

Documentary Filming for TV

By **WADE BINGHAM**

Cinematographer

CBS Reports

Hollywood, Calif.

DOCUMENTARY CINEMATOGRAPHY was my first love, and after 13 years and more than one million miles of travel with CBS News, I still love the game as much as ever.

I guess you'd call me a hard news reporter with a camera. In my way of looking at cinema aesthetics, creative photography is that which is natural and spontaneous, and the unrehearsed scene is the best one.

Of course creativity is a highly individual and subjective matter, and I wouldn't deny for a moment that the director of photography on a feature film does some remarkably inventive work. But as a means of expression for me, my camera operates without a script, without specially designed sets, and without paid actors and special lighting.

Real Life

For me, creative cinematography means a personal interplay and feeling between my camera and my subject. We deal with life as it happens, and with people as they are, and under those circumstances we very seldom have all of the elements under our control. Consequently we often have to employ ingenuity and daring to get the results we want on film.

My base of operations is CBS Reports, a division of CBS News. Admittedly biased, still I think ours is the best documentary series on the air, that nobody does the job we do. As one example of our attention to detail, we always take only the best camera and sound equipment to every assignment, no matter where it is. And we always shoot double system sound for maximum quality.

The job of CBS Reports is to docu-

ment national and world events in depth, detailing in pictures and sound the historical origins of any event, its current status, and its potential effect upon the future.

The series originated under orders from Dr. Frank Stanton, CBS president, and was originally produced by Fred Friendly and the late Ed Murrow. Friendly is now president of CBS News, and the executive producer of CBS Reports is now Palmer Williams, formerly director of operations for the series.

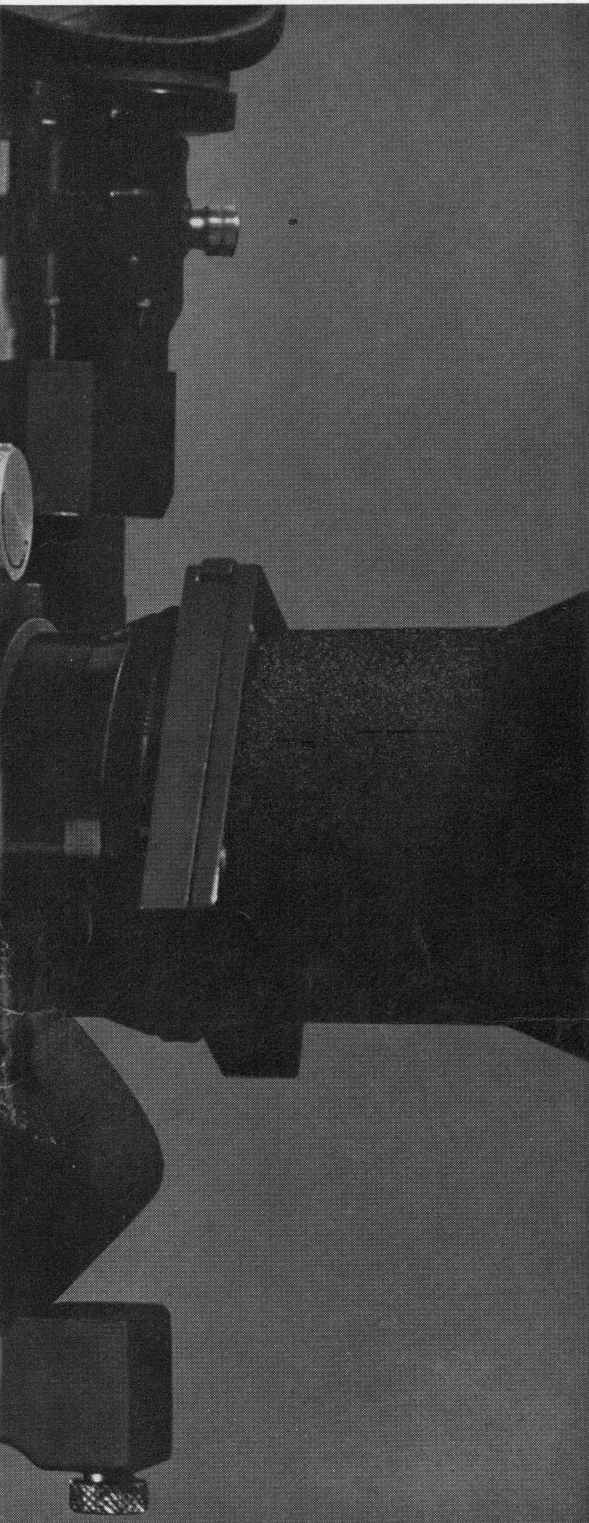
We never work from a script in photographing for CBS Reports. Most of our programs originate from outlines or ideas. Then we build the story as we go along, as our knowledge of the subject matter expands with our relationship to the idea or outline we bring to the subject.

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It takes about ten seconds.

One of our customers, shooting at the G.O.P. Convention last year in San Francisco, reports that he was able to get matching close shots of two VIPs — one asking a question and the other answering it — on two rolls. He ran out on the question and got the answer on the next roll. He says it took him about the same time to change magazines as it took the answering VIP to collect his thoughts and clear his throat.



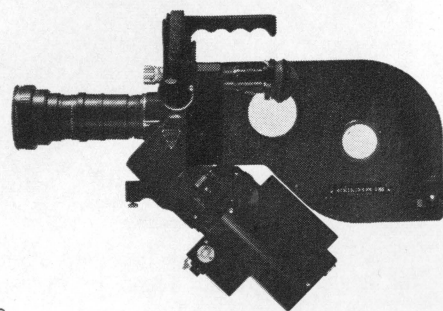
HOW TO CHANGE MAGAZINES ON THE NEW ECLAIR NPR
(noiseless, portable, reflex)

don't open blimp
snap off old magazine
don't open door
don't open gate
inspect aperture
don't close film guides
snap on new magazine
don't thread film
don't close gate
don't open film guides
don't close door
don't close blimp
shoot

The NPR's blimp-free silence, precise reflex viewing, sync-pulse generator, registration-pin movement, transistor-regulated motor, two-lens turret and effortless hand-holding helped him, too.

Service, sales and rental facilities are available from these expert, franchised dealers: *New York*: F&B CECO, Camera Service Center or Camera Mart; *Los Angeles*: Gordon Enterprises or Mark Armistead (rental only); *Chicago*: Behrends Inc.; *San Francisco*: Brooks Camera. Or write us for our brochure.

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The result is that our scripts are written in the cutting room. And the film itself must therefore carry the complete story, whether it's about a Vietnamese family in a small village and how they contend with the specter of communism, or the big story of full scale combat.

Asia was my beat for 11 years, and during that time I covered every type of major news story on the spot, as it happened: revolutions, riots, wars, floods, famine, funerals, conferences and coronations. In 1956 I was the pool cinematographer for this country's second and last hydrogen bomb test at the Bikini proving grounds. I also photographed Nikita Krushchev during his travels in Burma and Indonesia.

Documentary Tools

I notice that 16mm cameras are being used with increasing frequency in filming for documentary and public affairs programs, because their light weight and portability afford a lot more versatility.

For my most recent Vietnam trip, I rented an Eclair NPR through Grant Loucks of Gordon Enterprises in North Hollywood. I chose it because I wanted a noiseless, portable reflex 16mm camera, which would let me follow focus while zooming in for combat sequences from relatively safe distances. Of course no place is really safe under those conditions, and I am more amazed each day that there still hasn't been any cinematographer killed in that undeclared, but very hot, war.

Another thing I like about the Eclair is that we could shoot candidly in synch sound, using the built in synch generator in conjunction with a light-



UP A TREE on bamboo ladder goes author for angle on ground action in Vietnam.

weight tape recorder. I also like the fact that the center of gravity of that camera falls near the center of the shoulder. As a result I can use it hand-held much longer without strain. In fact, I think the Eclair's balance comes closer than any other camera to becoming a part of the body, and that has helped me more than once in making good, steady, hand-held zooms.

We used it frequently to photograph action from a helicopter, which had no doors and was plenty windy. Without those quick-change magazines, I don't know how my assistant could ever have got the camera threaded.

Not that I use the Eclair exclusively. I also work with the Arriflex, in both 16 and 35mm, as well as the Wall and Mitchell.

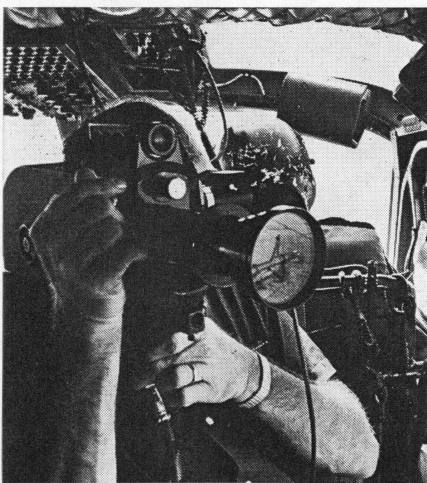
My crew varies from as little as three up to a dozen or more. It all depends on the assignment from CBS Reports in New York. But for the most part there are four of us: my assistant and I, a sound man and an electrician.

Combat Photography

My first assignment in Asia was to cover the war in Korea in 1950-53. In 1954 I photographed the fall of Dien-bienphu to Red rebels, and the retreat of the French from Hanoi. That was the year that the savage Indo-China war supposedly ended, but 11 years later the fighting continues in Vietnam.

Back in the States, at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, I photographed experiments and exercises with obsolescent propeller-driven aircraft, experiments designed to obtain renewed usefulness from this equipment for the fighting in Vietnam.

At one time I strapped the Eclair on



HELICOPTER shots provide battle coverage. Zoom lens reflects U.S. machine gun.

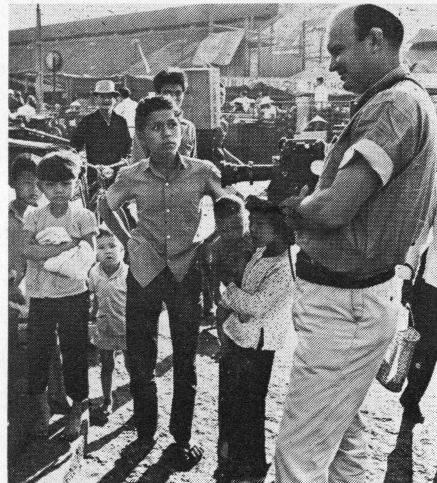
a tripod in the cargo area of a C-123 transport, which was to fly four feet off the ground, open its rear hatch and skid-drop a Jeep to the ground. A braking parachute slowed the Jeep's forward movement and it gently bounced on its skids and came to a safe stop. The camera caught the whole sequence, rock steady and without vibration.

Back in Vietnam. I once found myself behind enemy lines for several weeks. Fortunately I was with friendly troops who were caught in the same trap, and even more fortunately we did finally get back out.

But I also enjoy shooting the country's civilians and the way they live. When I'd enter a strange Vietnamese village, unable to speak the language, I found that a friendly smile would get me an awful long way. I wouldn't try to direct the people, because they resent it. I guess they're a little tired of taking orders by now. So I'd just move slowly, guiding them gently, and film things as they happen. Using this easy-going approach I was able to get excellent results, because the people are generally friendly, a little curious, and extremely photogenic.

Again the Eclair came in handy, because it is so quiet that it never acted as a reminder to the people that they were being photographed. Whenever they thought about the fact that the camera was running, they would be onstage and start posing. I didn't want that. What I was after was spontaneity.

Which brings me back to what I said at the outset. I like documentary filming because it tells about life as it is lived, here and now. It is truth. ■



FRIENDLY SMILE goes long way, says author. Here he charms Vietnam kids.