

MEMORANDUM OF EUROPEAN WAR COVERAGE

(As adopted by a committee of the National Association of Broadcasters in New York, September 7, 1939)

General

Every effort consistent with the news itself is to be made to avoid horror, suspense and undue excitement. Particular effort will be made to avoid suspense in cases where the information causing the suspense is of no particular use to the listener. For example, news of air raid alarms should not be broadcast until we actually learn whether or not there has been an air raid. Also, we will avoid descriptions of hypothetical horrors which have not actually occurred, such as discussing the things that might go on if another ship were to be torpedoed. In all broadcasts about the plight of refugees, the number of killed and wounded, and so on, we will use our best news judgment and try to avoid undue shock to the radio audience, without taking upon ourselves an unjustifiable responsibility for concealing how bad the war really is.

Broadcasters will make every effort to be temperate, responsible, and mature in selecting the manner in which they make the facts of war and its attendant circumstances known to the audience.

Broadcasters will, at all times, try to distinguish between fact, official statement, news obtained from responsible official or unofficial sources, rumor, and matter taken from or contained in the foreign press or other publications, so that, by reporting and identifying these sources, we can help the radio audience as much as possible to evaluate the news brought to it.

The radio audience should be clearly informed that the news from many sources, whether it be press bulletins or direct broadcasts, is censored and must be appraised in the light of this censorship.

Broadcasts from Europe

Broadcasters will designate, if they choose, broadcasts of news and news analysis, either or both, from Europe at such intervals as they individually deem to be desirable. It is advisable that these broadcasts be by Americans as far as possible, and that each individual broadcaster instruct the persons he employs, either permanently or temporarily, in the general principles set forth here. Insofar as European broadcasts contain news analysis, they are to conform to the definition of news analysis hereinafter set forth.

Speeches by foreigners from abroad, public proclamations and statements, and like matter are to be handled by each individual broadcaster in such manner as he deems best to serve his audience, but it is essential that fairness to all belligerents be maintained and that this phase of the operations be carried out in such a way that the American audience shall be as completely and fairly informed as possible.

Broadcasters recognize that, if they do not handle the war with complete responsibility toward the American people, and if they deviate from these principles, they run the danger of involving all other broadcasters in the consequences of their acts. The operation of these principles should include at all times a strong responsibility toward the industry as a whole.

Remotes

If broadcasts become available from scenes of battle, bombed areas, air-raid shelters, refugee camps and so on, broadcasters will not deprive the audience of the ability of radio to give them first-hand information,

but will use taste and judgment to prevent such broadcasts from being unduly harrowing.

Propaganda from Europe

If broadcasters put on propaganda disseminated by radio stations or the press of European countries or distributed by these countries in any other manner, each will be guided by his own news judgment and endeavor to label precisely the sources of the material, and to do this sufficiently often so that no reasonably careful listener is likely to be misled, and he will also be governed by the same rules of fairness in presenting all sides, though not necessarily in the same broadcast, nor need this judgment be a quantitative one. In this connection, it is recognized that there are certain hazards in bringing these broadcasts direct to this country and extreme care will be exercised in so doing.

Domestic News

All the foregoing general principles will of course apply to domestic broadcasts on any phase of the war. All news broadcasts, whether sponsored or unsponsored, are to remain in the strictest control of the broadcaster in order that the standards herein set forth may be maintained. News analysts are at all times to be confined strictly to explaining and evaluating such fact, rumor, propaganda, and so on, as are available. No news analyst or news broadcaster of any kind is to be allowed to express personal editorial judgment or to select or omit news with the purpose of creating any given effect, and no news analyst or other news broadcaster is to be allowed to say

anything in an effort to influence action or opinion of others one way or the other. Nothing in this is intended to forbid any news broadcaster from attempting to evaluate the news as it develops, provided he substantiates his evaluation with facts and attendant circumstances. His basis for evaluation should of course be impersonal, sincere and honest.

In order not to keep the public unduly disturbed and alarmed, each broadcaster, exercising his own news judgment, will endeavor to interrupt programs for news bulletins as little as seems consistent with good operations.

Commercial Programs

No propaganda in connection with the war will be allowed in either the commercial announcements or the context of commercial programs. Nothing in this shall be interpreted as barring straight news or news analysis, as herein have been described, from commercial programs.

Speeches

The safeguards of fairness and program balance now applied in the handling of speeches on controversial issues will continue to be applied and, in order to make this effective, every effort will be made to obtain the text of speeches before they are scheduled.