

## NBC's Supersleuth

On the TV screen, he's all but faceless. The camera peers over his shoulder as he grills an informant or witness. He avoids publicity, usually works alone and few of his NBC News colleagues have met him. And his background in journalism—until he joined the network two years ago—was nil. Yet Walter Sheridan, 41, an ex-sleuth for both the FBI and the Justice Department, is now television's most talked-about investigative reporter. "He's tough, shrewd, able and dedicated," says a friend in the government. "He has an entree into law-enforcement files all over the country. Hiring Sheridan was like hiring J. Edgar Hoover."

Sandy-haired and unobtrusive in appearance, Sheridan is any forgotten face in a crowd. But the results of his digging have provided NBC with some of its most memorable documentaries. Last

and the FBI is a right-wing organization." As for the NSA, he grew to abhor its bureaucratic aura of dossiers and polygraphs—"I felt cut off from the world."

But Sheridan found it hard to escape from Washington. His talents soon led him back into the Justice Department where Attorney General Robert Kennedy made him chief of the "get Hoffa" squad. Finally, after two years of living out of a suitcase, he was instrumental in winning Hoffa's 1964 conviction. Turning down a staff job with newly elected Senator Kennedy, he decided to satisfy an old urge to become a journalist. "I want to hit people between the eyes," he says. "I want to talk about things that have not yet been talked about, like the hypocrisies in country clubs and quotas in medical schools."

Zeal was no substitute for experience, and the job-hunting Sheridan—who now lives in Bethesda, Md., with his wife, five children and two dogs—went to one

loose as most reporters," says one journalist. "He's an intense man, with a purpose. You have more respect for him than affection."

Not surprisingly, Sheridan's relentless pursuit has led to counterattacks. This summer he shuttled back and forth to Chicago to face a charge by Zachary Strate, a Hoffa associate and owner of Miami's Eden Roc Hotel who had been convicted of mail fraud. Strate claimed that Sheridan offered him evidence of wiretapping as the basis for a new trial if he would help Sheridan "get" Jim Garrison. The case was thrown out of court. What's more, after NBC's program attacking Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney arrested Sheridan on a charge of bribing a state witness. The case has yet to come up for trial.

With NBC ready and willing to put up the cash for legal fees, Sheridan finds it easy to take a detached view. "It looks like an awful lot of trouble in a very short time," he admits. "But when you get into these areas, you're creating problems for people. They're going to shoot at you."



Newsweek—Tony Rollo

Reporter Sheridan: 'I want to hit people between the eyes'

year, he livened up a show on organized crime by producing a gaggle of underworld types, from bagmen to loan sharks. In June, he burrowed into the Kennedy assassination conspiracy alleged by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and persuaded a Turkish-bath attendant to tell how he was bribed to support the prosecution. Last month, Sheridan presented evidence of an underground conspiracy in Detroit organized to exploit the recent riots. "He's taught us a lot about finding out things," says producer Fred Freed, who heads an NBC investigative unit. "Of course," Freed adds with a smile, "his contacts help."

Sheridan's contacts, developed over fourteen years as a Federal cop, are awesome. Among his many chores: drafting professional Communists into the FBI and clearing employees for the National Security Agency, the highly secret organization dedicated to cracking foreign codes. He quit the FBI because he felt uneasy supporting Hoover's brand of anti-Communism: "I was a cut liberal,

network and several newspapers and magazines before NBC decided to take a chance. "I'd much rather have people who are good at other things but know little about TV," says Freed. "TV is easy to learn, and Walter's learning fast." Sheridan, however, is still shy before a camera—one brief appearance for the Detroit riot exposé took four hours to film because he kept blowing his lines.

**Hurts:** Off-camera, it's a different case. In Detroit, he rose regularly at dawn, using his contacts to hunt up hard-to-find pimps and pushers. To those he interviews he is sometimes a needler, sometimes a father confessor and almost always a producer of information. "He's relentless," says one New Orleans newsman who helped Sheridan round up witnesses to talk on-camera against Jim Garrison. "Where some reporters would be more human when they see they're hurting a man, Sheridan sees that it hurts, and he understands, but he doesn't stop." To fellow reporters, Walter Sheridan is a puzzling character. "He's not as

## Britain's Blubby Blup

For the teeny Briton, the dozen pirate radio stations that opened up three years ago were strictly groovy. Blaring rock and deejay patter from ack-ack forts and ships off the English coast, they pulled an army of youthful listeners away from the staid BBC. The pirate owners, however, got involved in nasty brawls among themselves; and the British Government, unhappy anyhow about the stations' unbridled commercialism, finally got tough this summer by making it illegal for any British firm either to supply the stations or to advertise on them.

It was a mortal blow for the pirates. But for the BBC, it was a chance to win back teenyboppers. Thus the BBC promptly hired almost 30 dispossessed disk jockeys, set aside a whole station and prepared the British public with blurbs recorded in an echo chamber: "Your radio is about to switch eeyooooo on!" And on came the new Radio One two weeks ago. "Let's get out of bed and twist the old kneecaps a bit," ex-pirate Tony Blackburn bumbled the first day as he set his turntable whirling. Adult listeners were startled even more by "Emperor Rosko" who taped his deejay bits sitting shirtless in the Paris studios of Radio Luxembourg. "The keeter with the teeter is your leader now," announced Rosko. "All right baby, that's blubby blup, don't wear it out and you can sing along..."

While such carryings-on were an attempt to be more trendy, the new Radio One seemed slightly out of tune. Pop purists were miffed when it banned a rock version of "God Save the Queen" and mixed square crooners like Frankie Vaughan with the Beatles. Oldsters resented the noise. As for the former pirate deejays, they bridled under the new BBC restraints. "What I miss in this studio," mourned Blackburn, "is a porthole."

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