

FRANK DUESBURY

News at ten

Soon after 8 a.m the duty news editor for ITN is at the news desk preparing the day's schedule. He started work from the moment he got out of bed, listening to the early morning bulletins on a transistor radio while he shaved. On the way to the office he will read some of the papers, and the rest when he gets in.

The day's work was partly prepared the previous afternoon when major stories were studied and it was decided how to tackle them. He talks to the regional ITV company news editors to see if they have anything to offer for that day. Then he prepares a list of stories that will make news. The list will undoubtedly change as the unexpected happens. ITN's early bulletin is at 5.50 p.m and *News at Ten* take news up to the last minute of the programme. And, as the news editor completes his list, no one can be certain what the content of *News at Ten* will be. But the action has started.

The foreign news editor provides a similar list on overseas coverage and at 10.30 a.m the editor, Nigel Ryan, holds his morning conference where the framework for the day is fixed. Attending the conference are the deputy editor, David Nicholas, the assistant editors, Donald Horobin, and Hugh Whitcomb in charge of news gathering and administration.

Also in the morning conference are the producers of the early bulletin and *News at Ten*, the assignments editor who is in charge of the film crews, the chief sub-editor of film for *News at Ten*, a producer who is working ahead to provide background stories for later bulletins, and the home and foreign news editors who develop the stories on their news lists. This conference lasts around 20 minutes; major decisions will have been made, other decisions will have been left till a situation is clarified. It has set the scene. The day has really started. The agency tape machines which seemed powerful and loud when the news editor sat alone in the news room, amidst the debris of yesterday's stories, fade into the background as the office fills up.

The news editor, back in his chair, briefs reporters and keeps in touch with those already on stories. The home and overseas news can be used by both the 'early' and *News at Ten* (known internally as 'the late'), though they may well give it different treatment. In the 'early' it is usually shorter with *News at Ten* doing a longer 'in depth' report.

ITN moved in to ITN House in August 1969 and it was purpose rebuilt to meet the needs of a major television news organization. It has the finest technical facilities of any news centre in the world.

The layout of the editorial floor is effectively linked to the technical facilities, so that everything is as compact as possible. There is no more effective form of communication than to be able to talk directly to the person you want; as can be seen from the diagram, there is virtually no need to use an internal telephone.

Both the news editors can talk directly to the producers of the 'early' and 'late'. The home news editor can swivel in his chair to talk to the assignments editor. No one can tuck himself away in a corner.

The 'early' desk is manned by the producer, the chief sub-editor who is responsible for the copy actually going into the script, the copy taster (he reads all home and foreign agency tapes, selecting the stories the producer should know about), the director, and the newscaster. They sit closely round the 'early' table forming the programme. At midday the producer holds a simple conference at his desk where they decide, late stories apart, what will be in the 5.50 p.m. news bulletin that evening. On the technical side the director is joined by the film shift leader, who is responsible for seeing film gets processed, viewed and cut to the producer's needs; the shift supervisor of facilities where the video tape recordings are processed and viewed, and the supervisory engineer who ensures that film, video tape, live interviews in the studio, and sound are co-ordinated. The 'early' is a short bulletin of just eleven minutes and has a huge following, especially in the provinces where the family view at tea time. Because of the limiting time factor the stories and film are tightly cut, forming a basis, at times, for the longer *News at Ten*.

At the foreign desk the duty editor is talking by telephone, telex, or cable, to ITN reporters overseas, as well as agency news desks. ITN has basically three sources of film from abroad — its own film crews, UPITN which is a fusion of ITN and United Press International, and the Columbia Broadcasting System. One of the problems facing any foreign news editor in television is the physical problem of getting the film back in time.

ITN has an agent at London Airport purely to

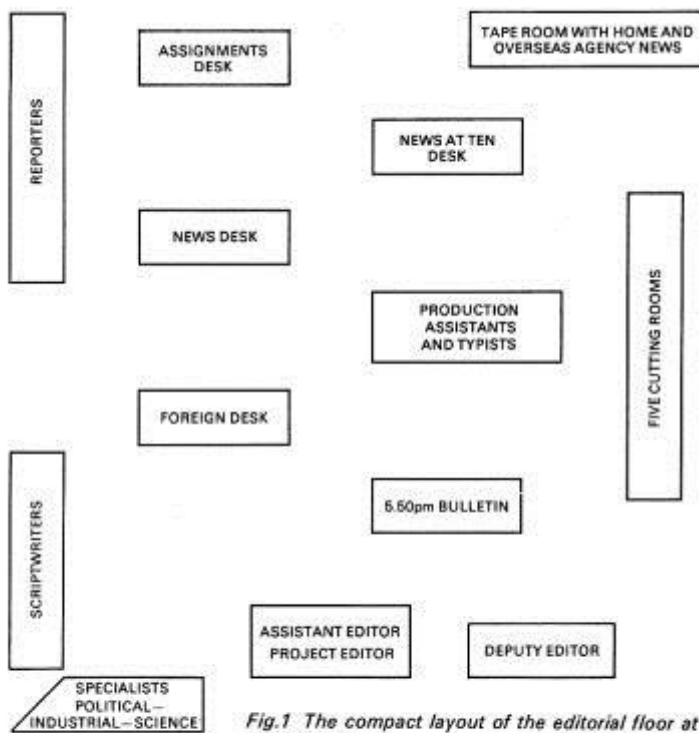


Fig.1 The compact layout of the editorial floor at News at Ten

handle incoming film and reduce delays to a minimum, and a corps of first-class despatch riders who bring in film not only from the airport but also from any home story where the footage has to be back in the laboratory for developing as soon as possible.

ITN reporters and film crews have been involved in some pretty bizarre situations. Even fodder for a camel has appeared on a reporter's expenses. One of the strangest trips was by Keith Hatfield, when he was marooned in the disaster village of Val d'Isere in France, because the local police were concerned that there might be further avalanches. He persuaded a bulldozer driver to give him a lift. He hid behind the driver's seat and after two miles the driver said that was as far as he was going. So Hatfield hitched a nightmare trip on a milk lorry that tore down the slippery mountain road, the driver oblivious of the perils that were about him. Another taxi ride, more safely, to Geneva airport, and Hatfield arrived at ITN as *News at Ten* was going on the air. He dubbed the commentary 'live' on to some rather rapidly, but effectively, edited film of the Val d'Isere disaster.

At the top end of the travelling market, David Phillips, one of the *News at Ten* producers, chalked up another 'first' when he hired, with another television journalist from CBS, a Caravelle jet from Royal Jordanian Airlines. David Phillips had flown out to Jordan to produce on the spot the running story of the three civilian jets sky-jacked by the Palestinian guerillas. In fact, he had no sooner set foot on Jordanian soil than the three aircraft on Dawson's Field were blown sky high. And ITN had the only close up film of £10,000,000 worth of aircraft disintegrating in a blaze of dynamite, fuel and fuselage.

The authorities would not let any scheduled air-

craft out of Amman airport during the dark because of sabotage risk. So Phillips chartered a jet to Nicosia and, sitting in solitary state with his CBS colleague, had the film back in time for a special at midday the following day. A classic example of television news reporting and organization, it was satellited round the world and won an award this year at the Cannes Newsfilm Festival.

A camel, a bulldozer, a jet... these are three out-of-the ordinary ways of getting television news stories back to ITN. But in the main it is essentially routine. It is a routine that depends, more than in other spheres, on the individual knowing what he is doing. It does not rest solely with reporters, or cameramen. There are script writers, film editors, laboratory technicians, all woven into a complicated organism that is partly human and part machine. One weak link and others' efforts can be spoilt, or even wasted.

Back at the 'early' desk the bulletin is being put together. Newscaster Gordon Honeycombe sees all the copy, makes any useful suggestions, and goes down to studio one, on the floor below (about 20 seconds away by the back stairs if you run), for a rehearsal of reading the complete bulletin. It is a technical run through so the director can check camera, captions, sound and other details. The *News at Ten* desk is complete after lunch and with the early bulletin finished, all of ITN's resources go into the half-hour news, a programme that was first broadcast on July 3rd 1967 and has continued at this hour ever since.

The complement is the same as for the 'early' except there are two newscasters. The whole programme is discussed round the table. It is quite informal and in the final analysis the producer makes the decision and carries the responsibility. Newscasters can rewrite copy to suit their style, but not to change the point of the story.

There does not appear to be within ITN the equivalent of a newspaper 'style book'. The only rule seems to be: if its news we'll run it, we'll run it before any one else and certainly not later, and we'll get it right.

The processes for doing this vary according to the story. Take, for example, a damaged tanker discharging oil into the English Channel. The 'tip' for this would come to the news desk from a local correspondent or Southern Television, or the Press Association, which supplies a news service to newspapers and ITN. The news editor will immediately tell assignments and a sound crew (this is a cameraman and recordist, sometimes a 'silent' man will go alone if only film is required), waiting in the camera ready room, will be on their way in minutes. With them will be a reporter. If time is tight a despatch rider will follow on to bring back the film in time for the first available bulletin.

Other lines have to be followed through. ITN would want to talk with the owners, the companies of other ships which may have been involved; are there any British crew aboard and where do they live? All these points will be covered by the news desk. ITN's project editor, John Cotter, who is re-

sponsible for setting up camera coverage on major events, also knows where to find aircraft or helicopters. And he may well on a story like this organize aerial coverage, ideal for seeing oil slicks.

The chief sub-editor of film for *News at Ten* will then ask one of the script writers to co-ordinate the copy from several sources, and link it to film. This is, of course, just one of 20 or more stories which will be featured in the bulletin – from big ones like the oil tanker, to a 30 second newscaster story of some small, but nonetheless, important incident or event.

The oil tanker film if not the lead story, is obviously going to be a major one. The film is quickly processed in the colour labs and sent to the film shift leader. Five cutting rooms flank the editorial floor which enables the producer, the deputy editor – his office is at the entrance to the newsroom – and possibly the director, to see the uncut film. They can't see everything on film for that day but they can select certain stories to view themselves. They indicate the shots they want and the final cutting is left to the scriptwriter on the story, working with a film editor.

On the technical side the programme is being prepared more or less in tandem with the editorial. There are three sources for an ITN bulletin; studio camera for the newscaster, or studio interview, and for shooting captions; telecine for film; and videotape recording. So in a *News at Ten* of twenty-five stories, there may be ten on the studio camera, five on telecine, and ten on VTR. This means that the stories have to be laced up in VTR and telecine in

the right order although they are scattered through the running order. It is the task of the producer to select the stories in the order he wants them, and the length they are to run.

At 7 p.m. – after the hour's supper break – the producer holds a meeting of all the key people on *News at Ten* that night. It is really a discussion with the producer indicating the running order and how they will be presented. It's a short meeting and after it everything is in full swing, with less than three hours to go to the opening chimes of Big Ben. Two other departments are keyed into the operation. Graphics are producing the diagrams to illustrate certain stories, including animated ones which can take two to three hours to prepare. They are nearly all hand done and the introduction of colour has given them added impact. News Information needs to have at hand all the still pictures which the director may call for, and the cuttings on any subject in the world which the reporters need for background and direct information for a story.

At 8 o'clock the producer should have his running order prepared for the director and facilities, though it is sometimes late. One observer once remarked that nearly everything seemed to run late at ITN except the bulletins.

The director is assisted by a floor manager who works in the studio, liaising with the director in the control room. When they have the running order they begin a technical rehearsal with the engineers, and check camera angles and positions. Behind the newscasters desk is a Chromakey screen where the director can 'under-lay' film as the newscaster, in vision, reads the story.

Also hard at work are the production assistants and the copy typists. All the newscasters' stories and links to stories are typed on to a narrow band and fitted to the teleprompter. The banded script is then played on to a monitor, just below the lens of the television camera, so that the newscaster can look at the camera and still read the words. He also has a typed script in front of him and can, as he sometimes does, read from the desk copy.

When *News at Ten* was being planned it was decided to have two newscasters because, it was felt, it would be difficult, almost impossible, for one personality to hold the audience for a full half hour. It also makes the programme more manageable. Tucked into the right ear of each newscaster is an almost invisible earpiece on which they can hear the conversation from the control room. So while they are calmly reading the news they are also listening for instructions. And instructions they are always getting.

At 9.30 p.m. or even later, the editorial staff and the newscasters go down to the studio for a rehearsal. Once again, this is largely technical and is not a complete run-through. Usually there is some five minutes more in the programme than the scheduled time of exactly 26 minutes 30 seconds (deduct 2 minutes 05 seconds for the natural break). The reason for this over-setting is the essential viability of *News at Ten*. A film story in the office just after the programme starts can be seen at

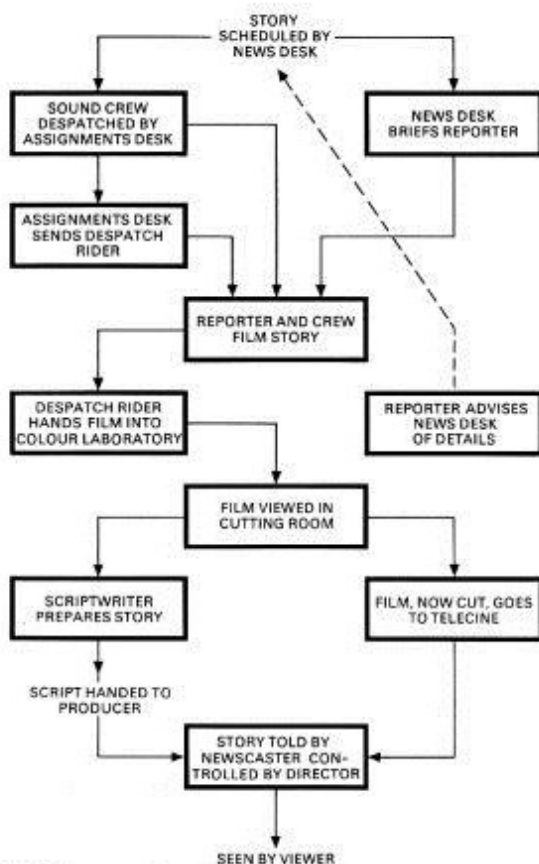


Fig.2 Progress of an ITN news story



Fig.3 A News at Ten camera crew filming 'Concorde'

the end, providing everyone sprints. And late news is often incorporated during a bulletin.

The producer can only get the honest feel of his programme when it is on the air. A number of stories are deliberately written with an 'early lead in' or an 'early lead out' so a story may be cut during the programme without losing it altogether. And at the end the time has to be just right. If this sounds pretty complicated and rather like flying by the seat of your pants, it is. It falls to one of the production assistants to report on the timing throughout, or back timing to be precise, shouting out the number of seconds left to the end of a particular item.

The director, who sits between the timing p.a and the vision mixer, calls for the shots from the four studio cameras and brings in telecine or VTR just by saying: 'roll telecine two' or 'roll VTR one'. So when the newscaster says: 'Richard Lindley asked him what he thought the position was now' the voice of the person being interviewed must cut in at the same time as the film starts running.

The control room sounds like a noisy muddle – the sound of *News at Ten*, the director rolling telecine and VTR and calling the shots to the vision mixer, who sits in front of a three foot wide bank of panel buttons, clicking new pictures on to the screen. The timing production assistant calls out the timing, the producer is issuing his orders 'cut story seventeen' and the chief sub-editor is taking a snap story over the internal phone that has just come over the tapes. The copy taster is still at the *News at Ten* desk watching for new developments and new stories.

The 'natural break' gives everyone a breather to check the state of the second half of the programme. 'Did we get that aerial picture of the tanker marked up with arrows to show the exact position of the oil slick?'. The producer is looking at the late story. 'It's worth a line,' he says. 'Let's take the early lead out on story fifteen and Andrew can read this copy.' The newscasters, still at their desk, mark their running order accordingly.

Then, like its the shortest two minutes there ever was, *News at Ten* is into the second half. The babble starts again... the clock clicks jerkily... the newscaster is saying 'that's all from us tonight. Goodnight to you.' The producer says 'thank you studio' and within ten minutes the studio is silent.

But the night is not over. A late sub-editor stays to watch the agency tapes in case a momentous national or international story should break before the end of transmission on ITV. ITN, in fact, never closes down. Through the night a dog watch is kept by UPITN who can alert the editor of any major news, such as Apollo 13 suddenly finding itself in serious trouble. The ITN crew covering Apollo were out of bed early that morning. The anchor man was Alastair Burnet who, in the same day, found himself in two programmes – the Budget and Apollo 13.

News at Ten is now the largest single daily news outlet in Europe and has had a considerable impact in the political field and of serious reporting generally. Its success, in a way, has created a special problem, which is the problem of responsibility. During the General Election a stop watch was kept on everyone who appeared in the ITN bulletins so that the parties balanced to the last minute.

The editor of ITN, Nigel Ryan, and his executives, devote serious thought to providing news for the massive nightly audience of *News at Ten* – around 15,000,000 viewers. 'Because of this impact we have to select with great care the stories we choose for the programme' says Nigel Ryan. 'We are aware of the important decisions we are making in such areas as the Common Market, Vietnam, rising prices, Northern Ireland, in fact, anywhere where there is a clash of opinion in an important matter. One of the continual problems is balance in a bulletin. We have solved many problems but we are not afraid to admit we have yet to find the solution to others. We like to think, that each *News at Ten* is really a dress rehearsal for the next one.'