PS1 for 7/23/87#OLLIE, WE LUV YA

What a week on television! The first two days, people were complaining that their favorite soaps had been preempted. Then, America's TV addicts found to their surprise that the Iran-Contra Hearings were high theater more compelling than their soaps.

For weeks, the liberal media and the partisan Democrats had been loaded for bear, sharpening their knives for the Lieutenant Colonel on whom they expected to pin the ""Contragate scandal.'' In the media, Oliver North had already been tried and found guilty; the only question remaining was to identify the crime.

So Oliver North was summoned into the lions' den to face a battery of interrogators. The accused was pitted against a formidable array of dozens of stern-faced Senators, Congressmen, their staffs, a forbidding row of hostile lawyers primed to parade their prosecutorial skills, and a bottom row of crouching cameramen.

The first day started with the Senators and Congressmen tart and cocky. Indeed, they were in the driver's seat; they had called the hearing; the liberal Democrats were ready to draw blood, and the Republicans were neutralized into cautious silence because the tide running against North seemed overpowering.

For two solid days, North was pounded by direct questioning from the House lawyer, John W. Nields. As the hours wore on, however, it became clear that North was in command of the colloquy and Nields couldn't lay a glove on him.

At the end of the first day, the reaction of the TV commentators was wait and see; it was only a matter of time, they thought, when North would break and convict himself and the Reagan Administration of high crimes. By the end of the second day, big media realized that they had been bested at their own game of television.

Tom Brokaw of NBC pronounced the hearing ""utterly fascinating,''

and, in tones of unabashed awe and admiration, credited North with scoring ""a hole in one.'' Dan Rather ruefully admitted that North ""speaks the language of Middle America -- he's a very effective communicator.''

Still, they cherished the hope that North would be broken on the third day by the tough counsel hired by the Senate Democrats, Arthur Liman. He, too, started off completely confident, raring for the chance to demonstrate his talents. Friendly cameramen shot him at an angle that minimized his three-inch double chin.

Liman began by addressing North as Lieutenant instead of Lieutenant Colonel. He didn't get by with this pettiness and only made himself look small in the attempt.

Liman then tried to patronize North by asking him if the Iran-Contra hearings were his ""worst'' days. Hardly; not for a man who had survived some really ""worst'' days in combat in Vietnam.

Liman patronized North again, saying, ""I'm not trying to trap you.'' Who did he think he was kidding? Of course, Liman was trying to trap North! But North skillfully avoided every ambush and came out unscathed.

By the end of what had been given advance billing as ""cross-examination by the top trial lawyer in New York,'' Liman looked like a pussycat who had been dropped in the pond. He never scored a point on the young Lieutenant Colonel.

By the end of the fourth day, America was experiencing a tidal wave of Ollie-mania. Tom Brokaw said that North's credibility had ""grown with every passing day.'' Americans have a new hero.

It was amusing the way, in four days on the witness stand, every camera shot of Ollie North was positioned so that his microphones obscured his Vietnam combat decorations. But it didn't matter. His courage, dedication and patriotism shone forth from his face.

The liberal Democrats, who had planned the Iran-Contra hearings as a lynch party to hang Oliver North and Ronald Reagan, are bewildered at the way North turned the tables on them. The whole bunch of politicians and lawyers came across (to borrow Brendan Sullivan's colorful metaphor) like ""potted plants,'' just stage props in a great TV drama called ""Ollie North Fights Back.''

For seven months, television has given us an unremitting diet of partisan Congressmen and other leftwingers denouncing and deploring the alleged "scandal'' of ""diversion'' of funds to the Contras in Nicaragua. Now the American people have seen an articulate spokesman tell us that it was both essential and legal to encourage private citizens and foreigners to give aid to the Contras during those months when Congress denied appropriated funds.

North explained to the American people on television for the first time, why it is both morally right and necessary to U.S. national security to back the Contras against Soviet Communism in Nicaragua. For the first time, the American TV viewers were given a coherent defense of the Reagan Doctrine of intervening to support anti-Communist Freedom Fighters.

As North so eloquently said, ""America is a nation at risk in a dangerous world.'' In this kind of world, we are glad that we have men who can accept the challenge, salute smartly, and capture the hill from the enemy.

When Allen Drury in ""Advise and Consent'' described the final confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, he warned that, in ""that fearful peril, only the most iron-willed and nobly dedicated and supremely unafraid men could lead the nation.'' Oliver North has proved that our nation can still produce a man with these qualities. Ollie, we luv ya.