



FEATURE

CBS TELEVISION NETWORK
PRESS INFORMATION
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LAST-MINUTE MEETING PUT "M*A*S*H" ON ROAD TO SUCCESS

On a warm night in the summer of 1972, three men met in the coffee shop of a Beverly Hills hotel, and they had a problem.

Rehearsals were due to start the next morning on the pilot episode of "M*A*S*H," and Alan Alda, who was eagerly sought for a starring role, had still not signed for the project.

"I think that meeting was one of the most crucial factors in the eventual success of the show," reflects Alda, who was one of the participants in the long-ago coffee shop conference, and who, before the evening was out, had committed himself to the series.

"M*A*S*H," one of the most popular and critically successful series in television history (it has averaged more than 10 Emmy nominations a year), is now in its eighth season (MONDAYS, 9:00-9:30 PM, ET) on the CBS Television Network.

Alda recalls that it was at that meeting, just hours before production began, that he, Gene Reynolds, who was executive producer, and Larry Gelbart, who had written the pilot script, agreed that they would always be true to their vision of the program.

"We knew we had a unique concept — one that gave us a chance to reach for a humanistic point of view — but if we hadn't had that meeting, where we swore to be true to our concept, we might have lost it."

Alda recalls that there were pressures to take a less serious approach to the subject, especially at a time when the Vietnam War was raging at full force and there appeared little chance for an early peace.

"People were telling us, for example, to get out of the operating room," he says. "But we were dogged in our determination to be funny, and to be human at the same time."

That determination, Alda feels, has remained constant throughout the series' history. "I think we can say — everyone who has been involved in the show — that we've never side-stepped our responsibility. Nobody has treated 'M*A*S*H' as a job where you punch in at nine and punch out at six at night."

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