

## THE FIELD UNIT

JACK GORDON\*

An assignment to cover a national political campaign offers an opportunity to explain the many problems and obstacles encountered by a newsreel unit in the field. As I was "Mr. Newsreel" with one of the candidates on the last campaign I can tell you this is so.

Shortly after the conventions, I was appointed, at the suggestion of our Producer Edmund Reek (after he had been asked about it by the Republican National Committee), to take charge of the newsreel coverage of the campaign and to be the liaison between all the newsreels and the Republican Committee. On paper it looked easy and a nice chance to see the country at the expense of the Republican National Committee. Well, you live and learn. The only things I saw were stars when our special train collided with the rear end of another train.

To start, my first duty was to make arrangements on the campaign train for a representative from each of the reels. When we were ready to depart we had only a rough itinerary. First, Philadelphia, next Louisville, then across the country to Washington, then Oregon, California, and then back east again. At every major stop plans had to be made for camera positions in each of the many auditoriums where Dewey was to speak. Lights had to be rented or bought and set up, and last but not least unions in different localities had to be contacted so that there would be no difficulties from that end.

Each auditorium and stadium was different, which meant many problems. Some had balconies and some did not. To offset this, platforms were built for each place large enough for all the newsreelmen to work comfortably. And lighting these huge places was always a problem. Some of these cities, where addresses were to be made, did not have sufficient equipment to supply our lighting needs.

We had to call New York, Chicago, and California to furnish this equipment; big city coverage was difficult, but easier to handle than stops enroute. When the special train stopped at some small town, the local populace would be out at the station en masse. Of course, our candidate would be prevailed upon to make a short address. Plans for these platform addresses would be announced but a short time before the train would be in the station. Cameramen would

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have to be ready to jump off the train and rush back to the observation car, fight their way through the crowds to get a good location, and be ready when the candidate appeared. At no time could the cameramen afford to let the candidate appear without safeguarding themselves by being on the spot with their cameras. None could foresee what might occur; witness the shooting of Mayor Cermak when an attempt was made in Florida to assassinate President Roosevelt.

In all of the major cities where the candidate campaigned the local authorities would arrange for quite a celebration and parade from the station to his hotel headquarters. This route had to be covered and arrangements had to be made for a special automobile to carry the cameramen at the head of the parade. Although this arrangement was agreed upon with the candidate and his staff it very often happened that the camera car would have to battle against being pushed out of the parade. Passes, police cards, and other identifications meant nothing to some of them. There is a perpetual feud between newsreel men and police. The constabulary always have their own ideas as to where the newsreel fits in. It was very important that the candidate be covered completely but it meant constant fighting to do it.

There is never a dull moment for the hard-working cameraman. He never knows what the morrow will bring for him. Some local assignment, city fathers pinning a medal on visiting heroes, a political speech, amateur boxing or basketball, Atlantic City beauty pageant, or a trip around the world. Perhaps just a fire that will keep him on the job all night and day, or a strike. Whichever the case, it will be on film, and the next day he will be back for more.

### THE NEWSREEL CAMERAMAN

WALTER McINNIS\*

Fifty years ago this October, Hammerstein's Olympia Music Hall rang to the cheers of an enthusiastic audience as President McKinley's Inaugural Parade was re-enacted in all its pomp on a motion picture screen.

In 1927, the Fox-Case Corporation launched its famous Fox Movietone News. It was instantly popular and the public who had become

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