

Bernie Harrison, Bernice
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ON THE AIR

'Vanished,' Part One, Sets a Brisk Pace

BY BERNIE HARRISON
Star Staff Writer

Part One of Fletcher Knebel's "Vanished" was intriguing enough last night to make at least one viewer almost forget that other show on closed circuit TV. (Forgetting Carlon Brando's Mutiny was easy.)

Knebel's best selling novel, if you missed it a few years back, was about the disappearance of a close friend of the president and was well stocked with Washington atmosphere and characters, and the NBC-4 made-for-TV movie is making the most of both.

Part One got us up to the point when the President's press secretary, played by James Farentino, is wondering whether his boss has cracked up. Of course, there was much to snicker at from a Washington perspective; for openers, the fact that the press secretary's roommate was an FBI agent (Robert Hooks.)

But some of the White House scenes worked very well and the piquant casting was a big help.

Robert Young, as a wily senator, Western clag horn style, Richard Widmark as the president, and Eleanor Parker as the distraught wife, were excellent. Others, like Bill Shatner as a noisy reporter, were less fortunate in their roles.

Ironically, one of the missing scientists in the show has a name that sounds a little like Kissinger.

Nothing helps more, however, in the telling of a multi-character melodrama than a

brisk pace. You can forget a lot of questions, like why the press secretary didn't follow up his phone call to the missing man's wife, just trying to keep up with what's going on. Part two tonight.