to view the wreckage below.

There is Walter Cronkite, omnipresent and inoffensive. Another in the charmed circle is Frank McGhee, a pleasant, convincing, Older Boy Next Door.

Another is Howard K. Smith, hard-headed, snippy, crusading and intermittently voiceless because of some hasel with network bosses.

AND THEN there is Martin Agronsky, a kind of Boy Bravo, a fighter, a matchless interviewer with a sense of humor and mind of his own. Agronsky is my man. He has been two decades in the business and he has the assurance of one who knows what he is talking about. But with the assurance he has a flash that I admire.

Since 1957 Agronsky has been doing time with NBC on the "Today" show, where his short Washington observations have been sandwiched in between the rapid chatter of watery Hugh Downs and endless commercials for the relief of physical disorders. Only once within recent memory did NBC let him off the treadmill and that was to do a fine documentary on the atomic submarine.

Recently Agronsky stepped off the NBC stage entirely and joined CBS as a news analyst on the Washington beat, as a reporter on the excellent "CBS Reports" and as a working TV newsman at the political conventions this summer.

MY CONGRATULATIONS to CBS and to Fred Friendly, who heads the net's news activities. You've got one of the best men in the business. Treat him right.

Quote of the Season: "Women are being made to look like absolute idiots by television," says Betty Furness, formerly the world's greatest appliance saleswoman. "The situation is very serious. It seems that the people at the top of the TV pyramid have decided to degrade women and never let them be seen as real people. Television has never known what to do with women as heroines. I recall the Western, 'Empire,' where they just killed off the roles of the mother and the daughter because they didn't know what to do with them. Look at all the television families without mothers. Mothers just get in the way so they don't have them."

NEXT SEASON the hoofbeats of only five Westerns will be heard on television. "Bonanza" producer David Dortart gives this explanation: "The mortality rate for Westerns is due to the provincialism of the New York television executives who are out of touch with 99 per cent of the country. The public will always want to see Westerns because a large percentage of the American people is only a generation or two away from the pioneers who built the West—or at least of the same stock."

I was mistaken—there IS a new angle to the Bing Crosby situation comedy being filmed in Hollywood this summer.

"Old dad doesn't get played for a patsy by his women-folk," says the star. "Doesn't that grab you? A father who can make decisions — and stick to his guns—will be the beginning of a new future in television. It's likely to be the greatest innovation since the talkies!"

Three Teeners Say Gang Attacked Them in Auto

Three teenagers, two of them Marines stationed at the El Toro Marine Base, told police Monday night they were attacked in North Torrance by a youth who had from 20 to 30 juvenile accomplices.

The incident occurred in the 20000 block of Wayne Avenue where a 16-year-old boy was having a party. Davis Lewis Dickinson, 18, and Joe Kenneth Ramsey, 19, the Marines, along with Don Leonard Rockafellor, 17, of 5108 Spencer St., said they were in Ramsey's car cruising the area of the party when a youth shouted profanity at them.

Dickinson said he stopped his car and a youth attacked it and the occupants with a 2 x 4 board loaded with nails and an angle iron. The at-

tacker knocked out the right read window of the car and struck Dickinson across the back with one of the weapons. Ramsey was struck across his right arm, the Marines said.

About 20 or 30 juveniles from 15 to 16 years of age were helping the attacker, the trio said. The victims left the scene and went to the police station where they reported the incident.

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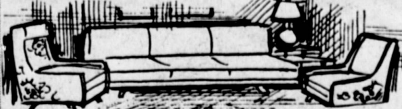
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