

RODERICK "SCOOPS" THE WORLD

JAMES THURBER once wrote a fable about two sheep who visited Wolfland to see what went on in the camp of their proverbial enemy.

After they had been in Wolfland for two or three hours one of the sheep (both of whom were in wolves' clothing) began to take notes with the intention of writing a book, "My 24 Hours in Wolfland."

The second sheep noticed what the first was up to and began to write a yarn, "My 12 Hours in Wolfland."

Whereupon the first sheep caught on to what the second was doing and wired a book to his publisher, "My Six Hours in Wolfland." The second called him in by phone to the *Sheep-land Times*.

The day the sheep arrived happened to be fete day in Wolfland, so in their accounts both writers told the same story: that the wolves were just like sheep, that they danced and gambolled about and had a good time all day.

Thurber records that, as a result of their epistles, Sheepland people tore down the barriers between the two countries and the wolves, their fete day over, entered and devoured the sheep.

In his moral to the fable, Thurber points acidly to the irresponsible journalist, "Don't get it right. Just get it written."

The idea of getting a story first, of course, is popularly known as the first principle guiding the actions of a newspaperman.

Absolutely as important to the good journalist, however, is that he get the story right.

Because a real "scoop" of world-wide interest is a once-in-a-life-time event, there is a terrible temptation for a newsman to gamble his professional future by filing a story of bulletin proportions on the basis of unconfirmed information in his possession. If he holds it 10 minutes, he may lose it to the opposition.

If his story is confirmed, he is made.

If it is not confirmed, he has jeopardized his own future, impaired the integrity of his organization and may have committed the disaster so point-



John Roderick, '36, (right) and friend, LIN TZU-han, chairman of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region Government, Communist Party leader, popular member ruling polithureau, Yen-an, China. (Associated Press Photo taken in Yen-an, Jan. 1947.)

edly illustrated in Thurber's fable.

Such a temptation came to John Roderick, '36, on Friday, September 17, 1948, when, as an Associated Press Staffer in Palestine, he held unconfirmed reports of tremendous significance to a world expecting the worst from the smoldering Holy Land.

Roderick, being the good journalist he is, "got it right" and still "scooped" the world.

The details of his work on this occasion are carried below in a story issued by the Associated Press:

"AP scored a beat of smash proportions Friday, September 17, on the assassination of Count Bernadotte in Jerusalem. The fast, enterprising work of John Roderick produced margins of 20 to 30 minutes in the U. S., 8 to 45 minutes in Europe.

"Ed Dooley, executive news editor of the *Denver Post*, said, 'AP coverage of Bernadotte major achievement; we

were going to press with AP when other two services were filing first bulletin matter. John Roderick's detailed story terrific.' The Portland, Ore., *Journal* was 'in composing room with story and banner before another service showed.' In a spot check, 12 sharply-competitive metropolitan afternoon newspapers were unanimous in preferring AP.

"Stockholm editors, stunned by their countryman's death, printed fly-sheets or posted AP bulletins in office windows. *France Soir* in Paris and *Momento Sera* in Rome issued extra editions with AP bulletins. We were 20 minutes ahead of another service in Copenhagen, won exclusive bannerlines in three Berlin morning newspapers. The story broke too late for London afternoon newspapers but we were alone with first radio bulletins there, in Amsterdam and in Brussels."

Roderick's own story:

"Bernadotte himself indirectly contributed a major assist to the story of his death. I'd picked him up in Damascus on his tour of Arab capitals. After covering his night news conference, I found I was unable by air or highway to get to Jerusalem in time to intercept him there the following morning.

"I asked the Count if I could fly with him. If he had not consented, I'd have been left high and dry in Damascus.

"At Jerusalem, I was met by Zein Nagati, of AP's Amman staff, and Photographer Aly Abu Zarur. We followed the Count until he crossed No Man's Land to the Jewish side, then returned to Amman (approximately 75

miles away) to file the story of his arrival.

"I'd just finished when a United Nations man burst in and shouted, 'This is it. Bernadotte's been killed!' A radio message had just come in. I ran down to the radio room, copied the first message and sent Nagati packing off to the telegraph office. Then I remembered that fake messages had been coming in to the Count over the United Nations wavelength. Only the day before, one had reported erroneously that Gen. Aage Lundstroem of Bernadotte's staff had been killed. I added this information to the bulletin. (This first bulletin was not distributed to members. New York decided that, in view of Roderick's careful warning

against possible faking, we needed more authentication.)

"A phone call to the Arab Legion failed to confirm the report. King Abdullah, queried personally by Nagati at the palace, knew nothing of the tragedy. Calls to Jerusalem evoked nothing. Finally—1¼ hours after the first bulletin—a United Nations phone call brought official confirmation.

"We knew we were out in front when Nagati found an opposition staffer diligently copying our Urgent in the censor's office!

"When it was all over, I had one valuable souvenir. It was a \$10 travelers check signed by the Count on the day he died. My hotel gave it to me as change."

Roderick's Career

John Roderick is a native of Waterville where he began his journalistic career with the Waterville Sentinel under the direction of Edward Talberth, now political writer for the Ganett papers, with headquarters in Portland.

He worked with the Sentinel all through his college days and won a leave of absence from the Sentinel to serve with the AP for the Legislative Session at Augusta in 1937.

Later he joined the AP bureau in Portland and still later was transferred to the Washington regional staff, leaving it for Army duty in 1942.

Most soldiers headed as directly as possible for home when their time for discharge came, but not John who was in China when his time ran out. He rejoined AP on the spot, at Chungking, on Nov. 1, 1945. Two months later he was sending out to the world some amazing tales on Chinese Communist activities written from the caves of Yen-an, which, it appears from the AP photo on the previous page, housed Communist headquarters.

John joined the Palestine staff of AP on August 11 of 1948, transferring from Peiping, China.

His big story break on Bernadotte is all the more remarkable when it is known that he had been in Palestine but a few days more than a month, but still knew his way around well enough to beat out correspondents on the scene for many months.

He Attended Classes Days, Worked Nights

AT COLBY, John Roderick was known by his associates as "the man who went to college all day and worked for the *Waterville Sentinel* all night," according to Dwight E. Sargent, '39, editor of the *Portland Press Herald*.

Sargent writes: "I knew John both at Colby and in newspaper work. He used to amaze us at Colby where he was known as the man who went to college all day and worked for the *Waterville Sentinel* all night. How he could keep smiling under these circumstances is beyond me, but somehow he managed to do it.

"He was my boss much of the time when I worked at the Legislature for the AP. He was a superior newsman, a man of great imagination. He was able to inject color into dull stories when the rest of us couldn't see any available.

"He is a good poker player and a great collector of the miscellaneous. To a considerable extent he's a connoisseur of good music and good food.

"His quick development as a writer was due to a constant curiosity about everything. He liked to travel, to meet new people, to talk with them."

Another associate in the field of Journalism who has nought but the highest regard for Roderick's work is the man who brought John into the Associated Press, Frank Murphy, chief of the AP Bureau in Portland, Maine.

"John Roderick—memories of a

gallant, cheerful, energetic staffer came to mind with a nostalgic twinge at mention of the name.

"Proudly do we of the Portland bureau follow John's success abroad. We knew him when—. Early did we perceive that in our midst was one whose success potential was great.

"Having brought John into AP, it has been with understandable personal pride that I have watched his progress.

"John came to AP on leave from the *Waterville Sentinel*. He joined the temporary staff covering the legislature at Augusta. After that we brought him to Portland—thanks to generous *Sentinel* editors who did not hold him back when he wished to seek wider fields.

"Blessed with a natural gift of words, a gift that Colby education certainly augmented, John was an agile lad behind his typewriter. It was no drab product that rolled from it. He was able to see and inject the sparkle another might have missed. His descriptive writing warmed the hearts of those under whom and with whom he worked. And, amusingly enough, like all geniuses, his abhorrence of routine work was quite evident.

"Certainly the field of journalism is richer for having had men like John.

"We often smile here when we think of an instance that illustrates John's ability and love for journalism.

"It was John's day off when a Presidential candidate came to Portland on
(Continued on Page 12, Col. 1)