

Nixon Aide Cites Examples of TV Networks' News

By LES BROWN

A White House aide, amplifying President Nixon's running criticism of television network news, yesterday cited a number of "subtle and sophisticated" techniques by which, he said, the networks and other media damaged and distorted the public perception of what was occurring in Government.

Bruce Herschensohn, deputy special assistant to President Nixon, suggested in a telephone interview yesterday that the failure to report certain news stories, the use of derisive labels for the President's actions, the employment of certain audiovisual tricks and the "news judgments that always seem to go against us rather than for us" all contributed to an unfavorable impression of the Nixon Administration in the public mind.

Mr. Herschensohn said there was no lack of specific documentation for the President's charge, on Oct. 26, 1973, that the networks were guilty of "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting," but he said the White House staff had been too busy with other matters to prepare a formal bill of particulars.

Such a list had been requested by the National News Council, which had hoped to investigate the specific instances of alleged distortion that prompted Mr. Nixon's broad denunciation of network news. Mr. Herschensohn said he meant to draw up such a list when he had more time.

Nevertheless, he was able to provide some examples of news-distorting techniques that he said were "off the top of my

head, and really my own observations that don't necessarily reflect what the President had in mind when he made his criticism."

In the area of omission, Mr. Herschensohn pointed to two stories never reported by the networks: a report by Joseph Alsop, the columnist, of a new theory on how the President's tapes might have been erased, which he said would have supported the White House position that the erasures were accidental, and a column by William Safire in The New York Times, indicating that H. R. Haldeman, the President's former chief of staff, was paraphrasing Mr. Nixon and not quoting him directly when he testified to the Watergate committee that the President said, on March 21, 1973, that raising hush money for the Watergate defendants "would be wrong."

Mr. Herschensohn said the label "Saturday night massacre" was adopted widely by the media to describe the sudden departures from the Administration of Archibald Cox, the special Watergate prosecutor; Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus, but then he asked, "Why didn't they call it the 'Monday night massacre' when [John W.] Dean was fired and Haldeman and [John D.] Ehrlichman resigned?"

"Operation Candor" was a term coined by The Washington Post, and picked up by others, Mr. Herschensohn said, when the President promised to clear up a number of questions concerning Watergate. "I was horrified when I saw the

label they had given it, because it suggested that the President wasn't candid before," Mr. Herschensohn said.

"It also meant that if the President didn't stay on the defensive for the next three years, they would pronounce 'Operation Candor' at an end—and that's exactly what happened," he said.

He also noted that the Columbia Broadcasting System titled its documentary on the Middle East alert, "The Mysterious Alert," which he stated clearly implied that something was strange about it "although numerous points made in the documentary indicated there was nothing mysterious about the alert."

Mr. Herschensohn termed these "harmful" labels, which gave the public a distorted im-

pression of the news.

An example of distortion by "audiovisual gimmick," he said, was the hold-frame technique used on the C.B.S. evening news during the early days of the Watergate story. The news film showed various Administration figures at some ordinary activity, and then suddenly the film would freeze them in motion.

"The audience perception was that they were caught doing something," Mr. Herschensohn said. The technique is associated with Jack Ruby killing Lee Harvey Oswald.

A former film producer for the United States Information Agency, and the director and script writer for the film on John F. Kennedy, "Years of Lightning, Day of Drums," Mr. Herschensohn said he had used the hold-frame technique him-

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'Distortion'

self, and always for a particular reason. Usually, it was a way of telling the audience to look more closely, he said.

"There was no reason the networks couldn't have used portraits of the Administration figures, instead of freezing them walking, looking like criminals in their overcoats," Mr. Herschensohn stated.

He said the various techniques, news omissions and editorial judgments—which put stories reflecting favorably on the Administration behind those that were essentially unfavorable—were not likely to be perceived by unsophisticated persons studying the newscasts for journalistic transgressions.