

A Personal View

No Business Like What

By Russell Baker
N.Y. Times Service

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ABOUT MIDNIGHT several days ago, a man appeared on the television screen in the cellar of our house to tell about a killing he had committed.

Everybody else was in bed. What is curious is that it never occurred to me to race upstairs and rouse anyone. Here was a man going on in great detail right there in our cellar about this killing he had performed, yet it seemed no more worth disturbing the house for than if it had been another appearance by Phyllis Diller.

It was the Dick Cavett show and it had begun, as usual, with Dick's monologue, and a promise of pleasant anesthesia as Dick read off the cast of show-biz people on hand to plug their various enterprises.

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BRIAN BEDFORD came first. He is in a play in New York and seemed agreeable. Agreeability is a virtue at midnight in the cellar, at least in our house, and since there is too little of it most of the time, Brian was a welcome guest.

He and Dick kept smiling, even through one rocky passage about a suicide. One felt headache and reality slinking off in defeat; one sensed the settling of the facial muscles into a fixed, fatigued smile.

Then Dick was back with his next guest. He introduced Captain Bob Marasco. The audience applauded. Down in our cellar, the pleased smile may have shown a trace of a frown. Captain Marasco? The name was vaguely familiar. Was it somebody who had just made a new Andy Warhol movie?

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IT WAS NOT. Dick said that Captain Marasco, who lives in Bloomfield, N.J., was a former Green Beret officer who had been charged by the Army some time ago with murdering a Vietnamese man and then dis-



Captain Marasco, the self-admitted killer

charged from the service after the murder charge had been dropped.

A few days before his guest appearance with Dick, Bob had told the New York Times that he had, in fact, killed the Vietnamese who, he said, was a triple espionage agent. Dick quickly filled in his audience on this background, and Bob, who had a lot of poise on camera, began to tell about the killing, and about life in the Green Berets.

In the opening phase, I did not listen so much as I looked. That is the norm when you get a new personality on the talk shows. Bob appeared to be a tall, broad-shouldered, athletic young man. His clothing style was mod without being odd. "Carefully groomed" would be the cliché.

Business?

Bob's account of the killing seemed to bear this out. He answered Dick's questions with details which a less-fastidious man might have glossed over in his recitation. Yes, Bob said, Dick was right! Two shots in the fellow's head. Of course, he had been pumped full of morphine before the shooting, which made it as humanitarian as you could possibly make something as awkward as killing a man, Bob volunteered.

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DICK LOOKED slightly aghast and held up a shampoo. Brief films were shown to sell consumer goods. This was not too dull, this talk with Bob. Would Dick cut it short to bring on Patsy Kelly, who was playing in "No, No, Nanette."

The show was back. Good! Dick was going to keep Bob talking. What do you do now for a living? he asked Bob. Bob smiled slightly, knowing he was going to get a laugh, already indicating he would rather not. He said he sold life insurance. The audience laughed. Brian, who was still there, looked white and wilted, although this may just have been a faulty video tube.

Brian asked how Bob could possibly have done it. Bob said he had what amounted to an official execution order from the C.I.A. He had done it to serve his country, to serve us in the audience, to serve me down there in my cellar. He was not telling it now for profit, was not making any money, in fact, from his story. He just wanted us to know what duty we were all exacting from our Army.

There was a station break. A brief film showed a liquid that did a terrific job of cleaning a toilet. By 1 a.m. Bob had begun to pall and when Dick went off I dialed with a yawn in search of an old movie. Later, going up to bed, there was a moment on the steps when the numbness lifted momentarily, and I marveled, for just an instant, that the TV set never turned into a cobra and bit us.