

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

RALPH DELBY

April 16, 1986

at

Leo Burnett, Inc.

Chicago, Illinois

By Scott Ellsworth

Abstracted by Vanessa Broussard

For the Marlboro Oral History Project

INTERVIEW # 9

Archives Center
National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution

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RALPH DELBY

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

An art director for thirty-five years, Ralph Delby has been with Leo Burnett Advertising Agency for nineteen years. At the time of the interview he was an art director on the Marlboro account.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This interview focuses on the creative aspects of photography. Delby describes in detail aspects of the Old West that are utilized by the account group and the symbolic meaning of the cowboy. Other topics include: the role of an art director; his relationship with the photographer; and, the objectives and ground rules established by the account group.

The interview was conducted in the offices of the Marlboro creative group, Leo Burnett, Inc., Chicago, Illinois.

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Abstract of Interview with Ralph Delby, April 16, 1986,
Leo Burnett Advertising Agency, Chicago, Illinois
Interviewer: Scott Ellsworth

Tape 1, Side 1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

:10 Ralph Delby has been with Leo Burnett Advertising Agency for 19 years, 12 of these on the Marlboro account. He has been an art director for 35 years. Born in Chicago, he presently resides in Flossmore, a southern suburb.

MARLBORO ACCOUNT

:45 Delby states that the Marlboro account has not changed in 12 years. Before Delby joined the account group, Ken Krom, the "Daddy" of the account, set the ground rules.

1:20 Through the years, Marlboro advertising has maintained a consistent approach toward the integrity of the West, the attitude of the cowboy, as a heroic figure, and photographic technique and composition.

"LONGHORNS" (special ad #6148)

2:35 "Longhorns" special ad (#6148) ran in March 1986 magazines as a six-page gatefold insert. The account group doesn't run special ads often because they are expensive and difficult to execute.

3:35 The original copyline for the opening spread read: "Longhorns. Half a ton of just plain mean." The second line, after opening up the spread, reads: "Longhorns. If you're tough enough to handle them they call you a cowboy." This copy came after the copyline. The account group wanted action, drama, a violent effect, but one also under control.

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The original copy was not used because it was considered too violent. The new, initial copyline reads, "You can hear them coming a mile away." The purpose of the violence was to get the reader to open the ad.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SET FOR "LONGHORNS" SPECIAL

7:05	The "Longhorns" ad was filmed twice, and in two different locations. The first was in Colorado, where strong winds wiped away the camp.
7:55	The account group decided to use hand picked animals of about the same size. They found the longhorns at the Raymore Ranch in Kansas.
9:05	The advertisement was photographed in Mullensville, Kansas. The logistics of a location is important in maintaining a sense of control.
10:05	Jim Braddy was the photographer for this ad. He is the oldest photographer on the account.
10:55	The size of the ad dictated that it had to be shot differently for a panoramic view. It was shot at 9:30 a.m..
13:05	The account group wanted to focus on one cowboy-- Darrell Winfield--as a heroic figure.
15:25	There is some retouching of the photograph, to remove excess dust.
15:50	Delby has worked on several projects; this was the most difficult.
16:00	The animals were run until they were exhausted.
	The account group filmed three consecutive days in the same location.
	Two 35mm slides were used for the advertisement.

CONTROLLING THE LONGHORNS

- 18:05 To control the path of the animals the account group found a bowl type terrain, a very narrow canyon where they brought the animals through.
- At the top of the canyon the account group placed fencing along the plateaus and positioned people. During the shooting, the account group was able to box in animals that were not positioned properly.
- 22:45 The account group is trained to seek maximum drama, such as the use of stormy skies, and the wind blowing. These are the types of things that it can't create in the office where the overall game plan is designed.
- 23:20 The selection of the ranch rests between the photographer and the art director. The account group wants a location where it can create high action. Logistically good terrain, water, barns, and a place where one can shoot 180 degrees is important.

COMPARING "RIVER CAMP" (ad #5845) AND
"THUNDERHERD" (ad #5844)

- 23:55 The photographer for both "River Camp" (5845) and "Thunderherd" (ad #5844) was Coe Rentmester (?) who is a Time-Life photographer.
- As an art director, Delby can tell photographers how to set up a shot. It is then up to the photographers to capture their assignment on film.
- 26:00 There was no retouching on the "Thunderherd" ad. As the account group was out preparing for the shot, a beautiful sky erupted. Hastily, they decided to use this as a background for the ad. This is what is known as a "grab shot".

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