Getting a message of help across

By Jamie Talan

Red Cross a beneficiary of "public relations advertising," a concept that was just catching on. The last day in February, 1942, was declared Red Cross Reply Day and a war fund message was sent out an average of 5½ times an hour. The message: "Keep your Red Cross at his side."

Ingrid Bergman's appeal was seen and heard by more than 80 million theater goers; a documentary, "Seeing Him Through," was shown to 20 million listeners throughout March, and ads were read in more than 16 million Sunday newspapers. The agency of record during the "At his side" campaign was former Kathrauff & Ryan, but whether it created the slogan is not clear today.

It was an enormous job," says Mark Earle, management supervisor on the Red Cross account in Thompson's New York office. "We continually work on incorporating the entire concept of "advertising" into our thinking." Thompson has doubled its creative time with a new health promotion campaign. Together, there are now four full-time creative people on the account, and fundraising, blood donations and health promotion.

This year 3,100 staff hours were spent creating the 1943 reply which was introduced last month in St. Louis during the national Red Cross convention.

This year's slogan, "We'll help. Will you?" won over last year's "Together we can change things" in tests. The blood campaign, developed for the local drive campaign in 1975, is still using "Thanking. You've saved my life," which has been effective in drawing donors across the nation.

The Red Cross currently delivers half of all the blood in the U.S. The Ad Council estimates that in 1981 the Red Cross received 10,000 public service radio, television, magazine, transit and outdoor display space and time valued at more than $85 million. Thompson passes along only out-of-pocket costs, which last year totalled $72,732.

"Many production costs are given at either a charge or a discount," says Mr. Earle, the Thompson management supervisor. "Businesses are very generous when it comes to public service work."

Red Cross and Thompson have proved flexible to change, expansion and updating, which is possibly why the relationship has lasted so long. There have been rough spots. The "Good neighbor" campaign of the 1970s was dropped when a 1976 Harris poll revealed that 41 percent of Americans said they would not contribute to local relief, was low. In 1979, Alan Gillies, former Thompson creative director in the New York office, began relying heavily on "personals" to push editors and broadcasters into airing the messages.

"You're competing for the charity dollar and a signature on the line of a check is of a chance of being aired," says Mr. Gillies, who in one case used Lucille Ball, Miss Douglas, Dionne Warwick, Bob Hope and Bill Cosby in the same campaign "Help keep Red Cross ready."

The personal ads proved extremely popular, says Mr. Gillies, who is now retired and living in Arizona. "Media placements that year were estimated at over $40 million." Yet the Ad Council, which prints and distributes Thompson's ads, finds it difficult to determine how often the ads are used. "In 1971, no advertising department, advertising campaign director, says she receives only 5% to 20% of the approximately 22,000 business reply cards the campaign has sent out asking media outlets about their usage of the ads. A 1983 Harris poll placed advertising awareness of Red Cross at 58%."}

Since early on, Red Cross ads have highlighted the organization's humanitarian tradition.

In 1946, Lennen & Mitchell wrote the campaign theme "It's your Red Cross," and when Comppton became the agency handling the account, it changed the theme to "Yes, too, can help through your Red Cross. Give now!" Next, N. A. Huyer added a brief: "-one at a time, and it created a campaign using Arthur Godfrey quoting tragedies of the year.

From 1953 to 1957, SS&C&B handled the account, developing the theme lines that were later used in many of Thompson's ads of the 1960's: "Join the service and "On the job when it counts.

When the Ad Council designated Thompson as the agency of record in 1957, the Red Cross was having some major problems. "People didn't understand the nature of the Red Cross during peacetime," says Wallace O'Brien, president and chief operating officer of Thompson. "Soldiers were home from WWII angry that they had to pay for coffee and donuts as they fought for us and they blamed the Red Cross."

Additionally, Mr. O'Brien says that the public had stepped up in the "worst disaster cycle" in the history of the Red Cross. The storms changed, but the use of human interest stories did not. Says Mr. O'Brien: "The Advertising has leaned mainly on American hard work helped the Red Cross and used "At his side". We used the dark side of the situation to motivate people to give blood, time and money.

As the Red Cross service, the increased, the advertising campaigns expanded to include the additional "product" offered by the Red Cross. Over the years, the ads joined in learning to swim and deaf women holding babies.

The Depression and the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the presidency in 1932 brought the need for a government welfare program. "It brought some bad press for us during those years," says Mr. O'Brien. "People seeing that public service was harder to come by."

On the other hand, Americans have always recognized the value of giving to the Red Cross. In 1940, the first project began preparing for what became World War II, the Red Cross Reply Day. It was named in 1945 as "At his side," which was used in the United States throughout war years. Movie and Broadway stars appeared primarily in major cities to promote the Red Cross appeal, and an estimated 92% of all Americans were reached by radio.

In 1942, the Advertising Council, a not-for-profit organization that evolved in response to the war, made the