

Richard Eaton, president of a broadcast group that owns TV and radio stations from the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the beaches of Hawaii, still writes all the checks for his 350-employee enterprise. And once each week he visits one of the 16 stations owned by his United Broadcasting Co.

So close is he to his management that an FCC examiner once found the ownership-management balance of one of his stations "overly integrated." This finding came from one of his many bouts with the FCC that have, in some eyes, flawed his broadcast credentials. Many of these troubles involved technical violations, but others, like one in which he is currently involved, are more complicated. The latest problem relates to the charge that his WOOK(AM) Washington was used in a numbers racket. Friends of Mr. Eaton maintain in extenuation that his troubles stem largely from his employees who don't take governmental requirements seriously enough, particularly such things as log keeping, frequency-modulation measurements, and other meter-reading obligations.

This complex man, hampered since youth by a polio-crippled leg, has had two careers. His first was as a newspaper correspondent and publisher in Europe before 1940. His second has been as a broadcaster since 1947.

Taken to France when he was 7 by his physician father, who became a member of the staff of the American Hospital in Paris, Mr. Eaton grew up in that city, and attended French schools. He returned to the U.S. for his college education, graduating cum laude from Harvard University. On his return to Paris, he began a career as a foreign correspondent for such newspapers as *Journal des Debat* and *Figaro* in Paris, *National Belge* in Brussels, and the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Daily Mail* of London. It was while he was working for the *Daily Mail* in Moscow that he was picked up by the Soviet secret police and held incommunicado for two months before being released. To this day he doesn't know what the charges were, but he surmises they were related to the fact that he had delivered messages and money to Soviet citizens from their emigre relatives and friends in Paris.

At one point in his Moscow incarceration, he was marched into a cell that held a dozen prisoners—all condemned to death. He was sure he too had been chosen for the firing squad. Fortunately, his newspaper had by then received word of his whereabouts and he only spent a few days in this Russian death row before being released and deported.

After four years as a correspondent, Mr. Eaton decided to become a pub-

## Richard Eaton: colorful past, colorful present

lisher. He founded a pictorial weekly, *L'Etoile*, named after the famous Paris landmark. Although this was an innovation for that time, circulation of the picture weekly never reached viable proportions. So he turned it into a

### Week's Profile



*Richard Eaton—president, United Broadcasting Co.; b. Dec. 8, 1899, Chicago; B.A. cum laude, Harvard University, 1920; reporter for various French, English and Belgian newspapers; founded weekly pictorial newspaper, L'Etoile, in Paris and acquired 26 small French newspapers; returned to U.S. in 1940 and established weekly Falls Church (Va.) Echo and Fairfax (Va.) Journal; diplomatic commentator, WINX(AM) and WOL(AM) both Washington, and Mutual Broadcasting; established WOOK(AM) Washington, 1947; in succeeding years acquired or built WFAN-FM-TV Washington; WJMO(AM)-WCUY-FM Cleveland; WSID(AM), WLPL-FM and WMET-TV, all Baltimore, WINX(AM) Rockville, Md.; WBNX(AM) New York; WFAB(AM) Miami; KVEZ-TV San Francisco; WMUR-TV Manchester, N.H.; KIKU-TV Honolulu, and KECC-TV Yuma-El Centro, Calif.; m. Marguerite Travers, 1927 (divorced); children: Pierre, Daniel, Michele, (Mrs.) Marguerite Hurt, Monique, Francoise, Richard Jr.; m. Elsa Hurtado 1964; children: Maud, Alma, Lucille.*

supplement for other newspapers. This experience led him to begin acquiring provincial newspapers in France, and by 1940 he was the publisher of 26 newspapers as well as the owner of two printing plants.

In that year, Hitler's legions swept across the Maginot Line and France fell. Fleeing Paris with his family, Mr. Eaton went south to Spain and Portugal, catching the last oceanic trip west of the old S.S. Manhattan.

The Eatons settled in Washington—and with the publishing fever still in his bones, Mr. Eaton borrowed \$300 on the second-hand Dodge that he had bought for \$800, and founded two suburban newspapers in nearby Virginia.

Soon he was also doing foreign-news commentary on WINX(AM), then in Washington, and later he joined WOL(AM), also in Washington and at that time the Mutual Broadcasting System affiliate there. When Pearl Harbor stunned the nation, Mr. Eaton began reporting on that network, continuing this career throughout the war years.

He soon realized, however, that the future lay in broadcast ownership and in 1947 he received FCC authority to establish what is now WOOK(AM) Washington in the suburb of Silver Spring, Md. He says he intended to make it mostly a talk station, but his Negro printer (Mr. Eaton was publishing the Virginia newspapers) urged him to consider covering the expanding black population in Washington and he took that advice.

As he broadened his broadcast ownership, minorities became central to his program format. He claims he hired the first black disk jockey (in Washington) and the first black general manager (in Newport News on a station since sold). He feels that this format was early on, before it became chic in broadcast circles.

His thrust for ethnic programming took a peculiar turn in Hawaii, where he proposed to broadcast a substantial Japanese-language program on what is now KIKU-TV in Honolulu. His application to buy the channel-13 station was ordered to hearing by the commission on this issue—rather odd when almost 30% of the population of the islands is of Japanese descent. The transfer was granted.

And in some cases, he has carried his community-service ideas beyond racial concerns. In the Washington-Baltimore area, for example his radio and TV stations now carry consumer-education programs, under the title *Buyer Beware*, principally aided by the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Education. The video tape is then bicycled among other Eaton-owned TV and radio stations.