

Rather rehearses his lines

4 March 1998

A technical error recently provided a glimpse into the workings and mentality of the American media. On February 20, as war fever raged in Washington, CBS News anchorman Dan Rather and Baghdad correspondent David Martin were caught rehearsing coverage of a US bombing raid on Baghdad. For twenty minutes the test report, intended to be seen only in the network's New York and Washington newsrooms, was mistakenly beamed to a satellite where it could be picked up by anyone with the required receiving equipment.

The incident became public—although not widely covered by the media—when Bill McClure, master control operator at an NBC affiliate in Parkersburg, West Virginia, picked up the transmission and telephoned Associated Press to see if an attack on Iraq had indeed been launched. “It looked like a real broadcast of what was going on,” he told the news agency.

The CBS News anchorman, in pancake makeup, could be seen describing the bombing raid and the type of aircraft involved. He declared that the number of Iraqi casualties was unknown.

An explanation from a CBS spokeswoman made the incident, if anything, even more chilling. She said the network wanted to test new graphics and theme music that would be used to cover the attack.

“It felt like *Wag the Dog*,” commented a senior news producer who had watched the rehearsal. “I bet the network is living in fear that someone on the receiving end of the transmission had tape rolling.”



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