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In 60 Minutes II Interview with Saddam, CBS Anchorman Wastes Time on Trivia and Silliness

Dan Rather Stars in “Gullible’s Travels”

Saddam Hussein enjoyed another pleasant rerun of his 1990 interview with Dan Rather in prime time last night on *60 Minutes II*. But too many minutes of this hour were wasted on trivia and silliness, and Rather exhibited too much gullibility, for it to have any value to the American public:

The “Prayer” Pause. Rather noted that at one point, “Saddam got up from his chair and said it was time for him to pray. He left the room and we thought that might be the last we heard or saw of him, but he returned about ten minutes later, seemed refreshed, and answered questions about what kind of war he expects.” Isn’t it possible that the less-than-devout Iraqi dictator was “refreshed” after taking a palace potty break?

Respect Those You Want Shot. Rather highlighted how one of Saddam’s translators called the first President Bush “Bush” instead of “Mr. Bush.” Saddam “interrupted in mid-sentence” and said he insisted on “Mr. Bush” because, “I am being historically accurate in showing him respect. I used not to, and this is a funny anecdote, address him as ‘Mr. Bush’ when he was in power, but as soon as he left office I refer to him as ‘Mr. Bush.’ We believe that we should respect the humanity, even of our enemies.”

Rather did in this case underline the ridiculousness of this trivia he highlighted: “A reminder that after the first President Bush left office, Saddam Hussein tried to have him assassinated and today one of Saddam’s own newspapers refers to the second President Bush as the ‘Son of the Snake.’”

Talk English to Me. Rather also wasted air time in prodding the dictator to speak a little English. “Mr. President, I hope you will take this question in the spirit in which it’s asked. First of all, I regret that I do not speak Arabic. Do you speak any English at all?” When Saddam said he could understand some English, Rather insisted: “Well, would you speak some English for me? Anything you choose?” They joked about liking coffee, but Saddam refused: “Our language is Arabic.”

Drooling Over “The Duel.” Before one ad break, Rather promised they’d chat about Saddam’s “proposal for a sort of a duel, a TV debate with George Bush, in a moment.” Rather ate up five and a half minutes working out the logistics for the

preposterous idea that President Bush conduct a satellite-TV debate with the Iraqi dictator, as if Saddam has a long record of supporting open debate. As the show wrapped up, Rather acknowledged their debate hype was concocted for the promotion department, remembering that Saddam had also “challenged the elder President Bush to a debate” in 1990.

Will You Miss Me? Rather and Saddam have met two times in their long lives for a total of about four hours. But Rather seemed to want to underline their somehow notable personal relationship as historical figures: “I appreciate your remembering that we met in 1990. And I interviewed you in this very building. Given the sober moment and the danger at hand, what are the chances this is the last time you and I will see each other?”

The Arab Avenger. It wasn’t funny, but it was strange when Rather dispassionately asked Saddam if he “agreed” with the terrorist attacks against

America on September 11. In one of many fatuous responses, the Stalin-style leader claimed: “We believe in humanity...There should not be a killer while those who watch and applaud the killing.”

Rather reminded Saddam that he used to be known as the “Arab Avenger,” a hero of the “Arab street,” asking whether Osama bin Laden had “made you irrelevant?” Saddam replied, in part: “Jealousy is for women.”

It’s one thing for Dan Rather to be solicitous of Saddam Hussein at his palace and ask, “What’s the most important thing you want the American people to understand at this juncture of history?” It’s another thing for Rather to come home and still seem so thrilled to get the interview that he would conclude: “Saddam Hussein says he’s as strong as ever, no matter that he’s seen as a brutal leader.”

Seen as? — *Tim Graham*

Washington Post Hails “Coy” Dan

“Despite the coyness of the presentation, however, the interview represents an undisputed triumph for Rather and reaffirms his position as America’s premier newsmen.” — Washington Post TV critic Tom Shales, February 27.

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