

Lighting-Sets

Start of Series on Departments of Local 37

"Wrap 'em Up"

2300 Specialists Handle Film Production Lighting

"Wrap 'Em Up!" That order rings out on a sound stage, and the day's work has ended for two score electricians. They put their equipment in order and start for home. Sounds like a simple ending to a day's work. But on that sound stage for the preceding ten hours of "shooting," that staccato command would have been just one more order to further confuse the ordinary visitor to any Hollywood studio. Set lighting electricians, or "operators," as they are classified, are in no small measure responsible for success of a picture. Their work is highly specialized and exacting. Their duties are performed in response to a queer jargon of orders from their boss, or "gaffer," and the very nature of their duties is confusing to an outsider.

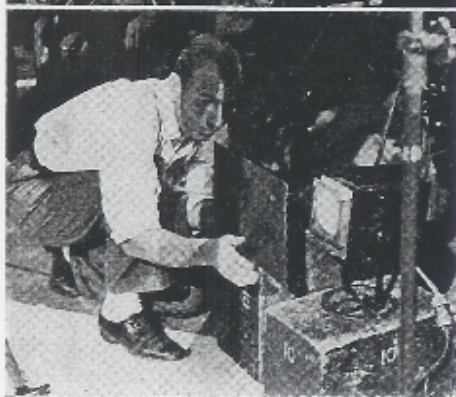
IATSE Studio Technicians Local 37 uses around 2300 operators to supply the constant demands of Hollywood studios. Each a specialist, these operators have a thorough knowledge of their work, and competently cope with most difficult problems of lighting. One week an operator may work 60 feet in the air, high over a huge set, and the next week in the musty, dank bilge of an ocean-going tramp freighter off the shores of Southern California, or a few weeks later in far-away Alaska bundled in countless fur wraps and heavy mittens.

Every location, each rapidly changing setting, presents new and individual problems that the operator must instantly master. From comparative safety of a modern sound stage to handling cables and lamps in a real rainstorm, standing in water highly charged with electricity—no matter the situation—the operator is competent to "deliver the goods." No less than 30 different types of lamps are standard equipment of the modern film studio. All necessitate complete knowledge of electrical hook-ups, proper volt-

age, and a constant and tireless effort in this specialized field. Volumes could be written on the circumstances peculiar to each set, each new picture, but to the layman, perhaps the jargon used by the operators is the most confusing and least understood of all.

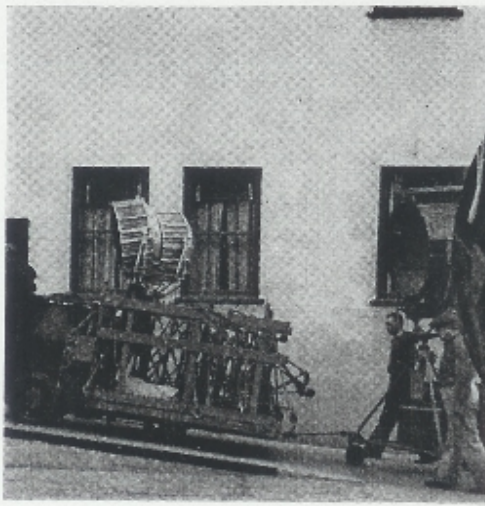
Of the many types of lamps used, each has a different label. There are Grecos, Moles, deuces, fives, rifles, 24's, 36's, 18's, 70's, 120's, 150's, rotaries, babies, matchboxes, juniors, pans, scoops and many others. Other equipment is typed as screens, oils, spiders, four-naught, two-naught, whistle-boxes, snoots, barn-doors, etc.

Let's visit a modern sound stage and hear what goes on there. Stop a moment and look around you—ever see so many lights before, and nearly all different? Glance up above you. There's all of a hundred lamps up there, big ones, little ones, every type. The men busying themselves on those narrow platforms, or parallels, are the set lighting operators, preparing their equipment—testing every lamp, cleaning lenses, checking circuits. The operator is virtually a member of a highly competent fire prevention squad. One faulty hook-up, one short circuit, and this huge stage with its fortune in settings and equipment would be a terrifying bonfire. The operator solemnly understands his responsibilities. Several hundred actors are standing about. Some of them are talking with the electricians, both on the floor and "up high." The actors know the fire hazard that is always present, and their faith in the operator to guard the actor's life has never been violated. An insecure lamp up there on those parallels could crush out the lives of many actors—many tons of heavy lights hang directly over the actor's head—but securely fastening those huge lamps is just one of the automatic duties that the operator performs so well. The man by the camera—looking up high—that's the boss in charge of set lighting, called the gaffer. His assistant at his side is called the "best boy." These two men were selected from the many available through Local 37 to



Bullock.

Never-ceasing vigilance is the obligation of the studio electrical operators of Local 37, IATSE. From high in the catwalks to kneeling to nurse a spot, operators must be constantly on the alert to protect not only photographic values but the lives of the people who work on the set under heavy lighting equipment. This article by a member of Local 37 is the first in a series outlining the work of the eight distinct branches of the organi-



Bullock.



Hendrickson.



Freulich.

Left, "Wrap 'Em Up" translated into action at the close of day as studio electricians fold up the huge lighting equipment. Center: the men who boss the set lighting are the "gaffer" and the "best boy." S. H. Barton, right, is a gaffer at Radio City. and George Neff, left, is best boy. Right, spectacular lighting for night scene in U's "Road Back."

checks his crew, finds them all in place and ready for his commands. His very attitude is one of confidence, confidence in his fellow members who stand ready and capable to assist him in this work. His only tools are a screwdriver and pliers, for the operator's complete knowledge of his work is his chief asset.

Two operators wheel a ponderous "sun-arc" into place, a floor lamp is changed, and the gaffer is ready to start. All must be in readiness before the director arrives for the first shot of the day. A "junior" is placed for a key light; is adjusted; and the lighting gets under way. Let's listen to the orders:

"Up high in Bay 12—hit that Greco—right it a little—heat it up—screen it! Bay 9—splash those three 18's across the floor—oil the center one a little—flood it! That 150 in the corner—hit it—pull in down across the door—put a snoot on it—cool it off! Bay 16—crack that 36 across the davenport—ease it off the window—cut into it on the right with a 70—put a barn door on it!—Bring that baby over here—O. K.—now wheel in a broad—put a silk on it—now bring me a rifle, that's it—now kill both of them!"

"Up high in the grid!—hook that 150 into a spider and put a whistle box on it—coal up that dead 120 and backlight the star—hit her hard!—Swing that 34 pan to the right—hit all your scoops—O. K. Kill 'em all and stand by!"

It doesn't sound very simple, nor was the lighting any simpler than it sounded. Each order was given with the sure knowledge of what results would be obtained. There is no guesswork in set lighting.

Like many another trade jargon, the special vocabulary of the studio operators has been patched together over a period of years. It is a form of verbal picturesque shorthand.

Now each operator carefully checks his lamps, lest they accidentally be

moved the slightest part of an inch. That alone could ruin a shot, and the lamps must not fail in the middle of a "take." The responsibility of each operator is definite and important, and he meets that responsibility with ability born of years of experience.



EXPERTS. Top, George Lee, MGM prop and his Pandora's box. A coming article will detail the work of propmen in Local 37. Bottom, R. C. Moore, 20th-Fox location chief, showing how the company files complete data and pictures on all kinds of location sites.

On location, the operators' duties increase. Entirely new situations and conditions demand that he must be both thoroughly competent and resourceful. A race-track, an African jungle, the desert, flood scenes, aboard a steamer, war scenes, a great fire picture being shot, and thousands of other location assignments burden the operator with complex problems, and he must be always ready at the proper time for shooting. One town has nothing but 220, another 440, this one 110. There are hook-up problems, laying cables through rivers, handling high intensity lamps in terrific rain storms—but the picture must not be delayed. The operator must be always ready.

Physical difficulties under which his myriad duties are performed are many. One day he handles a huge sun-arc high over a stage setting—the intense heat from hundreds of lamps making his precarious perch a dangerous one. The temperature often reaches 115 degrees and more, and he must be prepared for such rigorous tasks. A moment's relaxation, a slight fainting spell from the heat, a step on the treacherous rubber-covered cable, and he would go hurtling to the cement stage floor five stories below. Tomorrow his assignment may take him into a rainstorm to handle highly charged cables and lamps, and he must be prepared against electrocution. His keen appreciation of the dangerous work, plus a thorough knowledge of his art, lessens such a risk. These are but two of many life-risking assignments that may fall to him in his work.

One could write for hours and touch but a few of the dangerous, breath-taking episodes in the life of an operator. Yes, the 2,300 operators of I. A. Local 37 are well-equipped for their specialized endeavors, and are indeed an integral part of the technical division of the motion picture industry.

HANNA. Local 37, IATSE.