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NBC's "Vanished" Proves Movies Longer Than Ever

By VAL ADAMS

(Reprinted from yesterday's late editions.)

If you present a World Premiere movie every week, as NBC does, how do you make one World Premiere stand out over all others? Answer: make it twice as long and televise it in two installments.

This is just what NBC and Universal Studios did. On Tuesday night NBC presented the concluding installment of "Vanished," produced by Universal, which was billed as the first four-hour movie made for television. The first installment was televised Monday evening.

"Vanished," based on Fletcher Knebel's 1968 suspense novel of the same title, which was a best seller, was an unusual TV event. But in a way, all the planning

high levels including a Senate minority whip who seeks to raise scandal about the President and his missing adviser.

NBC and Universal injected more theatrical razzle dazzle into the "Vanished" project than any other made-for-TV movie has experienced. Universal paid \$125,000 for TV rights to the novel and spent more than \$2 million to produce the movie. Cooperation was obtained from the Department of Defense, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. The producers also had the use of the President's plane, Air Force One, and a nuclear aircraft carrier (Kitty Hawk) in waters off San Diego.

Impressive Cast

In front of this gigantic and impressive canvas, executive producer David Victor and producer David J. O'Connell assembled a huge cast, including James Farentino as the President's press secretary; Skye Aubrey as the secretary and playmate for the press secretary; Arthur Hill as the missing adviser; Robert Young as the scheming senator; E. G. Marshall as head of the CIA; Eleanor Parker as the alcoholic wife of the adviser and William Shatner as a relentless digger of news on the White House beat.

All these roles commanded attention, but really getting to know the characters was difficult. They were there more as a device to manipulate suspense rather than to reveal themselves.

Remained Secretive

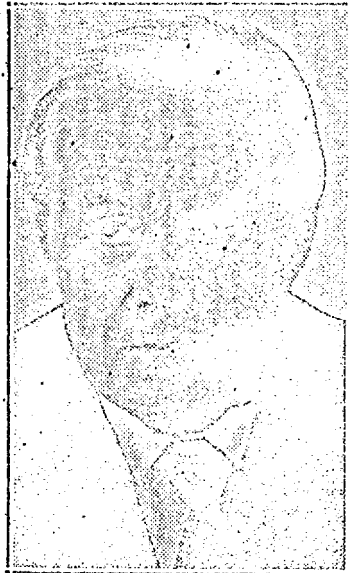
During the first three hours of "Vanished," Richard Widmark did not seem to be the most effective President the country could have. By the very nature of Knebel's novel and Dean Reisner's screenplay, he had to refrain—over and over again—from making any comment about the disappearance of his top adviser. Even when the press secretary almost ripped asunder by the Washington press corps, pleaded for confidential information, the President declined to give it, saying merely it would all come out well in the end. It did.

Young Switch

In such a huge cast, which also included Robert Hooks, Murray Hamilton, Tom Ferrin, and John Hagman in starring roles, there

was no real standout. Of particular interest, however, was the switch in roles of Robert Young from lovable Marcus Welby to a purely opportunistic senator serving only himself.

Give credit to Buzz Kulik for the monstrous job he had in directing the movie. A major flaw is that "Vanished" was much too long. The relatively small TV screen does not cry out for panoramic theater.



Richard Widmark
Portrays the President

and elements that went into the production, covering a span of two years before it got on the TV screen, overshadow the end product, the film itself.

As a movie, "Vanished" had lots of suspense. It was a slick production and in the first half, suspense was piled on to the point of almost shattering credibility. The last half of the show, of course, explained everything, but it took so long to reach this point that all the suspense then seemed quite manufactured rather than acceptably plausible.

Large Project

But "Vanished" could hardly be a dud. There were so many elements of built-in excitement: Richard Widmark making his TV drama debut in the role of the President of the United States; the mysterious disappearance of a personal friend and top adviser to the President and the suspicion that he defected to Communists; Washington intrigue at