

Chief of Radio-TV Station Here Also Doubles As Writer-Journalist

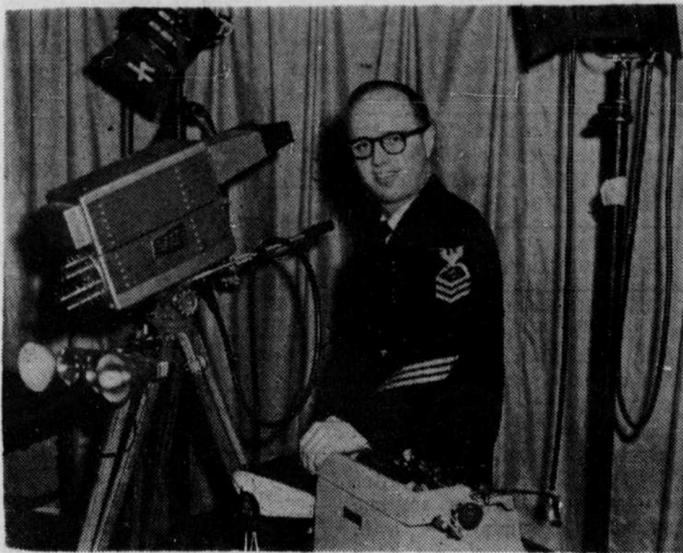
By Miriam J. Angell

Chief Journalist Fred Grant Harden, Chief-in-Charge of the Navy's radio and television station on Kodiak, greeted us on interview day recently with the request that we let him write his story rather than try to tell it, because, "I'm much more accustomed to banging out things on the typewriter than I am to talking about myself to others." We gladly agreed to take a vacation and let him do the work; we've edited a bit, to fit the material into our space, but otherwise the story is his.

"With my Navy career coming close to twenty years and retirement," Chief Harden began, "I am beginning to wonder what to do with myself when the door closes on active duty. It's been such a busy nineteen years." The Navy journalist has spent all his available free time writing fiction and articles for national magazines ever since the day in 1940 when he received his first rejection slip, from Redbook Magazine. "It was a typical first story, full of impossible situations with an O. Henry ending, but the day I got that little pink rejection slip was a proud day in my life. I'd wanted for a long time to be a writer and I ran around with that notice in my pocket for weeks, jumping at every chance to flash it around to show people I was an honest to good-

ness writer. In 1941 I deserted high school in my junior year for the call of the sea and far away places. After boot camp the Navy put me to work editing the station paper on Treasure Island, all the while training me for Convoy Gun Crews, later called the Armed Guard. Although I've done personal penance all these years for not finishing high school, that following year and a half in the Armed Guard was an education in itself. Aboard the merchant ships we protected, we visited ports that the Fleet, as a rule, never sees. We docked in Hawaii, the Aleutians, Samoa, Panama, South Africa, Iran, India, Brazil, Trinidad, and Australia. For one with ambitions to become another Steinbeck or Hemingway, it was a time packed with adventure and romance." The chief's subsequent duties more often than not gave him opportunities to ply his craft: editor of Navy newspapers, on the staff of All Hands Magazine, and duty with a number of Navy Public Information Staffs in San Francisco, Key West, San Diego and Yokosuka, Japan.

The Kodiak-based sailor has made some progress, writing-wise, since his first spurned offering back in 1940. He has had articles and fiction published in American Magazine, This Week Magazine, Pic, Coronet, Popular Me-



Chief Fred Grant Harden

Staff photo

chanics and a score of magazines whose titles he refuses to name for what he calls 'professional reasons.' The latter group includes some classified as modern-day pulps, or magazines that pay little for material, and then only on publication, "if you're patient enough and persistent enough."

"I've written so many 'fact pieces' for the pulps that were such pure fiction, and under such an assortment of nom de plumes, that I would have a hard time identifying some of these bits I wrote just a couple years ago. In my fact fiction I have wrestled orangutans in Borneo, hunted sunken treasure in the Florida Keys, and climbed up and down the Valley of the 10,000 Smokes for an Alaskan Abominable snowman. The going price for most of this type of male adventure stuff is two cents a word, but most of it can be cranked out in a night's session at the typewriter, once you learn the gift of giving them what they want.

"A nom de plume is essential for a writer who cuts it now and then for the 'slicks' as I have been fortunate to do a few times. The 'legit' magazines, like Coronet and the Post, who pay good money for the material they buy, object to having the names of their writers appearing in the pulps.

"However, the would-be writer who sneers at the pulps and re-

fuses to consider any market but one of the quality of the New Yorker is living in a vacuum of vainness which can cost him a good deal of constructive writing time. There's only one way to be a writer, and that is to write. Five hundred words a day, good or bad, develops the discipline that makes professionals out of procrastinators. On this subject I speak with some knowledge; about twelve years ago I sold a small article to one of the obscure technical military magazines. The check was as small as the article, averaging out to about half a cent a word. I showed it to a good friend of mine, a Navy Commander who was selling to outfits like the Post, and I mumbled something about it being a lousy market, but a check was a check.

Well, CDR Bosworth sat back in his swivel chair and pulled on his pipe. Finally he spoke, 'Fred, don't ever knock a market you've sold to. Anything you write and sell is a lot better than not writing at all, or writing something and not selling it. I began selling my first stories to Breezy Westerns and I've never been ashamed of it.' And this came from a man who was commanding a thousand dollars a piece for 1600 word short stories in This Week Magazine, and who was then rated as one of the top ten writers of Western

novels. (Just recently, Harpers published his book, "The Lovely World of Richi-san)."

Chief Harden is putting the finishing touches on a novel, entitled 'Heard the Eagle Scream', 100,000 words that he hopes to scale down to 80,000 before he sends them on to his agent.

"An agent is a necessity once you begin to sell regularly to the so-called slicks. The agent's ten percent cut of the pie is worth every bit of it; he frees you of the time consuming task of sending yourself out to market, and in most cases, he can obtain a higher price for a story or article than can the writer who deals directly with an editor."

Chief Harden transferred here as Chief-in-Charge of AFRTS Kodiak in September 1959. He has direct supervision over the station and its personnel and takes a great interest in trying to improve the program material. Currently a course of instruction in television and radio techniques is being taught at the studio and he is assisting in the course with an aim for more and better live programs. "This assignment has kept me hopping but radio and television were aspects of my journalist rating that lacked practical experience, therefore the work is more pleasure than pain. As much as I enjoy the work and value the experience I am acquiring, managing a small station like ours can be a headache at times.

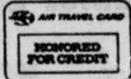
"Contrary to what it may seem at times to the TV viewing audience, we at AFRTS are really trying to do the best we can. Considering the small number of bodies we have with which to operate, and our budget limitations, I think in all modesty we are doing a whale of a job. But then I'm prejudiced."

The Chief discussed the potentials for the beginner as well as the professional writer in Alaska. He was enthusiastic about the great source of material available here. "It's a fabulous place, rich in untapped story material; like most of Alaska's natural resources, it has hardly been touched. A world outside is vitally waiting for an Alaskan Thomas Wolfe or Pearl Buck to make their debut. Alaska had Robert Service and Jack Lon-

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