

National Association of Broadcasters

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What Radio Is Doing In The War

(This report was given by Walt Dennis, NAB news bureau chief, before the National Conference of Entertainment Industry for War Activities in New York City, June 3-4. The material in it is offered herewith to broadcasters for possible use in their public relations work in their communities, such as in civic club talks, etc.).

When the word radio is used today, it is generally used in a commonplace sense. Of all the miracles of science which have been developed in the last century, radio has been the greatest which we now take for granted. To me radio means power. The power to fashion and mold the minds, lives and emotions of men. It is an instrument of information and entertainment with a potential so vast we should stand in awe of its accomplishments and its future promise.

Some portion of that power and some portion of that future have been revealed during this war—for war is the crucible in which science labors at white heat to fashion the great devices of peace into the weapons of war. Radio has been and is so being used and worked so that when peace again blesses us, radio will step forward to serve mankind in many new ways.

But my purpose today is not to clothe the mystery of radio in the poor raiment of my words, but to talk about the use of radio in the entertainment and information fields and especially its use to those ends in war time.

American radio at war breaks down into three categories—the domestic, the shortwave for overseas and foreign consumption and the technical, such as radar.

In order that you receive my report as I should like to have you receive it, I must tell you that I feel that radio is merely the instrument through which men and women, such as you in the entertainment world, transmit their art to our services and allies here and abroad.

When I think of radio in that sense I think of people working—working hard and selflessly—day and night to do their bit in their way to lighten the burden now resting on the shoulders of those who wear the uniforms of U. S. soldiers, sailors and marines.

And now it is time to talk of you—for you are the people of whom I am thinking. Your work could be translated into columns of statistics about the numbers—the thousands of programs and appearances you have broadcast and made at our camps in this country—the thousands of broadcasts and appearances you have made to the troops overseas, but statistics have always seemed like skeletons to me, clanking around in cold symmetry with no flesh and blood to give them life.

Rather do I see Edgar Bergen and that scamp Charlie McCarthy up in Alaska doing shows—and, yes, doing something else. How many of you know we have a hospital up at Dutch Harbor where battle-shocked soldiers and civilians are being nursed back to sanity? Maybe some of you know what Edgar and Charlie did for one civilian there not long after the Dutch Harbor raid. This unfortunate person would constantly take off his clothes and try to bathe himself—he didn't know who he was—or much else. Charlie and Edgar visited him and did a bit of patter. Months and months of listening to the radio—to Charlie McCarthy—had their effect. Charlie registered. The sick mind snapped back and today the man is well again.