

Shooting a SoCal Earthquake

A little article printed many years ago describing the newsreelers at work covering a 1933 California earthquake. Notice the last graf where the author mentions members of the public running around with their own cameras. These days you find the public doing the same thing with their cell phones instead though...

After a week of hard labor filming the Pacific Battle Fleet of the U. S. N., the newsreelers stationed at Los Angeles stepped off their boats just in time to feel the first shock of the earthquake of March 10 (1933). The temblor struck at exactly 5:55 p.m., Pacific Standard Time, and lasted about thirteen seconds.

The newsreelers were on the job at Long Beach, Compton and Watts before the dust of the falling wreckage had settled and as a result several scoops were scored in getting pictures to New York and to Metropolitan papers via air.

The big studios rendered aid in illuminated the darkened towns by sending truck loads of lights and mobile generator sets so that the spectacle was made to resemble a man-made movie set.

The roll call of the newsreelers at work on the scene only a few minutes after the first shock revealed the Universal Newsreel with Mervyn Freeman; the Paramount News with Joesph Johnson, Irby Koverman, Sammy Greenwald, Robert Sawyer, Marshall McCarroll; **Fox-Hearst with Joe Hubbell**, Al Brick, Jimmie Seebach, Eric Mayell, Ben Jackson, Warren McGrath, H. Tice; Roy Kluver was shooting from the Goodyear blimp and our own newsreel reporter, Ray Fernstrom, was associated with the Paramount outfit. George Lancaster and Harry Parsons were freelancing with Leica cameras, loaned by Gilbert Morgan, and altogether it was the busiest group in the world that night. A little later they were joined by a delegation from San Francisco.

All the newsreelers were handicapped by a strange fog which floated in from sea shortly after the first shock, but it lifted in time to permit the sharp-shooters to get a lot of wonderful stuff in their boxes. Everybody who had any kind of camera was at work and among these were to be seen literally scores of 16 m.m. outfits getting the record on what their owners knew was to be a part of the history of California.