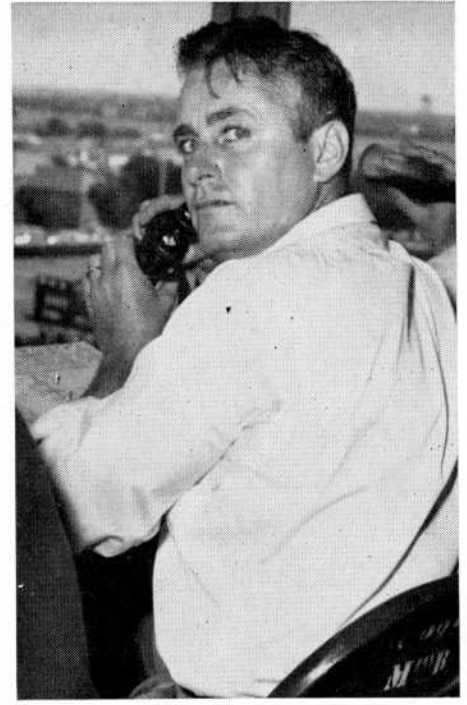


FRONT ROW OF THE WRITER'S LEVEL OF Press Box shows newspapermen covering N.D.-O.U. game.



CURT GOWDY reported N.D.-O.U. game for NBC.

# Belfry of Bedlam

High above Owen Field "Operation Press Box"—in preparation for 10 long months—was being put into operation. Down on the field the Sooners were swapping tackles with Notre Dame.

By ADDIE LEE PICKARD BARKER, '39journ

ND-Day, 1953!

In the slender, three-decked press box high above Owen Field, nerve-twitching tension was building up like pressure in a whistling tea kettle. It was Sept. 26, 1953. The zero-hour approached. Deep within the stadium Notre Dame's and Oklahoma's football warriors were arraying themselves for battle. Kick-off time was still two hours distant, but Operation Pressbox had been underway since 8 a.m.

The elevator creaked and groaned under its load of radio, television, movie and newsreel crews and their heavy equipment as it labored the 130 feet from the ground entrance beside the tennis courts to one of the three levels of the box. Already frantic newsreel cameramen were sending out S.O.S.'s for everything from a parking permit to hard-to-locate six volt batteries (we finally borrowed the latter from the Dorsett Laboratories).

Ten months' meticulous planning and preparation had led to this climactic moment. The country's ace sports writers and sportscasters had been invited, courted and finally persuaded away from home-stretch big league baseball to cover a football game

played in the 94-degree heat of the late Oklahoma summer. Air-cooled hotel rooms in Norman and Oklahoma City had been found and reserved for all of them. Coaches Bud Wilkinson and Frank Leahy had stolen away from their charges to participate in a social get-together for the press at the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City on the eve of the game.

On the radio (second) level of the press box all ten booths—one television, seven radio, and one each for Oklahoma and Notre Dame coaches, the official timer, and the stadium public address—were jammed to capacity.

All the V.I.P.'s of radio and television and all the major radio networks with coast-to-coast hookups were here—Harry Wismer of ABC-TV, Bill Stern and Bob Finnegan of ABC radio, Curt Gowdy of NBC, Art Gleason of Mutual, Joe Boland of the Irish Network, John Henry of the Big Red Network, Dick Bingham of CBS, and Bob Murphy of WKY-TV which did a live local telecast of the game.

CBS radio tardily applied for space the day before the game. We had no room. So we made room, building a temporary booth

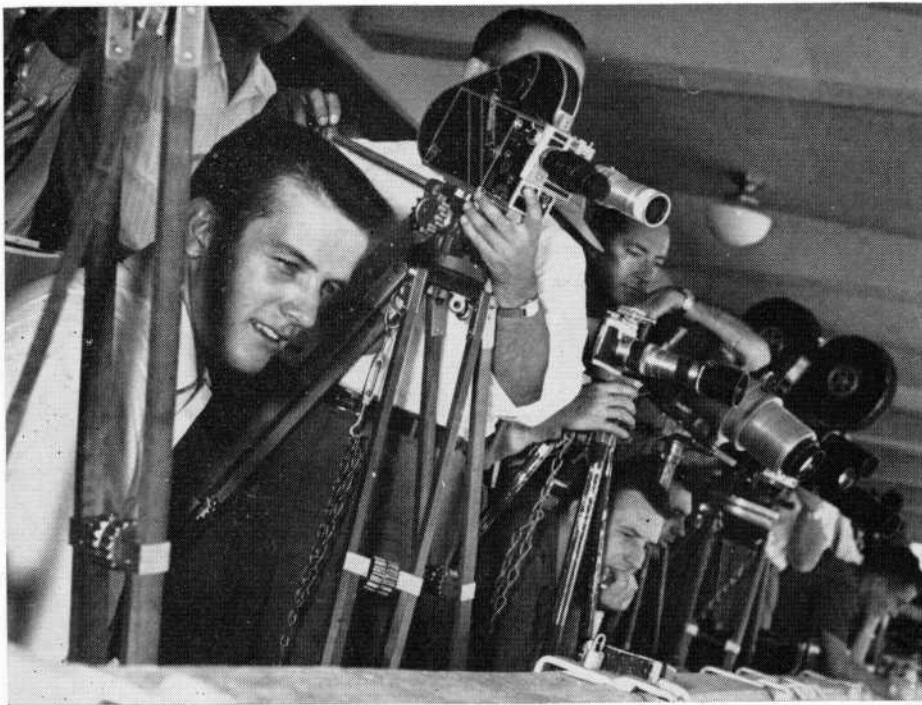
for them on the photo level amid a forest of camera tripods.

Crowded into the 19 front wall positions on the roof were Life magazine, Phillips 66's Big Seven Game of the Week, the nation's four major television newsreels (ABC-TV, NBC-TV, Telenews and UP Telefoto), Movietone, Paramount and Universal theatre newsreels, WKY-TV's three cameras, Oklahoma and Notre Dame movie cameras, and photographers from the Daily Oklahoman, Kansas City Star, Tulsa World, Wichita Eagle, and Muskogee (Okla.) Phoenix.

Unexpected complications always show up the first game of the season, in press box strategy as well as on the football field.

When the new Oklahoma press box was built in 1950, we bragged that it probably afforded sports writers more room—foot room, elbow room, aisle room, typing room—in which to do their job than any other press box in the country.

But this was a grandpappy of a game as far as press coverage was concerned. Not only were all 67 red leather swivel stools in the writers' (first) level entirely occupied by shirt-sleeved sports writers and their



AT PRESS BOX'S TOP LEVEL, newsreel and TV cameras jammed every inch of available space.

special Western Union operators, but also crowded into this level were the 12 unpaid members of our statistics crew and 23 special Western Union operators sitting back to back in the upstairs aisle.

During the summer we had built a temporary balcony on the press box roof for 34 additional sports writers and arranged another overflow section of chairs on the sideline. All these accommodations were full.

In addition, cameramen and writers assigned to cover the sideline and the crowd and color in the stadium used the facilities of the box for writing cutlines and identi-

*The author of this fast-moving article, Mrs. Addie Lee Barker, '39journ, for the past three years has been assistant to Harold Keith, '29ba, '39ma, director of sports publicity.*

*Known to hundreds of grateful sports writers and sportscasters all over the nation, she serves the University as a writer, researcher and in an important public relations capacity. Besides, she is Keith's secretary, the job for which she was originally hired, and supervises his busy office which maintains a live contact with magazines, newspapers, radio and television stations all over the country.*

*In addition to the pressures of her job, which entails much overtime, she is the mother of three children. Her father, the late Claud Pickard, was a well-known early-day Norman business man, played left end on the University football team of 1904, and served as sheriff of Cleveland county for two terms on the Republican ticket.*

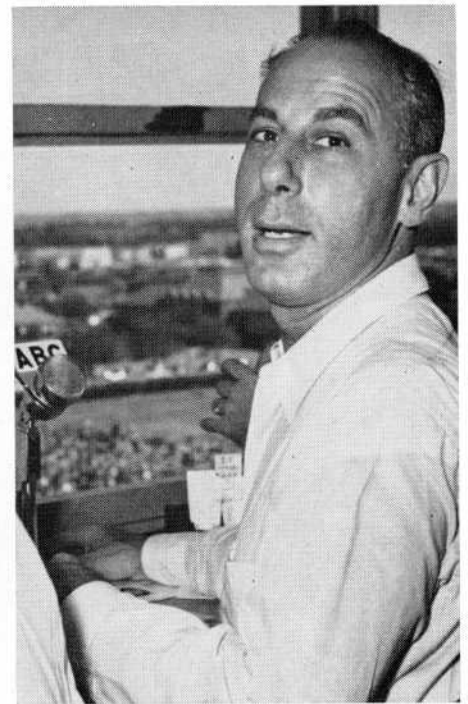
fications for their stories and features and grabbed a bite to eat at the snack bar on the writers' level.

That snack bar did a rushing business. Its purpose is to give the busy writers lunch on the working site so they won't have to stand in line for hours at some restaurant and be late for the game.

The menu for the Notre Dame game included 254 pounds of fried pheasant chicken, 500 ham sandwiches, 300 bread and butter sandwiches, 50 relish sandwiches, sweet pickles, potato chips, 750 cups of coffee, milk, Coca-Cola, Dr. Pepper, 7-Up, and doughnuts. The food bar opened at noon and served cafeteria style throughout the game. After the game and until nearly dark, hot coffee and doughnuts were served continuously to the sports writers busily filing their stories amid the hubbub of voices, clatter of typewriters, and click-clack of telegraph keys.

Two special busses had picked up members of the working press who had had hotel accommodations in Oklahoma City or had arrived there by plane or train the morning of the game and brought them directly to the press box at Owen Field. Immediately after the game, one bus took a load back to Oklahoma City while the second bus waited for the remaining writers who needed more time to write and wire their stories.

Valuable assistance was rendered by the state highway patrol and University police who escorted some newsreel, television and radio crews through the snarled traffic immediately after the game to catch planes from the University's Max Westheimer

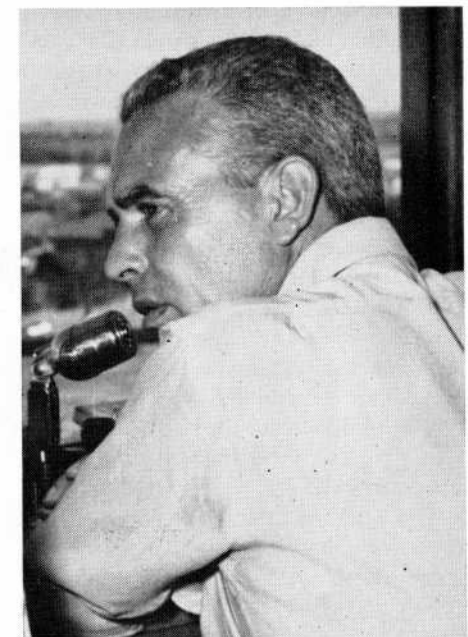


BILL STERN covered for ABC radio network.

field at the North Campus or scheduled flights from the Oklahoma City airport and thus meet Sunday deadlines in baseball or professional football hundreds of miles away.

On Friday afternoon before the game our student helpers had lugged boxes of official programs, forms for keeping the statistics of the game, our stiff cardboard "flip" cards which listed three-deeps and rosters of each team, a line-up sheet and special press program, programs for pre-game and half-time activities, pencils, carbons, yellow copy paper, typewriters, a ditto

Continued page 17



ART GLEASON did play-by-play for Mutual radio.

ville, is stationed at Ft. Lee, Virginia, with the Army. He formerly was a junior engineer for Cities Service Oil Company.

John C. Reddell, '53bs, is a football coach in Oklahoma City. He has one child, John Calvin, Jr., 2.

Thomas J. Abbott, Jr., '53pharm, is stationed at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, with the U. S. Army. He was formerly a pharmacist at Doolen's Pharmacy, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Phyllis Virginia Jarvis, '53ed, is teaching English in Sayre, Oklahoma.

Richard Lee Jones, '53eng, is an engineer trainee employed by the Gulf Oil Corporation. He, Mrs. Jones, Kaye Margaret, 2½, and Lynn Carolyn, 3 months, are at home in Crane, Texas.

Mrs. Phyllis Elsbeth Black, '53ed, is living in Yoder, Wyoming. She has two children, Nancy Elsbeth, 4, and Michael Alan, 2 months.

Dr. John H. Floyd, '53med, is living in Bethany, Oklahoma, and is an interne at University Hospital, Oklahoma City. He has one son, Marvin Dean, 1.

Sidney H. Jenkins, Jr., '53ph.d, is a research chemist and living at 3819 Nancy Avenue, Wilmington 8, Delaware. He has two children, Scott Hugh, 4, and Polly Porter, 1.

side line passes. Also a log of those to whom we had issued parking permits to drive their station wagons or cars close enough to the press box gate to unload their heavy equipment. Also hundreds of match books and a box of aspirin.

Spotters, cue men, and caption writers are essential for radio and television broadcasters as well as photographers, movie and newsreel crews. We must obtain someone who can recognize and preferably has memorized the numbers and positions of all players and who is familiar with the team's plays and offense. Freshman football players, a recent letterman, or an injured member of the football squad are preferred. Twenty-five spotters were required for the Notre Dame game. The final list included track stars, baseball players, a swimmer, and several Norman high school football players.

One hour before the kickoff, our Belfry of Bedlam was packed and jammed but the elevator still labored incessantly from floor to floor. A thousand people seemed to be asking questions.

"Where can we get another typewriter?"

"Am I supposed to type with this thing on my lap?"

"Please find our spotter and tell him to report to the roof. If you don't locate him in five minutes, can you get someone else up here in a hurry?"

"Hey, where's the telephone man? This teletype's gone haywire!"

"What's the temperature and wind velocity now?"

"What's the estimated crowd here today?"

The phone buzzed constantly. Even though the stands were not yet filled nor the stadium public address turned on, every town in Oklahoma seemed to have an emergency to report. Notes flowed up the elevator pipeline from working newsmen who had forgotten or lost their passes and

<p>PHONE 48 CLARK CLEANERS LAUNDRY 750 Asp, Norman</p>
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## Belfry of Bedlam

Continued from page 10

machine, and football brochures and distributed them at each position in the box. Other essentials included a copy of the doctors' register and a check list of the names of all persons issued press box or

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couldn't get on the elevator. We got them all in.

With the kickoff, quiet and concentration replaced the pandemonium in the press box. Everybody started doing his job. The steady clatter of typewriters, an occasional question over the inter-com, and the press box announcer calling off the plays down on the field supplanted all conversation. Writers ignored the ringing phone as a doctor called to register, reports came in of wallets or keys lost or found, a "joker" wanted a very funny announcement made over the stadium public address, or someone had to know how Slippery Rock was doing.

An old grad phoned clear from California offering a hundred bucks to anyone who would cut off the air a national sportscaster he disliked or fancied wasn't doing justice to the Oklahoma team. Someone even wanted to talk to Coach Wilkinson. Just put the coach on the line and he'd tell him how to win the game.

But win or lose, this bit of strategy had to be saved for another day.

Throughout the hard-fought game a steady stream of dittoed information was passed unobtrusively to each writer and also fed into each radio and television booth. The play-by-play was distributed after each quarter, team statistics at the half, and at the end of the game a "quickie" summary sheet, lineups, team and individual statistics, complete play-by-play and statements of coaches and players from the rival dressing rooms.

Finally, at 7:30 p.m., the last Western Union operator departed. The lime-striped field below upon which our team had fought so well even in defeat was cloaked in shadow. The press box, fantastically littered with paper cups, soiled programs and coffee stains, was at last silent and empty. The lights were turned off, the windows closed and the whirring elevator took its final load down.

Sleep came easily as ND-Day 1953 ended at last. Operation Pressbox, for which we had planned so strenuously for ten long months, was finally completed.

Or was it? At midnight the long distance telephone shrilled. Bill Stern, ABC's radio broadcaster was on the line. He was calling from Chicago where his plane had just landed. He was awfully sorry but he had left his thick-lensed brown tortoise shell horn rims in his press box radio booth. Could we please air mail them Sunday to him in New York?

We did. Ten days later we receive a letter of thanks.

"You will be amazed to know," he concluded, "I promptly left them in Purdue the next week. All I need is a new head."

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