

# "YOU CAN'T PRINT THAT, BOYS"

## The News And How To Understand It

(By HESSELL TILTMAN, writing from America, in "The New Statesman and Nation")

QUINCY HOWE, author of "England Expects Every American To Do His Duty," and an American "double patriot" who—as the "New York Times" reviewer remarks, "still seems inclined to doubt the news of Cornwallis's surrender, and occasionally searches for Redcoats under his bed," has written a new book entitled "The News and How to Understand It." The book is enjoying a large sale which is no matter for surprise, for surely never in all history was any people exposed to

such a *newskrieg* as that which batters—via press, radio, films and speeches—about the heads of American citizens at this moment.

Any correspondent—foreign or otherwise—knows that in this country (America) there are four distinct categories of news; the first, which can be stated clearly, is just news; the second is news which may only be hinted at; the third consists of news allowed to "leak" on the understanding that it will be promptly denied; and the fourth of "off-the-record" information—what American journalists call "the real McCoy"—which can neither be stated nor hinted. And as so often happens in the mis-spent lives of the men who cover

the world, most of the juiciest morsels are in the fourth category. The "off-the-record" banner-headlines floating round Washington—unprinted and unprintable—at twelve noon to-day would, if placed end to end, stretch from the White House to Berchtesgaden and back to the Potomac, and provide the motive power to set Hitler off on another Grand Tour of Europe.

### "Talking Turkey" with Roosevelt

I was present at a press conference presided over by a member of President Roosevelt's Cabinet the other day. An American newsmen put the Big Man a leading question, of the variety known here as "talking turkey." A direct reply would have created a first-class international sensation. Did the statesman, therefore refuse an answer, or seek refuge in ambiguity? Not at all. Turning to the questioner more in sorrow than anger, he remarked: "You know damn well the answer is 'yes.' And you also know damn well I can't say so. My reply is 'no information.'" After which he told us the whole story—a better story than anything in the papers that day.

Which brings me to yet another category of American "news," which can only be described as news which isn't news. There is, however, the technique of the deliberate "leak." Just as nations have been known to leave blueprints of battleships lying around for the convenience of Japanese spies (it has happened in three countries in which I have been stationed), so it sometimes comes to pass that Washington would not scream if the Gestapo got hold of some particular item of information. In such cases it often happens that some correspondent with a specially well-constructed "grape-vine" linking his desk with Government circles comes out with a piece of news which causes quite a flutter in the various Axis capitals. Questioned subsequently, the Administration keeps its face straight and says "just another rumour." (Washington's capacity for denying the obvious is not to be despised.)

### Examples of "Inspired News"

An example of this type of inspired news was the publication of the fact that the U.S. strategic plans for countering any Japanese thrust southwards have been complete for weeks past, and that the "stop Japan" front was ready to function on the touching of a button. Every American journalist knows this to be so, but just try to get confirmation out of the State Department or Navy Department.

An even better example, perhaps, is Singapore, and the frequently-reported agreement with Britain for the pooling of the Pacific naval bases. Every well-informed correspondent in the U.S. believes that deal has been in the bag for the last three months. Yet only this week, when I mentioned Singapore to a high official at the Navy Department, I gathered that he had vaguely read of the place in the newspapers, but did not quite know where it was!

### The Wise Two Hundred

At this moment the world would like to know precisely where Washington

## The Author

Hugh Hessel Tiltman is 44 years old and has been a foreign correspondent for London newspapers in various parts of the world for 20 years. He was stationed in Washington in 1920, and has since won considerable repute for his objective reporting of the Sino-Japanese War 1937-38, which he covered for the "Daily Express." In one period of 2 years he covered 25,000 miles in Eastern Asia and the Pacific. Mr. Tiltman has written widely on foreign affairs, especially problems of the U.S.S.R. and the Far East. He is the author of more than a dozen books, including "Slump, the Story of Stricken Europe," "Japan, Mistress of the Pacific," a life of Ramsey MacDonald, and "Nightmares Must End," a history of Fascist aggression in the years up to 1940.

stands on the question of those Irish bases which England needs so badly; how Washington weighs up the submarine campaign against British shipping, and what the American Government thinks of Britain's prospects in 1941. Well, two hundred men know the answers, for in this country one does not have to burgle Foreign Office records to get at the facts. But Gestapo tortures would not make any of those two hundred journalists squawk. All we can do is to imitate the Three Wise Monkeys—and wait for "news" to become just news.

The same hush-hush policy has cloaked up to this writing, the real facts concerning the sabotage campaign in the U.S., which has resulted, if rumour is correct, in a varied assortment of strange and peculiar happenings, including the burning-down of part of the War Department, two fires at an important navy yard, blasting of a dozen war plants in a month, and the finding of a time-bomb, just in time, aboard an army transport crowded with troops and their families, when en route from San Francisco to New York. Washington denied the bomb story; the Navy authorities confirmed it. The anti-sabotage experts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, busily looking into some dozen and a-half examples of buildings and ships which blazed up or blew up at odd hours, are saying nothing.

The story behind those explosions and fires has been soft-pedalled as a matter of high policy. It is the unailing practice of the U.S. authorities, whenever they suspect sabotage, immediately to declare that sabotage is not suspected. It helps the task of making inquiries, and keeps American citizens from getting excited and demanding that German diplomatic representatives are run out of the country overnight. For the same reason, the Government deliberately played down the risks of a clash between the U.S. and Japan in the Orient, knowing perfectly well that it would be fatally easy to have mass protest meetings demanding the bombing of Tokyo.

### The Future Before it Happens

The results of thus splitting up the news into categories, and giving correspondents a sort of preview of what will

(Continued on next page)

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for over 40 years now . . . .



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