

JOHN COTTER MBE

Interviewed by Rodney Giesler in Chard on 5.7.97

File No: 411

Born Blackheath on 22.9.1918. Father Jack Cotter, a cameraman with Topical Budget, early newsreel company, then with Pathé Gazette and Fox Movietone News. Died in 1959. John followed him into the business. Trained at Kodak for a year, then taken on as assistant by Jimmy Hodgson with "The March of Time". Volunteered for Army on outbreak of war. Evacuated from Dunkirk. Commissioned into the Army Film Unit. Sent to Malta covering the siege. Then followed the army through Sicily and Italy, ending the war in Vienna. Joined Universal News as cameraman in 1946 working with Stan Crockett, sound recordist. Moved to Gaumont British. Thence to BBC Television News at Lime Grove. Then Alexandra Palace. Filming football matches off the telecine. Cranking the camera motor to avoid the hum bars. Then became news organiser, controlling movement of camera crews. Approached by Philip Dorté to join newly-formed ITN in July 1955 as news organiser. Five sound camera crews and three silent. A good nucleus of experienced people. Switched from 35mm to 16mm Auricon sound on film cameras and achieved greater mobility. Bolder style of working. Top reporters at the time. How the job was done before satellites. Lab in the news building. Everything had to be transported by hand. A hairy business. Electronic cameras slow to come in because of Union restrictions. Dispensation agreed. Technique revolutionised news handling. Film was still used by stringers in remote areas. Satellites totally changed life style of cameraman. Local crews increasingly used. Retired in 1982. Staggered at changes since then. Goes back to describe how the job was done prewar. 35mm sound on film Wall camera. Huge amount of gear. Rostrum on roof, 6 kw of lighting, two cameras and sound equipment and cable. Blew fuses all over the country. Did everything yourself. "March of Time" prestigious. Americans hard task masters. Covering stories in Nazi Germany. Coal shortage in 1947. Recollections of Army Film Unit. Working with commando units. With the infantry. Had six units of sergeant cameramen. Moved from action to action. Carried 35mm De Vry cameras. 100 ft. mags. Worst cameras made. Eyemos great improvement. Processed at Denham. (45'24")

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Followed the Commando Brigade up the Adriatic Coast. Battle of Lake Comacchio. Rescuing civilians. Memories of France in 1940. Taking a bath in Richard Dimpleby's bathroom. Kept meeting his father in war areas. Rackets worked. "The battling rabbi". Excitement and freedom of filming the war. Life of idleness in Austria. Importance of matching personalities of camera crews. Time as Royal Rota cameraman. Filming the christening of Prince Charles. Waylaying the royal car at Duxford. Filming Prince Philip on the polo field. The best and the worst politicians. Conference drinks parties. Got on well with Tito. Filmed the partisans in Yugoslavia. The release of the Chetniks. Filmed the forced repatriation of the White Russians back to Russia at Villach. Film impounded. Author who interviewed him about this incident found dead shortly afterwards. Memories of Dunkirk. Advising South African government on their television service. First meeting with Geoffrey Cox in a dug out in Italy. (42'48")

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Filming the terrorist attack at the Munich Olympics. Setting up a live broadcast of the Moscow May Day Parade. Delight at the first satellite pictures. Live broadcast of Francis Chichester at sea. Planning coverage for Royal tours. Coverage facilities superb in the U.S. The Eurovision News Exchange. The ease of working with satellites. Problems of sending news back from the Falklands war. Crews stopped from covering South Georgia. References to uncle Terry Cotter. Stresses on family life caused by the job. Memories of Castleton Knight, Leslie Murray, Ronnie Noble, Sidney Bonnet, Ken Gordon, Paul Wyand. Summary of the evolution of news gathering technology. Bureaucratic problems encountered whilst travelling the World. Memories of reporters. (37'27")

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