

Alan Silverbach: his market is the world for Fox Television

Fresh out of the Air Force after World War II, Alan M. Silverbach joined the 20th Century-Fox Film Corp. as a trainee. He's still there—though technically he can't be called a 30-year man.

Mr. Silverbach, who is senior vice president in charge of worldwide syndication and nonprime-time programs, left Fox in 1966 for a brief association with Screen Gems (now Columbia Pictures Television). He bounced back to Fox before the year was out. "Some people didn't even know I had left Fox," Mr. Silverbach says. "I sometimes forget it myself."

Three decades in motion picture and television program distribution seem to have had a rejuvenating effect on the 54-year-old Mr. Silverbach. He can pass for years younger; he is tall and slim, with an unlined face and a full head of hair. He has a composed, relaxed manner and laughs easily and often. He is well liked by his colleagues, both those at the buyer level and those at other program syndication firms. In describing Mr. Silverbach, they use such words as "fair-minded," "classy," "fun-loving" and "knowledgeable."

Alan Melville Silverbach was born in New York and raised in nearby Paterson, N.J., where his father was a textile manufacturer. His early ambition was to be a physician and he was a pre-medical student at Duke University in North Carolina from 1938 to 1941. Though his own career plans were deflected by World War II, he can say, with pride, "My son, the doctor." His only child, Dr. Spencer Silverbach, is a general practitioner in Enfield, Conn.

"Though America wasn't yet in the war," he recalls, "I was moved by what was happening in Europe and joined the Air Force after my third year of college, in 1941."

Mr. Silverbach served as a pilot, flying 65 combat missions. He was shot down several times.

By the time the war was behind him, Mr. Silverbach was married and the father of a son. He set out to find an interesting livelihood and earn a living for his family. He heard that 20th Century-Fox was setting up a training school to prepare people as branch managers in overseas markets that had ceased or curtailed operations during World War II. Mr. Silverbach applied and was accepted in a class of 25 persons, mainly veterans of the armed forces.

Mr. Silverbach received six months of training in Buffalo, N.Y. His instructor was Howard Minsky, later to achieve fame as producer of the motion picture hit, "Love Story." One of his fellow trainees was



Alan Melville Silverbach—senior vice president in charge of worldwide syndication and nonprime-time programs, 20th Century-Fox Television, Los Angeles; b. Oct. 12, 1921, New York; attended Duke University, Durham, N.C., 1938-41; served as pilot, U.S. Air Force, 1941-45, released as major; trainee, 20th Century-Fox International's branch manager program, 1946; salesman with Fox International, New York, 1946-55; director of foreign sales, 20th Century Fox Television, 1955-59; director of domestic and foreign sales, 1959-66; VP, international sales, Screen Gems, New York, 1966; VP and director of domestic and foreign sales, Fox Television, 1966-75; present post since 1975; m. Meredith Lang, 1974; son (by previous marriage)—Spencer.

Andrew Jaeger, now president of Allied Artists Television. But Mr. Silverbach was not dispatched to some foreign outpost. Instead, he was to be assigned to the New York office of the foreign sales operation.

Though his work in the years from 1946 to the mid-1950's centered on theatrical film sales, Mr. Silverbach was indoctrinated early in the television business. He remembers that as early as 1948, Fox occasionally sold film product to overseas TV markets. But television was in its infancy at that time and the major film studios had not yet forged alliance with the new medium.

By 1955, Fox, along with the other giant motion picture companies, acknowledged the inevitability of television and moved forcibly into the medium. It was at this point that Mr. Silverbach shed his theatrical assignment and moved into TV on a full-time basis as director of foreign sales for 20th Century-Fox Television.

He became a familiar figure at airports in Europe, Asia and Latin America, and made innumerable friends in countries all over the world. He has kept his hand in international sales throughout his career, though in 1959 his responsibilities were broadened when domestic sales were added to his jurisdiction.

As a major production firm involved

both in feature films and television, Fox has been a leading supplier to TV of both movies and series. It is Mr. Silverbach's role today to supervise the sale of feature films and a large catalogue of series that includes *Dinah!*, *Room 222*, *Adventures in Rainbow Country* and *M*A*S*H*, which is being offered for future release.

Mr. Silverbach recently was put in charge of nonprime-time programs and in this capacity is responsible for the development of shows for daytime and early and late fringe periods. Among the latest Fox TV projects in this area are *Celebrity Sweepstakes*, sold to the NBC Owned Television Stations for a fall start; *Here's Hollywood*, optioned to the ABC Owned Television Stations; *The Desert Task Force*, under development with CBS, and a number of other programs in development with De Pattie-Frieling Productions and with the team of Rita Lakin and Bob Lewis.

Mr. Silverbach called 1975 "a very successful year" for Fox with sales topping 1974 by about 50%. He attributed the accelerated business tempo to several factors, largely to the brisk sales of *Dinah!* (more than 100 markets); increased sales abroad, and the availability of additional products by Fox.

In the years ahead, Mr. Silverbach envisions that Fox TV will be in a stronger competitive position in the feature films sector. He pointed out that about two decades ago Fox decided not to distribute directly to TV the feature films it produced. Those released from 1935 to 1948 were assigned to National Telefilm Associates and those after 1948 through 1964 were acquired by Warner-Seven Arts (now Warner Bros. Television).

"We are starting to get back some of the films as the licenses expire, and we'll be getting more and more of them back in the years ahead," he says. "Many of them may not have too much value as they have been played off many times, but there will be a good number that are staples and can be played over and over again. Since 1964 we have retained the rights to our features and we have about 150 now out in release through our own sales force."

Mr. Silverbach enjoys golf, tennis, boating and fishing. Boating particularly was a passion when he lived in New York and sailed on Long Island Sound.

Mr. Silverbach, still an unreconstructed New Yorker, was transferred to Los Angeles about two and a half years ago. He said he is now enjoying the West Coast but says: "I don't get too much of a chance to miss New York. I get back there about 15 to 20 times a year. In the event that Fox ever wanted to transfer me back I'd have to think about it—for about 20 minutes."