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Both reporters were on their respective scene in minutes.

Bob Haiman rushed down to a burning Webb's City, a department store in downtown St. Petersburg that caught fire in the past hour, and Jonathan Abel skipped breakfast in a hurry to the Hernando County Jail, where Matthew Draper had escaped the previous night.

Both reporters were fresh out of college, worked the police beat for the St. Petersburg Times and used the latest technology to report their stories.

Bob Haiman used a two-way radio to relay the details of the scene back to his rewrite man, and Jonathan Abel used his laptop to post the progressing story online minutes after arriving on the scene.

But 50 years separate the two reporters. Haiman graduated from the University of Florida in 1957 while Abel left Harvard in 2005. A half-century of newsroom protocol separate the way each reporter covered his story.

It was the spring of 1959, and thirty seconds before the loudspeaker blared "Fire at Webb's City," Haiman waited around in his office at the local police station, which was the best place for his office as a police reporter.

"Every night I would wait for the balloon to go up, to hear the sirens," said Haiman, who waited for the loudspeaker to shout breaking news.

Webb's City, a 1959 version of Wal-Mart, was an all-in-one department store at First Avenue South and Ninth Street. Customers could get a trim at a barbershop, buy some liquor or furniture, and shop for clothing all at the same store – a rare but popular setup in that era.

“People went there as a huge trip,” said Haiman. “There wasn’t much going on in St. Pete in those days as far as entertainment.”

With three hours until press time, he hopped in company car #8 to get to the burning Webb’s City, but he had no cell phone, no laptop and no computers to back him up.

His only communication with his paper was the two-way radio with a whip-antenna in his company car.

Haiman recalls the first communication for the story:

“St. Pete Times, car 8 calling.”

“Yes car 8, go ahead.”

“I’m on my way to Webb’s City. There’s a report of a fire there. I’ll tell you more when I get there.”

“Keep me posted.”

The department store was about a mile away from the police station Haiman was at, and before he arrived on the scene, he could hear the sirens and see the smoke and orange glow over the trees.

On the scene, Haiman heard that a beer-storage warehouse next door had caught fire and spread to Webb’s City.

By this point, it was 9:30 p.m., 2 and a half hours until press time.

Jonathan Abel had more time than that.

While covering the story of the inmate breakout at the Hernando County Jail in the spring of 2006, Abel got his call for the breaking story before work even started, a full day until press time.

Matthew Draper escaped from jail around 2 a.m. The Sheriff's Office was notified at 5:56 a.m.

Abel knew by 8 a.m., and he was on the scene by 9.

First things first, he called his editor to put something up online.

"Everything is breaking news these days. The competition is high to see it on the web before print," said Abel.

Despite the remote location of the jail, Abel connected with his editors over the Web with an aircard attached to his laptop, allowing him to access the Internet anywhere cell phone reception was available.

A story as big as this, the news organizations involved all have the same basic facts –where did he go, what did he do, has he been caught- said Abel. While reporters are accountable for these facts, the challenge is to make your story better than the other stories.

Scrambling for fresh material, Abel pulled up an address for the escaped inmate's mother after finding the information he could at the parking lot of the jail.

He followed his directions down a dirt road and past a barbed wire fence. He knocked on the door next to a "Beware of Dog" sign, but no one answered and Abel was left with the facts he had.

Back at the burning department store, Haiman needed more material about everything, and more importantly, to relay back to the paper what was going on.

From his car, Haiman radioed the Times.

"We know it's a mess," they told him. "We're sending you more reporters and a walkie-talkie (the company's only) so you can report back."

Beer kegs that had caught fire started to explode next to Webb's City as Haiman dictated the scene over a two-way radio back to his re-write man at the newsroom.

The story was typed on a manual typewriter, on carbon-copy paper fed through, so as the story is typed out, two copies were made.

As deadline approached, the copy feeding out of the typewriter would grow to a few feet long. Every so often, someone would tear off one of the copies of what had been typed to take it down to the composing room to set it in type.

Without computers or printers, every line of a story would have to be manually set on a Linotype Machine. An operator would type onto hot lead to form molds of letters, which the machine would organize into a sentence, eventually forming a story. Once a mold for the entire story had been typed out, as many copies as the newspaper pleased could be printed.

Haiman stood on Eighth Street, retelling the scene into his radio as fast as he could, while another reporter did the same on Ninth Street from a phone booth.

Other reporters were assigned to sidebars and were frantically searching records in a library for famous fires and the amount of fireman injuries in St. Pete -anything to supplement the article before midnight.

The fire was under control by 1 a.m., but that was an hour after the first edition of the paper had gone to press. The last edition of the paper, which went to press around 1:30 a.m., included rumors about how the fire had started, the development of the blaze and the end of the fire.

Haiman and a team of reporters had managed to report the story on time, and with their re-write men, printed a story the city could read about 10 hours after it happened.

There were a few hours until press time on Feb. 11, 2006, and Jonathan Abel was about to finish his story as well. The escaped convict had stolen a car and crashed it along SR-50, where he was apprehended around 11:30 a.m., almost 4 hours after Abel had heard the news.

Once Abel had the finished story online, the work was only getting started.

“The harder half of a story is after he’s caught,” Abel explained pointing out that people want to know more about who this person is and the development of an arrest as it’s happening.

He went down the courthouse, pulled files on Matthew Draper, the now-apprehended convict, and discovered a history of ID-theft. He interviewed Karen MacManus, a woman from whom Draper stole \$28,000 worth of possessions.

More research proved that the jail Draper had escaped from had recently experienced a number of problems. The inmate was allowed to volunteer for a job he wasn’t supposed to and escaped when he noticed a guard left a door unlocked.

For every fact Abel could contribute to the story, there was an online update, so readers could stay on top of the story.

While Haiman was unable to update his story online as Webb’s City burnt more to the ground, the Times did print several editions of the paper. First editions of the paper went to areas outside of the city, while the city received the final edition, containing the latest news.

Both reporters helped keep the public updated as often as possible. Haiman radioed in what he saw, and Abel posted his story online as it was happening.

Through the latest technology the Times could offer them, each reporter hustled through a few hours at work to beat the rush of deadlines and competition, keeping the St.

Petersburg of today as informed as it was 50 years ago.