

# Young Boss Of an Old Paper

ROBERT K. MASSIE

OGDEN ("BROWNIE") REID recently celebrated his second anniversary as president and editor of one of the nation's oldest and most influential newspapers, the New York *Herald Tribune*. To get where he is, thirty-two-year-old Brownie had to replace his reflective older brother, Whitelaw—apparently with the agreement of his mother, Helen Rogers Reid, the paper's principal owner, who seemed to feel that Brownie was the only Reid who could save the *Trib*. Whether he will succeed is still not entirely clear.

The storm at the *Trib* didn't blow up overnight. For almost a decade the paper had been in trouble. In 1946, the last year of Ogden Reid, Sr.'s, life, it made a million dollars, but by the early 1950's it was in the red as much as \$750,000 a year. Rumors ran wild: *Look's* Gardner Cowles had cased the *Trib*, Colonel McCormick was interested, and so were the Sarnoffs of RCA. Helen Reid denied everything and promised that the *Trib* would never be sold as long as "a single Reid is left."

The causes of this financial crisis and the consequent revolution lay not only in the rising costs of paper and labor, which have bedeviled all publishers, but also in the vigorous competition of the New York *Times*. For many years the two papers had practically been twins: Each had world-wide on-the-spot coverage, large business and financial sections, and great editorial influence, both locally and nationally. What's more, the papers were competing for the same higher-income subscribers and the same "quality" advertising revenue.

In this race the *Times* has long held a substantial lead. In the decade since 1946 the *Times's* daily circulation has fluctuated in the vicinity of 550,000, while the *Trib's* figure has been closer to 350,000. And on Sunday, the *Times's* reader-

ship has been well over 1,100,000 since 1953. From a record 729,000 in 1947, the Sunday *Trib* fell to around 550,000 in the mid-1950's.

To many observers, these figures began to suggest that the distinguished *Herald Tribune*, already the smallest of New York's seven major dailies, would be forced out. The city, it seemed, simply could not support two newspapers of the caliber and coverage of the *Times* and the *Trib*.

## The Three Generations

It was a disheartening prospect. The *Herald Tribune* has a long history and a respected tradition of independent Republicanism and of good writing. In 1860 Horace Greeley, founder of the *Tribune*, blocked the nomination of William H. Seward, the front runner, throwing the choice to a dark horse from Illinois. When Greeley died, the paper passed to Brownie's grandfather, editor Whitelaw Reid. Reid's only son, Ogden, inherited the editorship in 1913. During the next thirty-four years, Ogden Reid, Sr., put together perhaps the finest newspaper staff in the country: Franklin P. Adams, Grantland Rice, Heywood Broun, Don Marquis, Robert Benchley, J. P. Marquand, Joseph Alsop, Walter Lippmann, Nunnally Johnson, John O'Hara, Ernest K. Lindley, and Deems Taylor, to name only a few. The elder Ogden Reid bought the *Herald* in 1924 from Frank Munsey (who had acquired it in 1920 after the heyday of the James Gordon Bennetts). Though it was always firmly Republican, the accuracy and scope of the *Trib's* news coverage held the lifelong attention of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

When her husband died in 1947, Helen Reid turned the editorship over to her son Whitey, then thirty-three. Through years of managing the *Trib's* advertising department, Mrs. Reid had earned the reputation

of being one of America's most brilliant businesswomen. At this juncture, therefore, she kept the business reins to herself.

THE TWO Reid brothers make a fascinating contrast. Whitey, twelve years the elder, has reddish hair and wide blue eyes; he could be considered a tweedy type. Brownie, who acquired the nickname because as a boy he tanned easily, has black hair and dark eyes, and has been wearing blue business suits since his days at Yale. Whitey dabbles in architecture and likes figure skating; Brownie prefers motorcycling, night-clubbing, and big-game hunting. Whitey is hesitant and self-effacing; his brother is confident and forceful. Although they live on different parts of the family estate in White Plains and their children (Whitey's two sons and Brownie's three) share the same swimming pool, the two families see each other infrequently.

Whitey was groomed from birth to take over the *Trib*. After Yale, where he was a member of the class of '36, he began working his way up through the ranks, including a brief stint as a war correspondent in Britain. His progress was interrupted by a tour of duty as a pilot of Navy patrol bombers in the Pacific, and when he came back to New York after the war, it became quickly apparent that Whitey had no special interest in the business side of newspapering.

MEANWHILE, Brownie Reid was growing up very much in the shadow of his older brother. He was thin, and handicapped by both bad eyes and chronic sinus trouble. With his parents at the office all day and his brother off at school, he spent a lot of time alone. He did get, however, an intimate early political education. The notables of the G.O.P. called often at the Reid mansion on Eighty-fourth Street; Brownie remembers Wendell Willkie with particular clarity and affection.

Brownie went to Deerfield Academy, where his nasal voice inspired the nickname "Oggie the Froggie." When he graduated in 1943, Brownie won the Academy prize for greatest improvement.

Paratroop training and a tour with the occupation forces in Japan

took three years. In 1947, Brownie was at Yale in search of a quick degree. Arranging his classes for convenient commuting from White Plains, sixty miles away, he spent very few nights on campus—only about a dozen during his senior year. He majored in political science. “All the time Brownie was at Yale,” a roommate has said, “I had the feeling he was saying to himself, ‘Someday I’ll be responsible for running the *Trib*. What do I need to know to do it?’”

Soon after graduation in 1949, Brownie became a cub in the *Trib* city room. Editors didn’t know quite how to handle him. “For instance,” one of them has said, “take the time he wanted to fly out in his own plane to cover some floods in the Middle West. It was his plane and his newspaper, so what the hell? Sure we printed his pictures.”

**B**BROWNIE’S specialty was subversion. He was co-author of a series on “The Threat of Red Sabotage” that won praise from J. Edgar Hoover but shocked some of his fellow reporters. Brownie wrote a weekly column called “The Red Underground,” and before he took over the *Trib*’s Paris edition in 1953, he persuaded FBI counterspy Herbert (*I Led Three Lives*) Philbrick to bring his material and himself to the *Trib*.

The year in Paris was a solid success. Brownie added American comics to the six-page journal. The story current at the time was that temporary expatriates like John Foster Dulles and Clare Boothe Luce had told him they missed seeing them. The real object, most likely, was to increase circulation among G.I.s in Europe. The funnies also picked up French readers, who used them to teach English to their children.

Meanwhile, a \$400,000 debt to the New York parent paper was being liquidated and plans were completed for the ten- to twelve-page format that now reaches some sixty thousand readers daily.

Brought back to New York in 1954 as vice-president and business manager of the *Trib*, Brownie began work on a plan for its complete overhaul, including negotiations for new financing.

The climax came at the April, 1955, meeting of the board of

directors, most of them company officials. Mrs. Reid, who owned 170 of the paper’s two hundred shares, announced that she was resigning as chairman, a post Whitey was taking. The presidency and editorship were then given to twenty-nine-year-old Brownie.

The night before this unhappy meeting, Whitey, suddenly realizing that he was about to be replaced, called a last-minute meeting of some of the paper’s senior editors. They



Wide World

#### Mr. and Mrs. Brownie Reid

gathered at midnight in his New York apartment, where he told them he had learned that money was going to be put up the next day by someone else but that, given time, he could get the money too. Whitey wanted his guests to give him their support to take into the next day’s struggle.

The little group decided to try to speak to Mrs. Reid and tell her they preferred to stand by Whitey, but it was too late. The next day Brownie was in and Whitey was moved upstairs to a position of little real authority. There are still two hundred shares of stock, but as Brownie told me, “They are not divided as they were; there have been changes and the chief executive officer [Brownie himself] now holds total control.”

#### ‘Indian Frank’s’ Two Pay Checks

The staff buzzed with speculation as to what the palace revolution would mean to them. They got an answer when Frank Taylor, a former Hearst publisher and Brownie’s new chief

aide as executive vice-president, brought them together for a talk: “I’ve always worked for two pay checks,” he said. “One I put in the bank. The other I wrap around my heart.” Recoiling from this, veteran editors and reporters flinched again at Taylor’s conclusion: “We must dedicate ourselves to sticking our thumbs in the eyes of all who oppose the American Dream!” On the spot he was nicknamed “Indian Frank.”

Once in command, Brownie launched an immediate drive on the circulation problem. The frontal assault on the traditional *Times-Trib* reader was called off and a flanking attack set in motion. Its two objectives were the tabloid readers, who, it was said, “should be reading something with more background,” and the flocks of young families in the suburbs who found the *Times* and the old *Trib* too stuffy. Catching the eye of these audiences meant promotion, and Taylor issued a general order of the day: “The *Trib* must be talked about.”

That summer of 1955 was a busy time. In May a new pocket-size TV booklet went into the Sunday paper. Resembling the nationally circulated *TV Guide*, it was such a success that newspapers across the country hurried to copy it. Cash-paying puzzle contests, an old Hearst come-on, were blossoming in the daily editions. The first of these, “Tangle Towns,” had given circulation a temporary boost. A new third section, devoted primarily to sports, was added, and to make sure everybody would know it was a *Trib* feature, it was printed on mint-green paper.

**T**HE NEXT STEP was to hold the newly won readers. After decades of struggle against the *Times*’s exhaustive coverage, Brownie voluntarily conceded the field. Over the entrance to the twenty-story Herald Tribune Building a sign bears the modern *Trib* credo: “More News in Less Time.” “Readers’ time,” as Brownie told me, “is at a premium. We see no virtue in length if it can be said briefly. Mass circulation needn’t be equated with cheapness; it can be equated, though, with human interest and incisiveness.”

Pursuing this objective, Brownie’s

editors present *Trib* readers with "the core of the news, flavored by the spice of life." The "core" is the work of an increasingly large news staff that includes a crack Washington bureau. Headed by Don Whitehead (*The FBI Story*) and including Robert J. Donovan (*Eisenhower: The Inside Story*) and Marguerite Higgins, this group is supplemented by the paper's syndicated political commentators: Walter Lippmann, Roscoe Drummond, and the Alsops. The "spice," supplied by sports columnist Red Smith, TV critic John Crosby, and European columnist Art Buchwald, extends back to the business pages, where Joseph Kaselow's light-touch Madison Avenue column is scanned every day by the titans of American salesmanship.

All of this is solidly in the best *Trib* tradition. But quite a different tradition is represented by the *Trib's* sudden obsession with the lacquered personalities of Broadway and Hollywood and by the increased picture coverage—the *Trib* has recently claimed more photo yardage than either of the morning tabloids—devoted extensively to publicity shots of stars and starlets passing through the local airports.

### **'Painting the White House Green'**

For some members of his staff, Brownie's two years have been disturbing. Shocked by Frank Taylor's inaugural address and by green newsprint ("like painting the White House green"), they worry about loss of the dignity the paper enjoyed in the days when the *Trib* was known across the country as "a newspaperman's newspaper." Many are irritated by the inroads of the "gossipists," led by the popular Broadway columnist Hy Gardner, who not only writes a daily column but edits the Sunday TV booklet and is in charge of the paper's promotion as well. Gardner's growing power is considered symptomatic of what is wrong with the new *Herald Tribune*. A number of staff luminaries left the paper soon after Brownie took over, among them city editors Joseph Herzberg and Fendall Yerxa, Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent Homer Bigart, and nature writer John ("Tex") O'Reilly.

The biggest target of general criti-

cism has been the layout of the paper's front page. In this prime space, startled old-time *Trib* readers now find a jumble of crime and sex stories that Ogden Reid, Sr., would have buried amid the classifieds. When one of his editors warned Brownie that his new front page wouldn't win any more Ayer Cups, awarded annually for excellence of layout, his reply was, "Ayer Cups don't sell newspapers."

**J**UST WHAT does sell newspapers, and specifically *Herald Tribunes*? Puzzle contests did, at least temporarily. But last winter, with no "Tangle Towns," the *Trib's* daily circulation had decreased since the winter before by 7,000 to 367,000. Sunday circulation had fallen by 20,000 to 576,000. By contrast, the *Times* enjoyed impressive increases of 52,000 to 623,000 daily and of 47,000 to 1,277,000 on Sunday. As for advertising, although 1956 was the best year *Trib* ad salesmen have ever had, in both 1955 and 1956 the *Times* sold more than twice the *Trib* space.

Be that as it may, Brownie has proudly announced that the paper is now out of the red and "comfortably in the black." He told me that "In 1955 our profit was in six figures" and that he was "considering acquisition of other properties." There seems little doubt that Brownie has improved the paper's financial status—whatever he may have done to its editorial content.

As for Brownie's politics, one critic has said, "I thought he'd begin with a loyalty check on the whole staff and then, with the remnants, Brownie would take the paper over to the far right wing." Brownie himself scoffs at such fears. "During the year McCarthy was at the height of his power, I was in Paris and saw first hand the damage he did to American prestige. I say 'Thank God the country has seen the end of McCarthyism.'" But some memories die slowly. At least one former member of the staff draws a parallel between Brownie Reid and Richard Nixon. He told me that "Brownie says his mission is to liberalize the Republican Party because this is an era when liberalizing the Republican Party is the popular thing to be for."

On one or two occasions the *Trib* has criticized the administration rather sharply, but in general has done its best to make the *Herald Tribune* the mouthpiece of East Coast Eisenhower Republicanism. Whether in the long run this is the best way to political influence is an open question. In the past the *Trib* put as much stress on its independence as on its Republicanism, and its power and prestige were at a level no party house organ can ever match.

Nevertheless, the *Trib's* big stake in the present administration is a source of pride to all the Reids, and Brownie has done his utmost to encourage this relationship. Every morning the *Tribune* is the only newspaper placed in the President's White House office (he does see others at breakfast), and during the Geneva "Summit" Conference Brownie personally saw to it that a copy of the Paris edition, flown in by chartered plane, was on the President's breakfast table by seven.

It is difficult, of course, to say how much influence one newspaper can exert on a President. Mr. Eisenhower himself has been heard to call the *Trib* "a very fair newspaper, whose news columns are written objectively." Many Republicans feel that during the days after the President's heart attack, when everybody was confused about his future, it was an open letter "To the President" on the front page of the *Trib* that crystallized support behind the position that if Eisenhower was pronounced medically fit, the party wanted him as its 1956 candidate. It has even been suggested that this open letter had considerable influence on Mr. Eisenhower himself.

In political affairs closer to home, *Trib* influence operates more directly and is easier to trace. When New York's senior senator, Herbert Lehman, announced last summer that he was not planning to run again, there was a scramble in both parties to pick winning candidates. The Democrats came up with New York's popular mayor, Robert Wagner. The Republicans had a tougher time. Their ablest and most attractive candidate, New York Attorney General Jacob Javits, had occupied so liberal a position during his years as a congressman that some members of the



Republican high command accused him of being in the wrong party. There were even charges that Javits had had Communist affiliations. After this wrangle had gone on for several days, another front-page *Trib* editorial came down heavily for Javits, who was nominated and in November won the election.

To questions about his own possible political ambitions, Brownie replies that the *Tribune* is sufficient responsibility. "If my father had left us a cookie factory in the condition this paper was in, I'd have been justified in selling out. But the *Trib* is one of the world's most important newspapers and democracy needs an informed public opinion."

### Loneliness and Dilemmas

Brownie takes his own role extremely seriously. "When you get right down to it," he has said, "newspaper editors must act as the conscience of the free world. No other media can editorialize so directly; magazines come out after the event has lost its immediacy; radio and TV are largely forbidden from it by law. Thus a newspaper editor is often a lonely man. Before the presses can roll, he must take a stand." After a statement like this, Brownie may add apologetically, "These are high-sounding words, perhaps, but I really believe them." There is, of course, no better place for high-sounding words than in the pages of a newspaper that sincerely and intelligently addresses them to a thoughtful audience.

Herein lies Brownie's dilemma. He wants a big hand in local and national politics, but this requires holding the thoughtful, influential, "stuffy" *Trib* subscribers whose readership has long been a factor in the paper's prestige. Some of these readers, unhappy with the new slicked-up "human interest" *Trib*, have already fallen away. Others hang on largely because of the columnists. If Brownie persists in his present course, he may lose much of his high-caliber audience and thus will be circumscribing his future political influence. It will be a tough choice to make. But the *Trib*'s present circulation status suggests that it is difficult to run with the tabloids and hunt with the *Times*. People seem to want one or the other.

## Lawyers On Trial

IRENE SOEHREN

RECENTLY the lawyers of Connecticut were assessed five dollars each by their state bar association to pay for the defense of eight alleged Communists who claimed they had no money to pay for counsel. In Denver leading law firms assigned one member from each to defend Communists. In Cleveland a Federal judge asked the bar association to obtain counsel for alleged Communists who could not afford competent lawyers. When the association collected money for the lawyers' fees, U.S. Assistant



Attorney General William F. Tompkins reportedly commented that lawyers who take up these cases are the latest "dupes of Communist Party strategy."

Lawyers all over the country protested and Tompkins hastily said he was misquoted. But the incident highlighted the current difficulty in securing legal aid for unpopular defendants.

"If you take the position that a lawyer should not represent a man charged with a crime, you substitute trial by lawyer for trial by jury," according to Newman Levy, an outstanding criminal lawyer whose father was a famous criminal lawyer before him. "You are letting the lawyer determine guilt or innocence. A lawyer has no right to make a judgment."

Levy defended Alexander Trachtenberg, a publisher, and George Charney, an official of the Commu-

nist Party. His clients were charged with teaching and advocating the overthrow of the government by violence. "They were charged not with actions but with talking and teaching ideas," says Levy. "I and many lawyers consider such a charge a violation of the First Amendment." Many of Levy's lawyer friends complimented him for doing what he supposes their uneasy consciences told them they should have been doing.

Harold Wolfram, for seventeen years an associate of the late Lloyd Paul Stryker, thinks that Levy may have escaped criticism only because this was his first Communist case. "Such a defense does hurt a lawyer," says Wolfram. A few years ago Stryker may have lost a Federal judgeship because of his defense of Alger Hiss in the first trial, which ended in a hung jury.

Wolfram points out that people don't object when mediocre lawyers represent unpopular clients; they pick on the lawyer only if he is an important man with a fairly substantial reputation. "A lawyer like that can afford to take only a certain number of these cases," Wolfram has said. "The time comes when he has to say to a prospective client, 'I have taken my share, and you've got to get someone else.' We turned some down. We had to."

### 'Fritz from Chicago'

Occasionally a lawyer cannot turn down an unwanted client. When the court appoints a lawyer to defend an unpopular case, he is duty bound to accept unless he has very good reason for refusing. Harold Medina, before he went on the bench, was handed such a case by John C. Knox, chief judge of the Southern District of New York.

Anthony Cramer, German-born but a naturalized American, was charged with collaborating with Werner Thiel, who came over on a