

# A View From Behind the Camera



BY THOMAS W. OLENDER

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

► Why use video as a complement to the reporter's transcript while deposing "The Big Three" during the Clinton impeachment trial? Because without it there would be no body language or facial expressions to observe. Savvy attorneys are very much aware of how seeing a witness's facial expression, long pauses, signs of fear, agitation, anger, etc., can convey the true message behind the spoken and transcribed words. In this case, these three witnesses were being videotaped in lieu of actually appearing at the Senate trial. This was the next best thing to having them there. When I watched the trial on CNN, I noticed how effective the video was in emphasizing a point being made by counsel.

## Requirements

When I was first contacted to videotape the Clinton impeachment trial deponents, I was told that the Senate's instructions and demands were for the highest possible quality video.

In addition to the picture quality, counsel was concerned about the audio

## About the Author

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quality. Audio is just as important as picture quality, if not more important — a great picture with bad audio is useless. I assured them that there would be an ample supply of microphones.

I quickly realized that in order to give them the quality and service they desired for depositions of such importance, I would need additional primary and backup equipment. I asked Greg Smith if he would be interested in helping me transport and set up the equipment and monitor the audio. Greg began working in my office in 1990 and, after attaining his CLVS in 1995, has

been my lead freelance videographer.

I used the Panasonic Supercam video camera, which has exceptionally good picture quality and records with date, hours, minutes and seconds. In addition to the videotape recording inside the camera, we set up a JVC professional field videotape recorder and simultaneously recorded an SVHS backup tape. The deposition table was crowded with attorneys and senators. We piggybacked three Shure M367 microphone mixers, allowing us to put out 11 lapel mics and two Sennheiser shotgun mics to pick up anyone on the periphery.

We always use a high-quality, five-inch video monitor, and in addition to that, we set up a 13-inch monitor in the back of the room so participants who could not sit at or near the table could observe the witness up close. It also created a comfort level for those concerned about the video quality. They knew exactly what they would be seeing when the tapes were played back at the Senate trial.

## The Importance of the Setup

There was a considerable amount of time devoted to predeposition room layout and seating arrangements at the Mayflower Hotel for the Lewinsky deposition. On the Saturday before the deposition, I met with the court reporters, counsel and senators. We discussed various ways in which the room could be set up to accommodate all parties and still give good camera access to the witness. Greg and I met again at the hotel on Sunday afternoon to establish

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where the parties would sit with great emphasis on camera location.

After we decided on a game plan, Greg and I were left alone to set up the video equipment. We taped and hid all cabling under the table, taped any loose cabling on the floor and finally tested all equipment before leaving for the night.

## Recording History

We were back at the hotel by 7:30 Monday morning, and as soon as the room was checked and cleared for bugging devices, we were permitted entry, tested all the equipment again and waited for the parties to arrive.

Before long, the Presidential Suite was filled with counsel and senators. We

introduced ourselves to those we had not met and patiently waited for Monica Lewinsky and her counsel.

When she entered the room, our adrenaline level rose considerably — the moment had finally come. Naturally, there was a certain amount of tension in the air; however, everyone was extremely friendly and cooperative. All parties were intensely interested in having a good video and allowed us to do whatever was necessary to reach that end result. The day proceeded much as any deposition would. At its conclusion, I made the usual closing remarks — time, number of tapes, etc. — and we were left to break down the equipment and move it to the Senate chambers on Capitol Hill.

The Office of the Sergeant at Arms personnel were kind enough to have a van waiting to transport us to the Hill to set up in a secure room on the Senate side of the Capitol Building. Greg and I were relieved to learn that they would take us there, usher us through security and guide us to the room (one which few average citizens get to see). We were there until 9 p.m. setting up.

The depositions of Vernon Jordan and Sidney Blumenthal were equally amiable. There was a sense of gravity during the proceedings on both days. Both Greg and I were very much aware that we were caught up in the throes of history in the making. The only glitch was during Mr. Jordan's deposition when, after about an hour on the record, there was a power failure and the proceedings were halted for 20 minutes until power was turned on again. Our lights and video equipment were too much for the circuit breaker when someone turned on a copy machine in one of the front offices. During our lunch break, the electrician brought an extension cord in for our lighting equipment, and the deposition continued without a hitch.

## Why CLVS?

► Both Greg Smith and I wanted to be known as professional videographers specializing in the legal field. The CLVS certification was one step in achieving that goal. I don't think either of us have noticed any great acknowledgment of the CLVS with our local clients; however, I think someone from out of our area or someone who just doesn't know a videographer would tend to use a CLVS — at least we know what a deposition is and how to conduct ourselves in that environment.

Tom Olender

## A Growing Field

Video, text and document integration is a new and exciting field, and I feel that the future of legal videography is exceptionally strong. With the notoriety video has attained in recent high-profile cases such as this one, attorneys are becoming more and more aware of what an effective tool video is in winning their cases. I am convinced that more and more law firms will be using this new technology in making their trial presentations. With it catching on so quickly, it's an excellent way for a court reporting firm to expand its business. ■