



Behind the Lens

Story and Photos
by Michelle Paulman

A former University of Nebraska-Lincoln employee has lived news broadcasting history. He even helped create some of it.

Filming Fidel Castro before he was a dictator, Martin Luther King, Jr., before he was assassinated, Jackie Kennedy before she was Onassis, and every president from Harry Truman to Jimmy Carter also has given the cinematographer hours of story-telling material.

Wendell Hoffman, 78, often regales people with tales from his days as a Columbia Broadcasting System cameraman in the 1950s and '60s, during the dawn of television news coverage.

A soldier in World War II, Hoffman began working at UNL in 1945 after the war ended as the Head of the Photographic Laboratory. He began

working part-time for CBS in 1952 and, a couple of years later, he left UNL to work for CBS full-time.

In 1958, CBS learned that Castro was camped out in the mountains of eastern Cuba. At the time, a dictator ruled Cuba, and Castro promised to



restore a democratic government. Hoffman and other CBS newsmen spent three weeks with Castro in the mountains, filming him for television.

When three young civil rights workers were killed in Mississippi by a town sheriff and his deputies, Hoffman was there to cover the story

for CBS. The event was later made into the movie "Mississippi Burning."

Hoffman also worked with Dan Rather before he was a famous network anchorman and covered John F. Kennedy's assassination with him in 1963. Other CBS greats Hoffman has worked with include Walter Cronkite, Harry Reasoner and Charles Kuralt.

These days, Hoffman, of 1900 King's Highway, is renovating a house at 5019 Walker Ave. into apartments. He bought the house in 1937, and it is now over 100 years old.

Hoffman worked when television and filmed news coverage were just beginning. Now, after 25 years of filming history, he has plenty of stories to tell to his old news buddies or young, budding journalists.

"When a bunch of old newsmen get together, it's like telling war stories," he said. "They're the stories of their lives."

Clockwise from top left:

- Hoffman fiddles with a torpedo camera used during World War II to determine if bombs dropped during air raids hit the target.

- Hoffman holds some panelling while University of Nebraska-Lincoln junior Jack Jenkins nails it in place.

- Hoffman relaxes in his living room after a day of renovating his other house at 5019 Walker St.

- Fifty-year-old bottles from the days when developing solutions were mixed from scratch are ready for the trash.

