

**JESSEL:**

"I've read a lot of things that look like the publishers don't like the United States."

**NEWMAN:**

"One does not accuse newspapers of being Communist, which you have just done."

By William Greider

George Jessel, the Hollywood comedian, made a little joke on television yesterday equating The Washington Post and The New York Times with the Soviet newspaper Pravda, only NBC interviewer Edwin Newman wasn't laughing.

Newman, hosting the Today show, abruptly ended the interview and dismissed Jessel from the program.

"I don't think we're obliged," the TV newsman said afterwards, "to invite anyone on to malign or slander anyone he pleases."

"I meant it as a gag," Jessel complained. "I was on a show a few weeks ago and a woman damned Christianity and all the religions of the world but they didn't throw her off. So why can't I rap newspapers? God doesn't publish the newspapers."

Jessel, wearing a USO military uniform decorated with a general's three stars, appeared on the show to discuss his recent tours of U.S. bases in Europe and his upcoming visit to Vietnam, his seventh during the war there. The 73-year-old entertainer complained about "wildly exaggerated" press reports about the Army's troubles and stumbled on "Pravda" before naming The Times and The Post, a rhetorical gimmick which



—The Washington Post

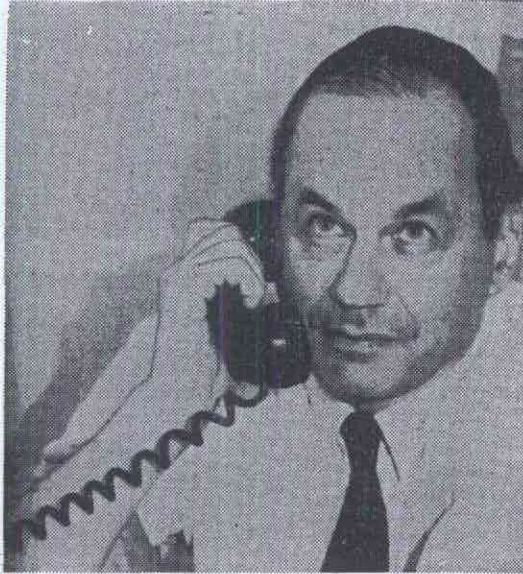
After a tour of Vietnam in 1966 George Jessel visited the White House where he displayed a certificate of appreciation given to him by Gen. William C. Westmoreland.



the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy popularized in his anti-Communist speeches.

"I am happy to report and that's why I asked your permission to get on here," Jessel told Newman, "that the moral of our men in Europe is very high and we're strong on the borders of Czechoslovakia and strong on the borders of Eastern

Germany. If they start on anything there, they'll get in a real you-know, regardless of McCloskey and Muskie and Mansfield. They'll fight and they'll lick these other guys. But, of course, when you pick up Pravda—The New York Times—you generally see, oh, they're all



Photos by Associated Press

*Comedian George Jessel, dressed in a USO military uniform decorated with a general's three stars, appeared on NBC's Today show yesterday. But Edwin Newman, host of the Today show, didn't laugh at Jessel's little joke.*

full of dope and killing children, drunk."

Newman and his fellow interviewer, Joe Garagiola, let that pass, but Jessel tried the gag again a moment later.

"We have a habit, some strange new thing, with the communique (sic) being anti-American with everybody negative," he complained. On a recent tour of America, he was impressed by the beautiful weather—"then you pick up a paper, you know, Pravda—The Washington Post—and you

see, 'Hundreds Die Of Pollution.'"

Newman was not amused.

"You are a guest here," he told Jessel, "but I don't really think very much of this talk about Pravda—excuse me, The New York Times; Pravda—excuse me, The Washington Post. I think that's silly, I do."

"Edwin, you have your opinion and I have mine," Jessel replied. "But the point that I want to make—"

Newman: "No, no, hold on a second."

Jessel: "Surely."

Newman: "I think what you're saying, if you mean

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it, is extremely serious. It's not the kind of thing—"

Jessel: "Surely."

Newman: "It is not the kind of thing one tosses off. One does not accuse newspapers of being Communist, which you have just done."

Jessel: "Oh, I didn't mean it that way, Edwin."

Newman: "What did you mean?"

Jessel: "Oh, I just . . ."

Newman: "What did you mean when you said it?"

Jessel: "Oh, it's a newspaper. I didn't mean it quite that way."

Newman: "You didn't mean it quite that way?"

Jessel: "I won't say it again."

Newman: "I agree that you won't say it again. Thank you very much, Mr. Jessel."

Jessel: "I just want to say one thing before I leave."

Newman: "Please don't."

At that point, Newman interrupted for a commercial, three minutes before the interview was scheduled to end. When he returned to the screen, Jessel was gone. Newman told the audience:

"Well, I'm a little sorry about that incident. I hope I did the right thing and I guess the best thing to do at the moment is to forget about it."

Newman, who was filling in for Hugh Downs as host on the program, said afterwards that, besides the derogatory references to the press, he was upset because "the interview was barely coherent, rambling, meandering."

"Certainly, it's not my intention to say anything unkind about Mr. Jessel," Newman said. "I'd never even met him before this. But if you read the transcript, you'll see that interview made very, very little sense."

Television, he said, must enforce "certain standards of conduct" in its interviewing. "It didn't seem to me we have any obligation to allow people to come on to traduce the reputations of anyone they want, to abuse people they don't like," the broadcaster explained.

Jessel said afterwards he was treated poorly, but he forgives Newman.

"He should have been a little bit kinder to a man whose only vice is that he loves his country," Jessel said. "And I don't consider that a vice."

While the comedian said

he did not intend to imply that The Post and The Times are Communist, he does feel strongly that the two newspapers dwell on the bad news about America in the same way that Pravda would.

"If you have a delinquent child, you don't go to the window and holler to the world, 'Hey, I've got a delinquent child,' do you?" Jessel asked. "In these bad times, our virtues should be emphasized, not our vices."

Jessel said that during his recent tour of Europe, "people say to me, 'Oh, your soldiers shoot children and they're full of dope.' It isn't so . . . I think somebody should stick up for our soldiers instead of knocking them all the time."

As for The Post and The Times: "I've read a lot of things that look like the publishers don't like the United States."

That negative outlook, Jessel added drolly, is also reflected in the Paris Herald-Tribune, which is owned jointly by The Post and The Times.

"The baseball scores look like nobody ever wins," he cracked.

Jessel said that, if his comments offended Newman, the interviewer should have switched the conversation to another subject rather than kicking him off the air.

"But I forgive him," the comedian said. "Mr. Newman is a newspaperman and he defends newspapers. I'm in show business and sometimes I defend show business."

Newman's boss, NBC News President Reuven Frank praised the interviewer.

"He acted wisely and in the best possible taste to correct a live broadcast situation which seemed to be getting out of hand."

NBC reported a flurry of telephone calls from viewers—running 3-to-1 in support of Newman's action. It was Newman's last day on the show and he left on vacation.

The New York Times and The Washington Post declined to comment on the episode.

Pravda, however, was offended by the comparison. "I can testify," said Thomas Kolesnichenko, the newspaper's New York correspondent, "that there is a big difference between the way you publish the news and the way we do."