

Making Over the Front Page at CBS News

Van Gordon Sauter

By Marvin Kitman

The CBS *Evening News* newsroom, where they tell us the way it is every night on TV, is a very cramped little space in the CBS Broadcast Center, the former milk-bottling plant on New York's West side. It's a news closet, really. Narrow corridors lead to the windowless offices of the superstars of TV journalism. It's like being below decks on the Queen Mary or in Hitler's bunker.

There is a high anxiety in the bunker as the clock ticks through conferences and deadlines toward 6:30 p.m. (the first of two performances of the nightly network news; the 7:00 is for the West Coast).

At various times during the hectic day here, a figure in shirt tails and sporting a silver-flecked beard will burst into the newsroom. He is Van Gordon Sauter, and he is the first president of CBS News to do this in a long time.

In the old days, a CBS News president rushing into the newsroom would have created panic. "Oh, oh," the seasoned newsmen at their desks would have thought, "We're fired." CBS News presidents were Olympian figures, like college presidents or judges. Sauter's predecessor, Dick Salant, was an elegant, protocol-conscious executive. Bill Leonard was too deeply involved in the problems of finding a successor, a job often described as deciding whom to pull

the chair out from under at the lunch table, while looking at what Roone Arledge was doing at ABC.

Van Gordon Sauter is non-Olympian. He deals directly with the troops. As one CBS News executive puts it, "He is not one of those rulers who comes out on Ground Hog Day, sees his shadow and runs back in."

The staff at CBS News was stunned at first to see Sauter running around the newsroom as if he were looking for something he had lost. "How's the broadcast going?" Sauter asks. . . . "What's happening in Beirut?" He wanders in three or five times a day; he even reads the wires.

At 47, Van Gordon Sauter is the fifth person to be president in the history of CBS News and the first to look like Ernest Hemingway, with a graying beard and rimless glasses perched on his nose. He's also the first to have lived on a boat in the Pacific and to have had a parrot in his office. "He's weird," an admirer exults. "Beginning with his name. What kind of name is Van Gordon Sauter? It sounds like a law firm. Van should be in the middle."

Van Sauter, as he calls himself, was different from the moment he took office as deputy president to Bill Leonard last November. "Sauter has a different view of what his role should be," explains Robert Chandler, CBS senior vice president for administration. "Salant and Leonard delegated responsibility for the broadcast to another level. . . . Van feels, as president of news, his most important

job is to oversee these things personally. It's a rational point of view. So executive producers report to him directly. Good or bad? It's different. That's what he's getting paid to have—a philosophy of how to do it."

So far, Sauter's philosophy has paid off. To his credit, he got Diane Sawyer to smile on the CBS *Morning News*. He got the CBS *Evening News with Dan Rather* going. In May he saw CBS raise the price of commercials on the *Evening News* \$10,000 a spot (from \$30,000 to \$40,000). That's \$15 million extra a year to CBS. Nobody else in the network nightly news competition has raised their prices.

Van Sauter came into the CBS News job with priorities. "First things first" is one of his mottos. The first priority was "The CBS News Without Walter Cronkite."

"CBS has to be number one in the nightly news," explains Shad Northshield, senior executive producer of *Sunday Morning* and former executive producer of *The Huntley-Brinkley Report* at NBC. "Nobody else *has* to be number one. It's not like other networks where it would be nice. It has to be at CBS. Period. They have their best people working on the show, spend the most money on it."

The CBS *Evening News* is the network's front page, and Van Sauter sees himself as its editor as well as the publisher. His vision of the job was that he should get in there, roll up his sleeves and make over the front page.

Marvin Kitman is television critic for Newsday.

First, he sent Cronkite's producer, Sanford Socolow, to head up the CBS bureau in London, a fate less than death. (Socolow turned out to be marvelous, running a very busy crisis headquarters that paid off in CBS News' superb coverage of the Middle East and Falkland crises.)

Then he appointed Howard Stringer, a brilliant documentarian (*The Defense of the United States* and 48 *CBS Reports*) to be Rather's producer. Stringer came to the news show with a fair amount of apprehension. He had never produced daily journalism. "Howard, you need to know one thing," Van Sauter explained. "This knob, turn it to the right, it gets louder. After that you're dealing with a matter of judgments."

It was a daring choice, which shook up the tradition-bound CBS News organization. But Stringer knew visual television. He is very effective at integrating scripts and pictures in a dramatic way.

Sauter gave "The CBS News Without Walter Cronkite" a cold opening. Until March, the Rather show had opened on a newsroom with several people puttering round. What they were doing is what are called backgrounders. Or were they calling their girl friends? Then the cameras pulled back to the anchor.

Now the first thing you see is Dan Rather reporting. You get to the news much more quickly with less folderol. Instead of using 53 seconds to get to the big story, as ABC News does, Rather gets right into it. This is a Sauter innovation: nothing startling, but CBS is the only network doing it.

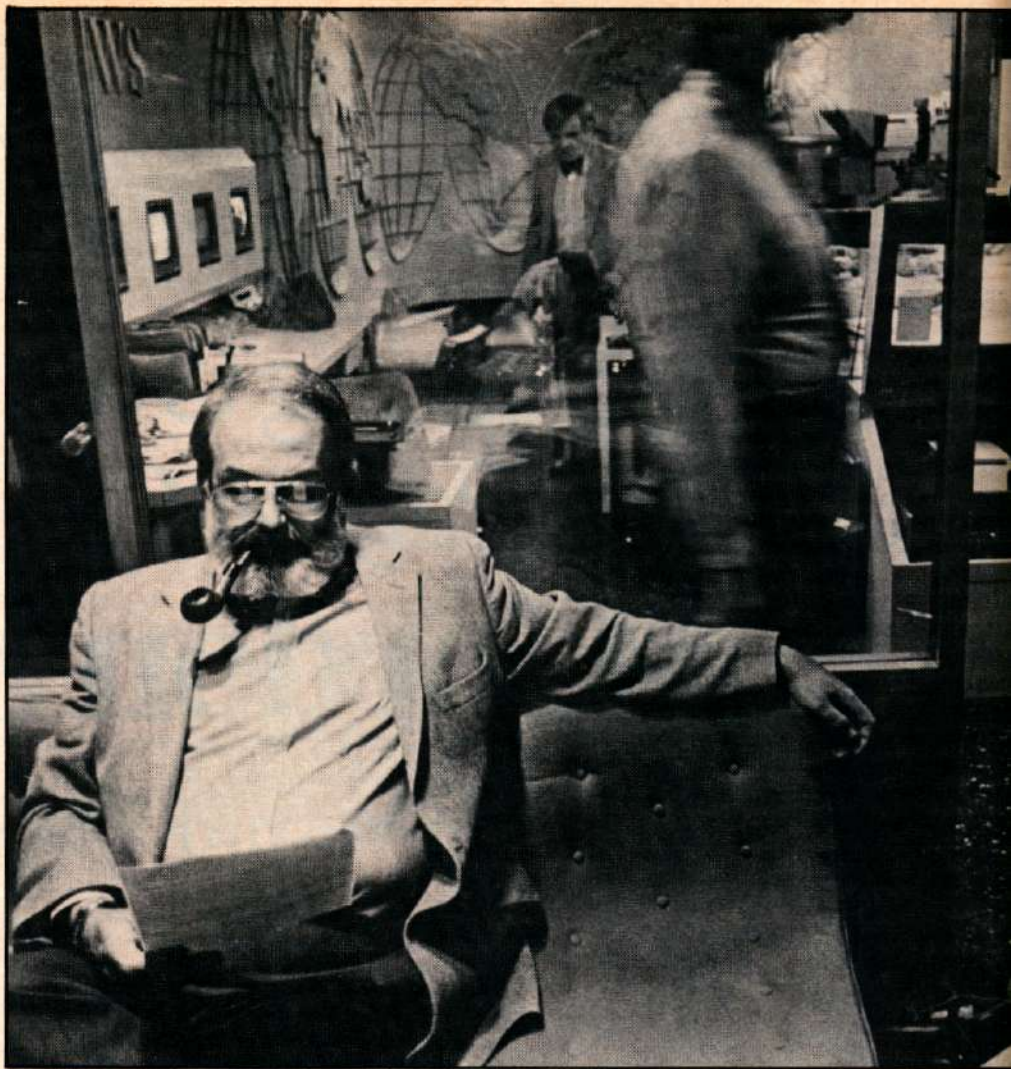
But the major change was Rather. Nobody had worried about the transition. So invincible was the ego of CBS News, they assumed anyone could sit in Walter's chair. He would automatically have Walter's mantle.

CBS should have had Walter saying, every night for a month before the end, "My buddy, Dan will be here. Everything is okay." A year in advance wouldn't have hurt, either.

Rather had a reputation for toughness. He was the man who stood up to Nixon. He had the *60 Minutes* intensity. He was, in the public's mind, grilling Richard Nixon all the time. He came into Cronkite's seat stony and projected a very stony image. Rather was tight. The job seemed to be choking him, making his eyes pop. One critic wrote that he may have bought the wrong shirt size at a sale.

Dan had to learn how to be an anchorman. He was not a street reporter anymore. The intensity he was famous for, the frantic haste, the anxiety, was coming through on camera. He had to learn how to calm down.

It didn't help at all what the so-called experts were saying. The trouble was, they said, Rather wasn't being used right. He should go out on stories. Reporting was his strength. Arledge of



ABC News was among those pushing a new role. "Roone is such a bad liar," says one news executive. "It was marvelous hearing him suggest what he would do with Rather."

Reporting, constant reporting, was a trap that would have ruined Dan Rather as an effective anchorman. And Van Sauter avoided it.

Rather had all of Walter's people around him, the lighting guys, the carpenters. They never did like Walter much—Walter didn't know anybody's name. Off-camera, Walter was cold, distant, above it all, like Rather seemed on-camera in the beginning.

But Rather knew everybody's name in the studio. He was friendly to the lowliest technician. The crew was rooting for Dan. They liked him. In person, under the extreme pressure of the show, he was a very ingratiating and calm person. Eventually the camera would show the way Rather really is, a compassionate, direct fellow. The camera doesn't lie forever.

It started happening the summer of 1982, a time of multiple crises—Lebanon, the Falklands, El Salvador—when it was very confusing to follow the widely hailed *ABC World News Tonight* with its triple anchorman setup. Peter Jennings was standing one minute at the

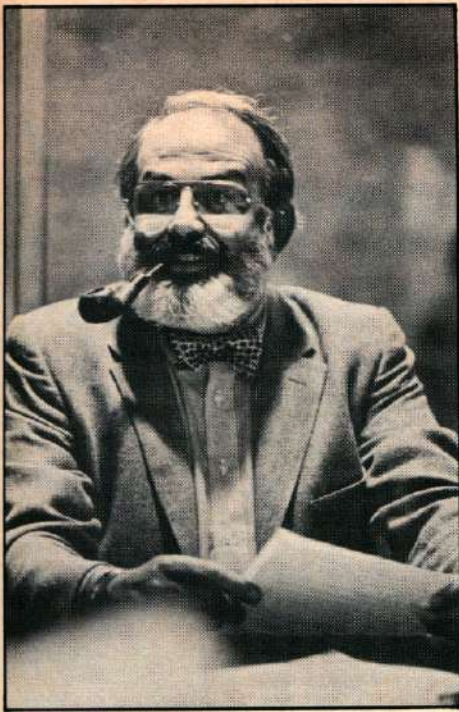
wall in Jerusalem and throwing the show to El Salvador.

As a single anchor, Rather was a stabilizing force. He centered, made less bewildering the crush of events and grew stronger and more calm during the months of crisis. At some point that June, Dan Rather stopped being Walter Cronkite's heir-apparent-someday.

The show's writing got brighter, with less of a wire-service flavor. New, improved writing is a pet project of Van Sauter and his number-two man, Ed Joyce, executive vice president of CBS News—another executive who likes to get involved in everybody's business.

Under Stringer, the emphasis of the network nightly news was shifted from Washington to national. That alone could have broken the organization in two. And there was a very testy time in February, when it looked like the ratings might be slipping.

"We needed executives solidly behind us," Stringer recalls. "Once it's going okay you want to be left alone, of course. But when you're running against what everybody's always done, Sauter's flying around here suited my style perfectly. We could have run into a wall of tradition. As a documentarian I could have been stonewalled, been finessed, if I tried to do anything different. Sauter



helped us climb the wall.”

While redoing the Dan Rather show, Van Sauter faced a second major crisis, an article in *TV Guide* entitled “Anatomy of a Smear,” which strongly criticized a CBS documentary, *A Vietnam Deception: The Uncounted Enemy*. One of the *CBS Reports*, the broadcast had been aired January 23 and charged that there was “a conspiracy at the highest levels of American military intelligence to suppress and alter critical intelligence on the enemy in the year leading up to the Vietnamese Communists’ January 1969 Tet offensive.” The documentary had been narrated by Mike Wallace and produced, written and reported by George Crile. It was also the last documentary on which Stringer was executive producer before he was promoted to the *Evening News*. In April, *TV Guide* charged that the program had violated CBS standards of fairness and accuracy. Van Sauter was attending the CBS affiliates meeting in Los Angeles when the *TV Guide* story broke. He promised a full investigation of the charges.

CBS News senior executive producer, Burton Benjamin, spent six weeks investigating. He read 20 hours of transcripts and conducted interviews with 38 people involved in the production. The results of this examination were released in July in an eight-page Sauter memorandum, an abridged version of the 62-page Benjamin report.

The Sauter report was something of a masterpiece. It found CBS News not guilty of the *TV Guide* charges—and pledged not to do it again. On page three it said in no uncertain terms that CBS News stood behind the documentary; on page four that it would have been a better program if these few things had been done—and then listed a hundred or so “ifs.” Nobody was fired.

New guidelines were established.

Nobody at CBS liked the report. Some newspaper critics said it was a sellout; others called it a whitewash. But for CBS News it may have been just what the doctor ordered. As a news president, Van Sauter may have handled the crisis brilliantly.

“What you guys outside don’t seem to realize,” a CBS News executive explained, “is that George Crile angered a lot of people around here. He was relentless, trampled over many, too many people. He made a crisis within a crisis. If you bend the rules, you’ve got to bring [the rest of CBS] along with you. It’s no good to frighten the people, cameramen, directors. It’s essential to think of a documentary as a collaboration. George worked alone.”

Politically, at CBS, Sauter’s report was a triumph. Sauter had steered a perilous course through risks and shoals, satisfying nobody—and everybody. And he saved a lot of scalps, including Crile’s. He needed to bring the staff together—he needed a consensus. The report did that.

“The study helped him around here,” a producer says.

“CBS News has a terrific reputation, at least amongst its employees,” explains Shad Northshield. “It has a very long reputation of integrity and separateness, always a great feeling of independence. The report strengthened the old timers’ judgment that [Sauter] does give a damn about saving us. There is that. He stood up to them, to the demand of the affiliates and the rest of the organization. It was a very strong statement in support of the program.”

Sauter’s ability to see something amusing in situations that others feel have no redeeming qualities helps establish a casualness and freer flow of ideas. “It makes him one of us, even if he is clearly the boss,” one of the news peons explains.

Sauter has an irreverent sense of humor. He likes to sit around in his shirt sleeves in the newsroom soaking up the atmosphere and laughing at media jokes. What makes him laugh are the headlines in the *New York Post*: “Mom Boils Baby Alive and Eats Her For Breakfast.”

Sauter and CBS *Evening News* executive producer Lane Venardos, who both had worked at WBBM-TV (the CBS affiliate in Chicago) in the early 1970s, one day were cackling in the newsroom about how Lane, back in Chicago, used to make the sound of a submarine going underwater as a signal for dangerous time ahead. One night last spring there was a crisis while the Rather show was on the air. “Let me hear the submarine,” Van said to Lane. “No.” “Go on and do it,” Van insisted. A commercial was on and suddenly there was this tremendous racket of a

sub submerging, with sirens, whistles, orders being barked and water rushing in, that filled the newsroom. You could even hear it out in the studio where Rather was doing the news. That was the night Rather turned around suddenly while reading the news, looking somewhat alarmed.

This is a new CBS News, which once had the reputation of being as funny and as casual as an undertaker’s.

The new president of CBS News works down the hall from the news rooms in an office that doesn’t even have his name on the door. Robert Chandler, number-three in command, a holdover from the old guard, not only has his name on the door, but also on his secretary’s door.

Sauter’s office is decorated in early Abercrombie & Fitch: old rolltop desk, an antique barber chair, a farmer’s oak kitchen table he uses as a working desk. Very rustic. On top of the rolltop desk is a cigar box, La Palina, made by CBS president Bill Paley’s old cigar company in Louisville. “To remind me that somehow he got from the cigar box to the 36th floor of Black Rock (CBS Corporate headquarters). He must be doing something right,” says Sauter. A stained glass work of art is over the rolltop desk. It’s a \$2 bill, reading “In Nielsen We Trust.” He whips open a Tab. He drinks as many Tabs as a Jewish princess. “I’m addicted,” he explains. “I drink enough to kill five rats.”

He sits down to bat out a memo on the old portable manual typewriter on the old kitchen table. An even older manual machine sits in a place of honor, next to Paley’s cigar box, on top of the rolltop desk. He is not into word processors. “They just passed me by.” (Curiously, the whole CBS newsroom does not have a single word processor. Everybody seems to write TV news on old-fashioned typewriters. TV may be the last holdout of the typewriter.)

Van Sauter still talks about his newspaper days at the *Chicago Daily News* in the mid-1960s. “God, do I love the camaraderie. I love the nature of the newsroom.” He has a print guy mentality. He is drawn to the newsroom like a Dalmatian to a fire. Sitting with him in the peace and quiet of his president’s office, you sense a restlessness. This is not where it’s at. Any minute you expect him to drop the phone, grab his hat and his whiskey bottle and dash into the newsroom to see what’s happening. Instead he has a Tab and talks to me about the past.

He was a general-assignment, reporter for the *Chicago Daily News* and covered murders, fires, riots. He blundered into TV by accident. “I had a fight with the editor. He wanted me to change a story. ‘But it never happened that way,’ I explained. Ethically, I couldn’t do it. I told the editor I couldn’t do it. And so I left the *Daily News* with

\$14 and unlimited credit at Billy Goat's" (a bar located half way between the *News and Tribune*). He started at CBS in Chicago 14 years ago doing radio news.

Since then, Van Sauter has had 12 jobs at the network, each one radically different: news writer, news director, anchorman, bureau manager overseas, station manager, standards and practices (censor), sports president, news president. The way Sauter has been moving from job to job in CBS the last 14 years reminds me of the family company where the boss' son is being groomed for the big job by being given experience in a wide range of activities. But Bill Paley doesn't have a son in the business and he already has an heir apparent, Tom Wyman, who is scheduled to take over CBS in April. As for Sauter, he always has hung around the newsrooms.

WBBM-TV in 1972 was in the doldrums. When Robert Wussler, later to be president of the CBS network, took over as general manager, he brought in his friend Van Sauter as news director. They spent money like drunken sailors. Van Sauter brought in the first minicam in Chicago in 1974—a blockbuster device then. Nobody had them in Chicago.

Sauter had his mini-cam—the prototype of all mini-cams today—on the street roaming around Chicago to see what was going on. A couple of times he struck it rich. Ten minutes before air time one late afternoon two elevated trains collided in an obscure part of Chicago. Sauter's mini-cam had live pictures that were stunning, showing the trains jackknifed up in the air. At the time, live pictures of an accident not in front of the TV studio building where they could wheel cameras out from the lobby were rare. It was riveting television.

Sauter was an unorthodox, eccentric CBS man even back then. For example, he had a bird in his office in Chicago.

"A good friend gave me a parrot," Sauter explained. "He was 62 years old when I got him. He was named Sam. He was malevolent, destructive and absolutely a joy. The only problem is that he had projectile diarrhea. You had to be very careful about his diet."

The parrot knew one word, "Loretta," which it had learned from a previous master. Unfortunately, Sauter had hired a secretary named Loretta. A coincidence, Sauter says. The parrot had also learned Sauter's voice. "Loretta could be working eight miles away and she's come running in with a steno pad to an empty office, except for the parrot," Sauter says. "The bird laughed hysterically. Sam was not a friendly bird. He used to try to bite women. He hated women in a TV news room. I'm still surprised CBS didn't get a class action suit because of Sam."

At the height of his success as a

news director in 1975, Sauter decided to become an anchorman, too. "I was the least successful anchorman in TV history," Sauter says. "It was my idea to expand the news director's job to include anchorman. My best friend had got fired as the anchorman. Why not me, I asked the question? I was young, bright, photogenic."

CBS at the time had a policy that a news director couldn't do both. So Sauter gave up news director and became anchor.

"He claims he was no good," says Ed Joyce, who had been a news director (WCBS-TV, the CBS New York affiliate). "We'll just have to take his word for it."

"I was an absolute disaster," Sauter recalls.

Actually, for all his modesty, Sauter wasn't that bad. He was anchor of the first 5 o'clock news in Chicago. When reporters came back from covering the story, he would talk to them about the story. It was the forerunner of "the newsroom-style" public television show. It was starting to catch on, too when Wussler went to New York to the network, and the new Chicago management decided they wanted a more formal newsmen.

"When I got my release as an anchorman, I didn't complain," says Sauter. "I knew the penalty. Hey, this is the price you pay. These are the conditions, the contract. That's your deal."

"It was four degrees below zero in the middle of the winter in Chicago, and I was out on my ass," Sauter recalls. "I said to Bill Small (then a CBS News official), 'Get me out of here.' He asked me if I wanted to go to Paris."

"When I die, I want to come back as Paris bureau chief for CBS," an old saying goes. It is one of the nicest jobs in Western civilization, or, as Sauter puts it, "a dream job." A dream for any reporter who used to read Hemingway and like him. To be in Paris on an expense account for a wealthy TV network. "When you're from Middletown, Ohio," says Sauter, "there is something very romantic about being in Paris." The electronic-age version of getting the job on the *Paris Herald Tribune*. It was one of the happiest periods in Sauter's life.

"There was not a whole lot going on there," Sauter says. "You got to travel where you wanted. You produced stories. Or suggested stories to New York. I was in charge of 14 people. Occasionally, I'd go out and report one myself. A favorite was a piece about a gypsy concert 200 miles away. What a life! I thought I was living in an Eric Ambler or Graham Greene novel."

"It was a great symbol of freedom when I was in Paris doing nothing but enjoying the city." He was living with his oldest son from a failed first marriage. Paris was becoming his second

home. His apartment was located two blocks from the Arc de Triomphe.

Sauter became part of CBS management in 1976 when he left Paris for New York to become the censor, or vice president in charge of program practices for CBS. Why did they make him the network censor? "I write well and make good speeches," he says. "Position papers are an important part of the job. You also needed to make decisions. That's what I got paid for. It's subjective, visceral. It's one of the great non-jobs of all time. Dr. No, they called me."

Bobby Wussler, his old friend from Chicago, now head of the CBS network, hired him. "No, he didn't ask what my moral standards were," recalls Sauter. "He and I had known each other for a long time. Nothing was written down. All hell was breaking loose in morality in 1976. It was the family-viewing crisis year." Van Sauter was right on the cutting edge of the new morality. He was the heat shield, taking the pressure from morality groups, PTA and the Moral Majority.

"You have to find a consensus," he explains, "where we as a network are. It's a very ephemeral thing. Where do you draw the line in a changing world? You just do it. And hope your judgment is sound. You can't use your personal standards. At least I couldn't. I had a different set of standards."

"It's like being publisher and editor, as I am now, of the network news. Conflicts. Basic job is to resolve conflicts; that's what I'm paid to do. A guy just walked in this door and said we need to send four more crews to Beirut. Another guy says we can't do it, we don't have the money. You resolve conflicts all day."

After that, Sauter went out to lotusland, to L.A., the planet of Los Angeles, to take over a very sick CBS affiliate. They still remember Van Sauter's reign at KNXT-TV (1977-80). He was possibly the most non-L.A. type who ever lived there.

Out there in paradise, guys wore Gucci loafers and whatever carat of gold—14, 18, 22—was necessary. Van Sauter arrived wearing Top-siders, Eddie Bauer, and L.L. Bean mail order. He was way ahead of his time in mail-order chic. They lived in Beverly Hills; he lived on a boat. They drove Mercedes with blonde accessories, he drove a Jeep, a big black job with huge wheels.

"The Jeep went with the boat in the Pacific," Sauter says about the days when he had the second best job in CBS. "I had a 45-foot cabin cruiser tied up at Marina Del Rey. It's the only way to live, out on the water, out of doors. If it really got bad I'd pull the plug, the electricity, and water line... and go out to sea."

The CBS-owned station was in trouble when Sauter went in to renovate. Wussler had served a similar term of

office there on his way to the top. "Wave after wave of general managers had resorted to gimmicks," one observer recalls. "The station staff was demoralized and everybody felt isolated. Van went in and in a year had turned the place around. It made them feel like it was a good place to work. He established a different climate. It was no longer the fun and games place of Hollywood.

Sauter also wrote the station editorials and delivered them. It was a chance to do television again.

"My editorials were sensational," Sauter says. "I made them very short. I found an issue and responded. Even if [it was] not one of the world's biggest subjects. It was visceral and the editorials got a visceral response."

One of the targets who got mad was a member of the L.A. school board. Sauter refused to let her respond.

He later started dating the school board member. It was Governor Jerry Brown's sister and the daughter of the former governor. Sauter wound up marrying the Princess of California. But he had to give up the boat.

Then they made him president of

CBS Sports in 1980. "It was so unlikely," he says. "My body speaks of a life of indulgence. I loathed sports. I didn't participate in anything, except watching on TV sometimes.

"Sports is a great place to get in the habit of working seven days a week," Van Sauter explains. "You work five days in the office and two days in the studio or field. You learn about production, how to play with technology, as much as you learn in the news. They have more freedom in sports. It's like the print world. Sportswriters always had more freedom. That's why so many writers came out of sports.

"I didn't go to sports with knowledge or interest in games, teams or leagues. My interest was in business and as TV events. People used to get angry at me because I never watched the game, didn't know who was who. It was not a sporting event; it was a TV event. I remember a crucial game in Philadelphia or Dallas or something, all the executives were in great seats in the stadium. I was in the bowels, running out to the truck to do this or that."

Now as head of CBS News, a steady stream of people and meetings

runs through Sauter's office. The producers of *CBS Reports* are in for a Tab break while running down the fall schedule of documentaries. "Do you have any scripts?" he keeps asking his line producers.

Charles Kuralt comes in from the road. It's an historic event. Kuralt is one of Van Sauter's favorite people, even though he dropped him from the *CBS Morning News*. "It's not his thing, six times a week. He's too valuable." Sauter says he's going to have Kuralt sit in for Rather on vacation. It's not the expected thing. He will have to tell Bob Schieffer the bad news.

Three wall TV sets are on and he looks at them with the sound off. "I look at TV differently than you do. I see people, reporters, graphics. I'm like a newspaper editor in another town. I can see from a few pages what the rest of the paper is like. I've heard enough on the radio or in the newsroom to know the news. How it's handled is important."

Fishing is Sauter's hobby. Fly fishing. He is just back from ten days in Wyoming and Montana, the Platte River, the Snake. "It's the one place in the world where there is no TV, no radio, nobody anxious to discuss the news of the day, other than what flies fish are biting." You can divide the world and the TV business into fishermen and non-fishermen, Sauter believes. Eric Sevareid and Charles Kuralt fish. "I could never get into tennis or golf. You spend most of your time being competitive. Why do it in your time away from the job?"

The highlight of Sauter's day is watching the front page, *CBS Evening News*. He actually lights up his one cigar of the day as the show goes on. "It's that time of day, my one indulgence," he says, as his staff files in to see the show with the boss.

Joyce and five or six top brass drape themselves casually around Sauter's early American furniture, just dropping in to watch the 6:30 show. It happens every night. They are like a Nielsen family. The *CBS Evening News* gets a 100 share rating here. They only talk during commercials. Then nine nights out of ten they have a seminar. It's like a football game, when the team goes back to the lockerroom for a post-mortem.

"He's quick to tell us what he doesn't like," Lane Venardos says. "That's good. Previously, top executives were loathe to tell us anything. They gave no opinions. Now we know where we stand."

"But he never tells you before the broadcast," Stringer says. "He doesn't come in and say, 'By the way, you guys are doing *that* story, aren't you?' Or, 'You're not going to touch *that* one are you?'" That's subliminal pressure. "We can take a hint with the best of them," Vanardos says. ●

The \$120 Million Libel Suit

By Jonathan Friendly

By General William C. Westmoreland's count, CBS damaged his reputation last January at the impressive rate of \$1 million a minute. Not one to forgive and forget nor to accept any of the compromises CBS offered him, the former commander of American forces in Vietnam is suing the network for \$120 million over its two-hour documentary, *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*. The program charged that, to avoid stirring up political protest at home, he deliberately underestimated the strength of enemy forces in the reports he sent to Washington before the 1968 Tet offensive.

"The issue here is not money, not vengeance," the General said, adding that any money he collected would go to charity. He said his suit was the only way left "for me to clear my name, my honor and the honor of the military."

The suit adds yet another dimension to what was already a complicated problem for CBS. The original program had been strongly denounced by Westmoreland and others, but it did not generate any broad public debate until *TV Guide* magazine weighed in with an exposé of the exposé. The magazine, working from uncut transcripts, said the producers

of the show had left out important denials that they had on tape and had been overly gentle in questioning the people who supported the thesis. After an internal investigation, CBS said it agreed with some of *TV Guide's* criticisms of its journalistic practices and would put together a followup program to explore further the issue of the enemy-strength estimates. The network offered Westmoreland 15 minutes of unedited airtime as part of the program-to-be. But the general and a number of his former aides spurned the idea, saying they wanted CBS to retract the original charge.

Initially, Westmoreland had been reluctant to sue, in part on the practical ground that it has been terribly difficult for a public figure to win a libel case. But the \$2 million verdict recently won against the *Washington Post* by the president of Mobil Oil Company may have helped to persuade him.

The suit did not take CBS entirely by surprise, and its president, Van Gordon Sauter, promised "a vigorous defense not only because we see this suit totally devoid of merit but because it constitutes a serious threat to independent journalism in our society."