

**BBC
AT
WAR**

PRICE SIXPENCE



B.B.C. at WAR



by

Antonia White

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>From Peace to War</i>	3
<i>The Home Front</i>	12
<i>The Battle Front</i>	27
<i>Across the Oceans</i>	39

Chapter I

FROM PEACE TO WAR

'I have to tell you . . . that this country is at war with Germany.' Into the peace of a September morning, through air still echoing with Sunday bells, broke the voice of the Premier announcing stress, strain and violent upheaval. The words sounded in thousands of homes in crowded cities, they drifted through open windows in village streets, they were picked up in ships at sea, on rubber plantations in Malaya and lonely huts on Hudson Bay. Throughout the British Isles, the people stood still to listen. They listened in country houses and cottages, in luxury hotels and cheap bed-sitting rooms, in newspaper offices and at street corners. For those few minutes the wireless set was the focus of the whole nation's life.

It was a dramatic moment in the short and eventful history of broadcasting. But for the BBC the real drama had begun thirty-six hours earlier. On the night of Friday, 1st September 1939, you heard for the first time the now familiar words 'This is the BBC Home Service.' Flat, unexciting words, giving no hint of the convulsive changes that had gone on behind the scenes to produce them.

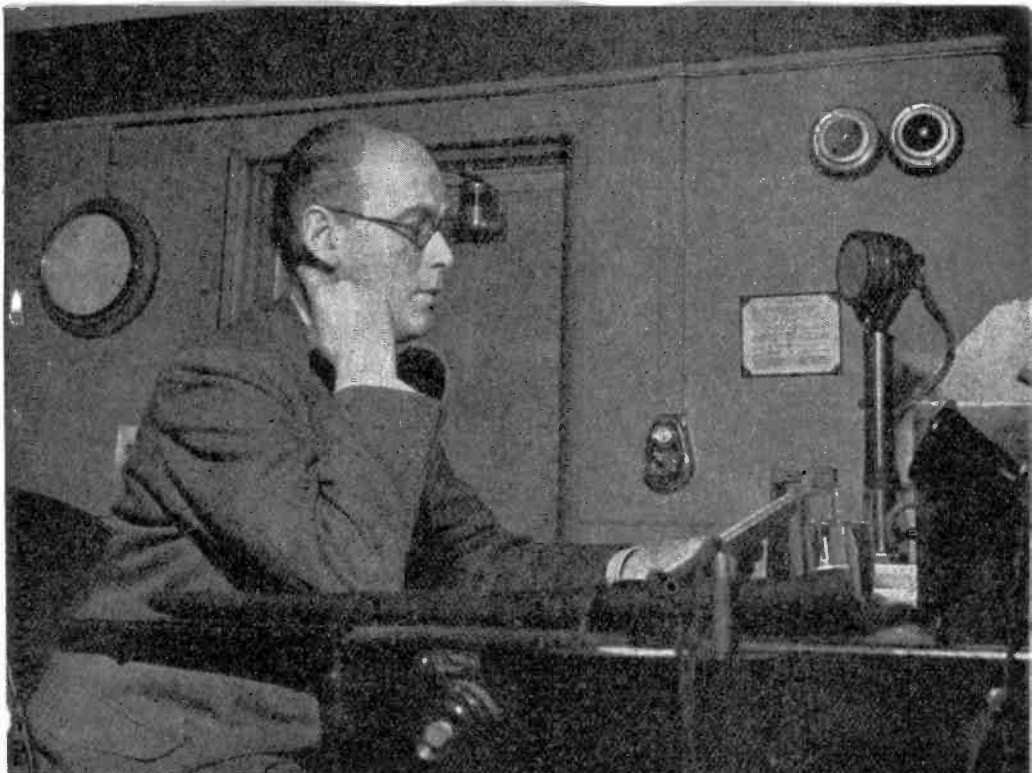
Ever since the days of Munich, the BBC had been preparing secret plans for mobilization in case of war. Two difficult problems had to be solved. One was that, at all costs, even if the country were dislocated by bombing or invasion, the broadcasting service must continue. The other was to reorganize the transmission system so that it could give no guidance to enemy aircraft. In certain circumstances a continuous strong wavelength can be as efficient a help to an aeroplane as a lighthouse beam to a ship. The first problem was dealt with by distributing BBC units all over the country. The second could be solved only by broadcasting one programme instead of the pre-war eight on a choice of two wavelengths. The extraordinary technical feats accomplished by the BBC engineering staff in reorganizing the transmission system so as to give enemy aircraft no possible help in reaching their objective cannot unfortunately be told here. Later in this chapter you will hear some of the difficulties—amusing in retrospect, but agonizing at the time—of transporting, billeting and feeding the BBC evacuees uprooted overnight and planted out in various parts of England.

Early in the evening of 1st September 1939, came the message from Whitehall that sent the BBC to its war stations. All over the country the broadcasting engineers opened their sealed orders and acted upon them. Within an hour and a half the change-over had been effected ; at 8.15 p.m. the Home Service was on the air for the first time. At noon the television announcer had broadcast a summary of the programmes for the next week. Ten minutes later came the order to close down. For security reasons that new and highly promising child, the world's first high-definition television service, had to be unceremoniously put to sleep 'for the duration.' The BBC was at war.

You probably remember those first days when you anxiously tuned in to every one of the almost hourly news bulletins . . . and how frustrated you felt because there seemed to be no news. You remember the endless flood of directions, counter-directions, exhortations and regulations that poured over the microphone dealing with everything from evacuation to blood-transfusion. Your wireless seemed to have changed from an agreeable companion to an official bully, and you were by no means mollified when the pill was sugared with programmes of gramophone records. Sandy Macpherson played the theatre organ for you till his feet were numb and his fingers nearly dropped off. You appreciated his efforts but you were by no means appeased. When the tension of the first three days relaxed you looked for something on which you could vent your accumulated irritation, and you found an excellent target in the BBC.

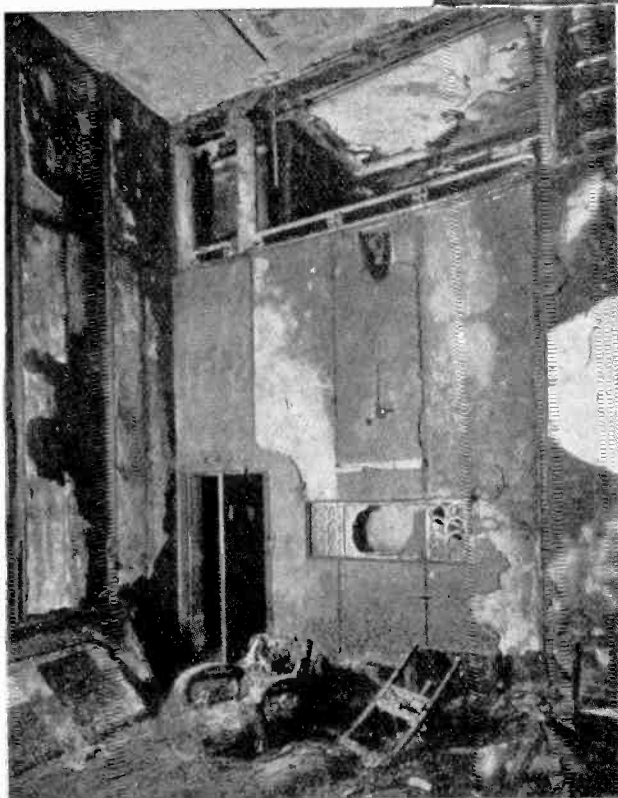
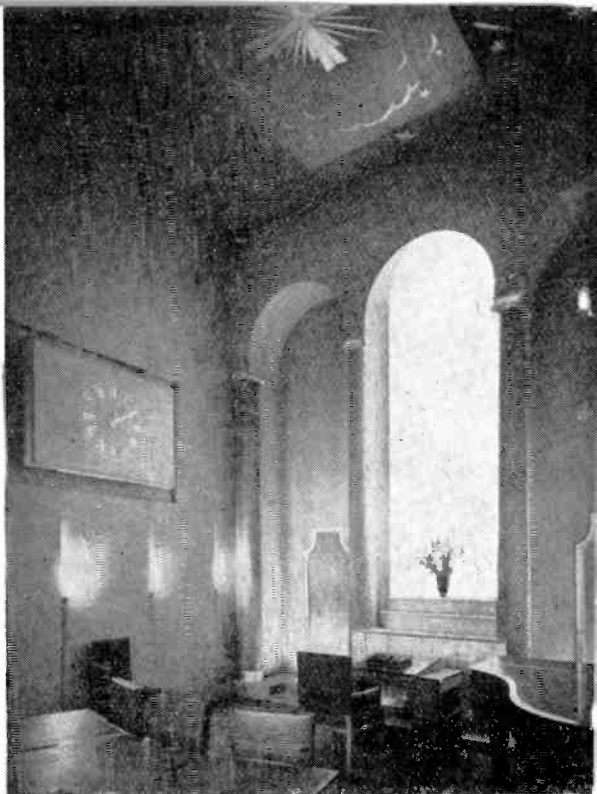
The warmest admirer of the BBC cannot pretend that the programmes it put out in the early days were anything like up to its pre-war standard. The fact is they were not meant to be. At that time, the BBC had organized itself for one thing and one thing only—to keep the essential news services going no matter what might happen, and to keep a communication channel open between the authorities and the public in case the normal ones were blocked by bombing or invasion. During those first months, like everyone else in this country, it expected total war at any moment. And like everyone else, when there came not total war but total inactivity, it looked for a time slightly foolish in its battle dress. It would have looked a great deal more foolish if it had been unprepared and the big raids had started in September 1939, instead of in September 1940. As it is, in spite of the worst blitzes of 1940-41 (in which London and Regional stations have not escaped without damage and casualties), unlike the German Radio, the BBC has never once been off the air.

Cutting down to one programme was a military necessity. It could not hope to be received with any more public delight than



Bruce Belfrage was reading the news. Above his head a bomb crashed down, wrecking the library.

(a) The religious broadcasting studio before an 'incident' —



(b) —and after.

the black-out, ration-books, evacuation and other irritating, but inevitable war-time measures. Listeners in peace-time had been like people with a choice of eight different newspapers, each with its own method of presentation, its own feature-writers and its own individual accent. Now, with only one 'home service' programme to cover a public of wide and conflicting tastes, listeners were in the position of people who are forced to buy only one newspaper whether they like it or not. Imagine that only one daily paper were allowed to be printed in the whole of Great Britain. It would be impossible to devise one which would seem equally satisfactory to the different types of people accustomed to take in *The Times*, the *Daily Herald*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*.

In the first days of the war everyone had expected that exciting events and news would follow hot foot on each other. Therefore the BBC had arranged for the maximum provision of news and had only prepared emergency programmes of gramophone records. What happened was exactly the opposite. There was a total lack of events and news, and what the listening public clamoured for was entertainment. In three days, in spite of the extraordinary complications and difficulties of the change-over, the resources of 'live' radio were assembled again. On Wednesday, 6th September, the first 'live' revue of the war was broadcast from Variety's new headquarters.

The arrival of Variety in its new quarters would have made a good companion picture to Frith's 'Derby Day.' Artistes, producers, musicians and engineers arrived by lorry, train and car. The reception hall was heaped with luggage, violin-cases and crates bulging with musical scores. There were pet dogs, too bewildered in the crush to wag their tails, and pet birds whose shrillest notes were entirely inaudible in the babble of human voices. John Watt was understating things when, at the first Variety meeting with Harry Pepper, Charles Shadwell, and various producers, accompanists and script-writers, he said: 'We shall be working under difficulties.'

Artistes had to settle into their billets; fortunately these had been well organized beforehand. Engineers had to set up the apparatus they had hastily stripped from the London studios, build it into local halls, fix control panels, listening rooms, connecting lines and a thousand other complex details. New numbers had to be rehearsed; band-parts copied; scripts written. 'Yes . . . you can have jokes about Hitler now.' 'Transport's a bit chaotic. If you want that script you'll have to dash back to London and fetch it yourself.' 'Can't trace that song. Ring up London, get someone to sing it over the 'phone and we'll take down the words and music

this end.' To the accompaniment of typewriters, pianos, telephone bells and frantic conversations, the first war-time radio revue was written overnight in a blacked-out office and finished two hours before it went into rehearsal. Everyone lent a hand and cheerfully did bits of everyone else's job as well as their own. Eminent music-hall stars helped with 'noises off.' Producers turned the handles of roneo machines. Composers copied out band-parts. As in every other department of the BBC on the outbreak of war, the frills were ripped off, the shirt sleeves rolled up and the red carpet put away.

Even before the blitzes came to treble the strain on everyone and to add danger to mere discomfort, every single BBC department found its smooth peace-time path suddenly choked with thorns and obstacles of every kind. The accommodation and catering officers were plunged at once into a sea of troubles, which was to grow stormier every week. You can draw up faultless plans on paper for evacuating several hundreds of people to different parts of England. It is quite another matter to carry them out. For instance you may reserve a large country house to serve as headquarters for a particular section in case of emergency. The emergency comes and eighty people are sent overnight to a mansion originally inhabited by eighteen. Telephone lines must be put in ; black-out and defence arranged for ; quite possibly the entire drainage and lighting system has to be reorganized to cope with the extra strain. Everything from beds to typewriter ribbons has to be rushed down at short notice. Last but not least the inhabitants have to be fed. Before the war the catering department ran six establishments : to-day it runs seventy-four. In the first week of the war they expected to have to provide, in one area, meals for sixty people. In a few days the sixty had swelled to four hundred. Tiny canteens with five tables suddenly found themselves called upon to cope with 700 people. Somehow the accommodation and catering staff developed superhuman capacities, which enabled them to deal with the most fantastic emergencies, from equipping hostels with everything from boilers to bedding in a few days, to arranging special meals for Indians whose religion forbade them to eat anything on which a human shadow had fallen. It was no uncommon experience for Miss Lawrence and Mr. Dormer of the catering department to spend their day rushing all over the country equipping and organizing canteens, and their evenings washing up and helping with the cooking until two or three in the morning (BBC canteens work all round the clock since most departments run day and night shifts) ; then to snatch a few hours of sleep, and begin a new office day at 7.0 a.m.

Billeting, of course, provided the inevitable comedies and tragedies now familiar to every evacuee and billetor. No one blames billetors for not welcoming their uninvited guests with open arms, but billetees have their legitimate troubles, too. It is hard if you are working on night shifts on such a nerve-racking job as 'monitoring,' for example, to be frowned on for staying in bed part of the day. It is hard to have no privacy except in an unwarmed bedroom, to have to bicycle two miles to get a bath and wash your clothes, or, like one member of the staff, to be thrown out of your billet for being rung up on urgent business at the immoral hour of ten at night. In one area, the work done is of extreme national importance but can only be spoken of vaguely. The billetors do not perhaps realize that the foreign staff whom they regard with such patriotic suspicion are doing a unique service to this country—a service which might involve the cruel persecution of their families in their own lands. No one suggests that every member of the BBC staff is an angel in the house, but neither is he or she necessarily a devil. To persuade resentful billetors that billetees are human is the delicate and unenviable task of the staff welfare officers.

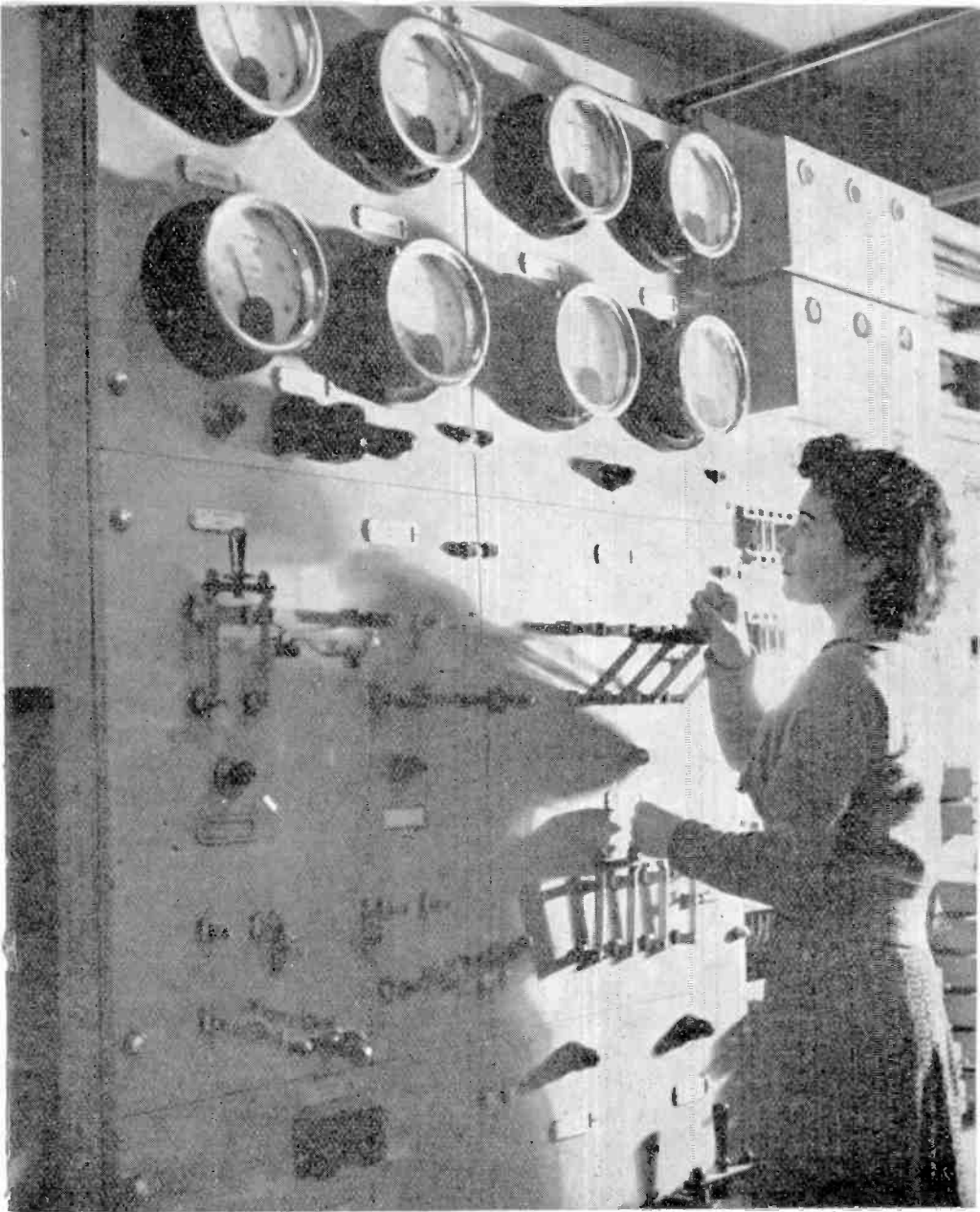
On the programme side, the first emergency period was soon over. The inevitable contraction to one programme only for home had by no means meant contraction in working hours. New services in foreign languages and for the Empire were speedily created. And though there was now only one home programme, it ran for seventeen hours instead of for under fourteen as in peacetime. This means that transmitters now have to be manned at all hours of the day and night—a heavy demand both on the apparatus and the engineers. Many of the engineers were called up to serve with the forces, and a large staff of new people, both men and women, has had to be trained to handle the complex and delicate machinery used in broadcasting. Much of the purely operational work has been taken on by non-skilled workers, yet the technical quality of the programmes has not deteriorated.

By the end of 1939 the programme service had been built up to something like its pre-war quality. There was still only the Home Service to cater for the ranging tastes of millions of listeners, but, as time went on, the programmes began to reflect the rich and varied life of the Regions much more fully though not so fully as in peacetime. The output was not confined to London and the new war-time centres; Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the other Regions contributed more and more to the quota so that the voice of all Britain, including Welsh and Gaelic, was once again heard in the home programmes. Nevertheless, both among the audience and behind the scenes of the BBC itself, there was a growing

demand for an alternative programme. One most important section of the community particularly needed it—the fighting forces both at home and abroad.

It took a good deal of technical skill to arrange that alternative programme 'for the forces,' but in February 1940 it was launched. If you don't happen to approve of the Forces Programme, remember that it was based on the expressed wishes of the soldiers, sailors and airmen for whom it was planned. Remember, too, the conditions in which it is usually heard. A man sitting quietly by his own fire-side can concentrate on a Beethoven string quartet or a Shaw play. No soldier, however intelligent, can listen in the same concentrated way in a crowded canteen with people calling for drinks, playing darts and keeping up a cross-fire of talk. The wireless can do no more than produce a cheerful background noise like an orchestra in a restaurant. The lover and the hater of classical music would be equally enraged to hear a Bach fugue played during the rush-hour at a Lyons Corner House.

The Forces Programme was planned originally for the men spending that winter of bitter cold and forced inactivity in the front line. F. W. Ogilvie, the Director-General of the BBC, who had fought as a captain in the last war, visited the B.E.F. in France with some of his staff and had personal talks with the men. Over and over again the items asked for were—'Something to cheer us up . . . something to keep us in touch with home.' Sometimes the words, 'I'm from the BBC,' would produce the prompt reply, 'Have you heard our dance band?' The band would be given a hearing and, if it was really good, Bernard Stubbs would come along with the BBC recording van and the company would crowd round for the long-awaited chance of shouting into a microphone. Records made by the men themselves went into the programme along with those of the uproariously popular concerts given to the B.E.F. by Gracie Fields and Maurice Chevalier. But long before the Forces Programme came under discussion, the BBC had had its representatives in the front line. Immediately war was declared, a recording car and its crew of commentator, engineer and programme official, landed in France to accompany the B.E.F. and make records under all sorts of conditions. Many of these records you heard in the early days of the war were made with shells and bombs dropping uncomfortably near. Once when Gardner was standing at the microphone, a Heinkel dropped a 500-pounder so close that the whole apparatus was thrown into the air. The bitter cold of that winter made it hard to get good records. Sometimes frost patterns would form on the blank discs and ruin the surface. Often the only way to safeguard the discs was for the engineer to take them to bed with him.



In war-time, girls do some BBC engineering jobs.



Members of staff take their turn at roof-spotting

It seems a long time since those days in France. In 1939 a BBC war correspondent, recording despatches in a camouflaged car eighty-five feet from the enemy's front line, was certainly taking risks. A year later a home announcer sitting at his desk in Broadcasting House was taking even more.

With the evacuation from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain (both described at first hand by radio reporters), the war-centre shifted to this country. In September 1940, London was in the front line of attack. In October, Broadcasting House received its first direct hit and six people in the building were killed. The BBC was no longer observing the war ; it was right in the middle of it.

One night as Bruce Belgrave was reading the news, listeners heard the thud of a falling bomb. The building shook but the announcer's voice, after a barely perceptible pause, went on without a tremor. Behind the scenes, there was darkness, the crash of falling masonry, choking smoke and dust ; human beings were flung against walls or pinned under wreckage. Some were hurt ; others severely shocked ; some had been killed outright.

A bomb takes only a few seconds to do its destructive work. The damage and dislocation it causes in an organization like the BBC takes months to repair and overcome. That one night destroyed thousands of precious gramophone records, wrecked the news library and reduced the telephone switchboard to a tangle of splinters and broken wire.

At six in the morning, after the first hit, the news librarian was trying to salvage the remains of his precious files, accumulated for years, from a dusty heap of rubbish in Portland Place—and only with difficulty prevented a policeman from arresting him for looting. To lose the news library was bad enough ; it was like losing one's memory. To lose the switchboard was even worse ; it was like being struck deaf and dumb. Every internal telephone was out of action and the small emergency switchboards which now had to be used carried eight exchange lines instead of seventy. Working in a tiny gallery in the basement, with the sweat pouring down their faces, the telephone girls carried on handling calls at the rate of eight a second. Nerves were strained to breaking point : it was impossible for anyone to work more than an hour at a stretch in such conditions.

Broadcasting House turned overnight into a fortress. The work had to go on and beds had to be provided for staff working late or who could not get home because of the raids. Wandering through the basements at night you saw corridors littered with mattresses on which tired men and women were trying to snatch a few hours' sleep. Some slept in their offices, others in rows on the floor of

the concert hall. In those first days it was not an uncommon sight to see the Director-General dosing down between a commissionaire and a secretary. Night after night he shared the discomforts of his staff. Now he has a bunk in his own room . . . 'to my shame' as he says.

As a result of the first bomb, men and women lost their lives in the service of the BBC. In a second incident, a month or two later, though there were fewer fatal casualties, blast, fire and flood played such havoc that part of the building had to be temporarily evacuated. No one who was on the premises that night is likely to forget it. The staircase was a waterfall; the lobby a pool. As one of the Canadian unit who had walked through the blitz to come on duty described it: 'The unusual building, designed like a ship, stood with its "upper deck" on fire and its "keel" in pools of turgid water like some vessel at Trafalgar . . . In the infirmary the number of wounded exceeded the accommodation—there were wounded from the neighbourhood as well as from the building itself. From an upper gallery I looked down into the pit where the news-men's desks usually are. The desks were almost floating. The walls had broken into fissures from which burst spurts of water.'

Down in the kitchens, the catering staff found themselves first choked with smoke and soot, then flooded. Miss Lawrence with great difficulty persuaded them to leave the building and go to a public shelter. Electricity had gone and there was nothing to cook with but two picnic-size primus stoves. Yet by 6.00 a.m. the staff was serving five hundred breakfasts among the wreckage.

Once again the news library and the switchboard, which had both been repaired in the intervening months were wrecked. Programme staff arriving the next morning found their offices in ruins and spent feverish hours rescuing dust-covered scripts that were to go on the air that night from a litter of plaster, slime and broken glass. New accommodation had been provided, but there were no telephone lines ready and the confusion was indescribable. Working in their own homes, queueing up at public call-boxes, somehow the people responsible for the talks and features due to go out the next few days made their contacts and kept up to their schedule. In spite of every kind of breakdown, the service itself went on unbroken.

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From that night onwards, the BBC service was carried on in circumstances that put the utmost strain on everyone concerned in it. In London and all over the country, the heavy raids continued month after month. At one time or another, every big town that was a Regional BBC centre had its smashing blitz. Rehearsals and

transmissions went on in rocking buildings ; staff were killed on duty or in their homes ; vital machinery was wrecked ; studios reduced to a heap of rubble. Over and over again, it seemed a physical impossibility that a particular programme should go out that night, yet somehow or other it did go out—and go out on time. Here is one tiny, but typical instance. One Sunday evening in Bristol there was such a bad raid going on that the religious postscript could not be broadcast from its ordinary studio. The orchestra could not cram itself into the small emergency studio, but Dr. Welch was determined that listeners should not go without their postscript of music. The microphone was placed under a table, and, with bombs crashing all round the building, Dr. Welch delivered his talk, Stuart Hibberd read quietly from the Bible and Paul Beard played the violin on his knees.

Chapter II

THE HOME FRONT

On the Home Front the BBC's main duty is still, as in peace-time, to inform and to entertain. Since the outbreak of war, what listeners of all types want first and foremost from the BBC is news. The nine o'clock news has become a kind of ritual in practically every home and establishment that owns a radio set. Dart-players break off in the middle of a match, bridge-fiends stop their game, knitters forget to count the rows as the wireless is switched on and a familiar voice proclaims, 'Here is the news and this is so-and-so reading it.'

'Here is the news.' In a moment you will be told a little of the complex and exciting work that lies behind that commonplace statement. But first let me clear up a fairly widespread misunderstanding. Many people, when they hear the words 'And this is so-and-so reading it,' are either irritated or bewildered. This new habit of giving their names is not a piece of exhibitionism on the part of the announcers : it is necessary for the following reason. When the Germans invade a country, the first thing they do is to seize the radio and disseminate false news. It is extremely important for you to know not only the voices but the names of your announcers. The mere fact of having a name tacked on to a voice makes it easier to recognize. Now you have become so familiar with the characteristic tones of, say, Alan Howland that if a German or a fifth-columnist announced that he was Howland you would not be deceived.

The men who prepare the BBC news bulletins have to consider two problems : what to say and how to say it. The whole story of how the raw material of a news bulletin is collected, sifted and checked cannot for reasons of security be given yet. What you are told in the news must be the literal, accurate truth ; yet no word must slip through that would give the listening enemy the strategic clues he is straining his ears to catch. How you are told it, is an interesting technical problem and one to which an immense amount of thought has been given on your behalf.

It needs far more concentration to take in the spoken word than the written one—and more concentration still when the speaker is invisible. For that reason, a BBC news bulletin seldom runs longer than twenty minutes. In that time it is possible to speak

only about 2,500 words—approximately the length of two columns of *The Times*. Compilers of news bulletins, therefore, have to compress all the essential news of the day into something like a fiftieth of the number of words at the disposal of a newspaper editor in peace-time.

Nor is compression the only problem. The bulletin is written not for the eye but for the microphone. One of the first things a journalist has to learn when he joins the BBC news staff is that newspaper presentation and wireless presentation are entirely different things. In a newspaper, with the help of headlines and variations of type, you can often tell your story most effectively backwards—putting the climax first and then filling in the details. On the radio this would be not merely confusing, but meaningless. The listener has to be told in the first sentence what the item is about ; then led through the story step by step until he has a clear picture in his mind. It is a new art, more difficult than the art of the old storyteller who could help out his narrative by expression and gesture. Like other arts it develops by experiment. Two craters yawn on either side of the difficult path of the bulletin compiler : dullness and unintelligibility.

The text of a news bulletin is not written, but dictated. This technique was adopted to ensure that the sub-editor should think in terms of the spoken word and not in terms of print. What might be a dramatic newspaper report is apt to become the flattest of announcements on the radio. A wireless bulletin cannot be as flexible as a newspaper article. There may be light and shade in the words themselves, but the listener becomes irritated if there is too much light and shade in the announcer's voice. At the same time the bulletin has to be far clearer and more precise than the printed word. The listener cannot re-hear, as the reader can re-read, an ambiguous passage.

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The news-room at Broadcasting House an hour or two before a bulletin goes on the air is as hectic as anything you see on American films. The nine o'clock news is prepared in a small hot underground room ; half office, half dormitory. The sub-editors who start work between 5 and 6 a.m., getting out the seven o'clock morning news, sleep in bunks at one end of it. In spite of an optimistic notice ' Silence please ' there is plenty of noise. Tape-machines click, wooden boxes of torn-off tape bump down the chute, typewriters rattle and telephones ring. Intermittent shrieks and buzzes from the engineering control panel in the gallery overhead add to the din. The staff works on shifts. Each shift includes a shift leader, at least five or six sub-editors and a number of news typists. Several

of the sub-editors are specialists on various subjects such as foreign affairs, war fronts, air affairs and Parliament. Each is responsible to the Senior News Editor, R. T. Clark. A news typist needs a quick, accurate brain and lightning fingers, for the bulletin is dictated straight on to the machine. One girl's job is to sit for several hours at a time listening through earphones to dictated reports of parliamentary debates and taking them down verbatim on the typewriter. On the night of Broadcasting House's worst blitzing, the midnight news was prepared just as usual though the building had been heavily blasted and parts of it were on fire. Much to their annoyance, the news staff was evacuated to another building—but the bulletin came out just the same. The men and girls who worked on the first morning news shift got no sleep that night after driving, choked with smoke and dust, through bombed and burning streets. Soon after they left, the news-room was deep in water.

There are BBC news-rooms scattered all over the country to ensure that, whatever happens, the news service goes on. One of them is incongruously housed in a large room that was once a children's nursery and still has pictures of little Bo-Peep and Little Red Riding-Hood on its walls. The department exiled to it curses its peaceful surroundings and would, like all the forced evacuees of the BBC, much sooner be back in London. In fact I have yet to meet any member of any department of the BBC staff who is properly grateful for being banished to what is (often euphemistically) described as a 'safe area.' They grudgingly admit that it is of national importance that some units should be protected as far as possible. But, though many of them have been bombed not once but several times out of their homes, the usual cry is, 'For heaven's sake don't send *me* out of London if you can find anyone else to go instead.'

Often an important piece of news will come in only a minute or two before the bulletin goes on the air. While the reader is making his preliminary announcements, the fresh item is being sub-edited, dictated and censored. While he reads, it is slipped quietly on his desk. That is what has happened when you hear 'A message has just been received.'

R. T. Clark, the Senior News Editor, is a man of remarkable personality. He is also a man passionately in love with his job. As a subject of news, he finds war considerably less interesting than peace. Probably the bitterest period of his life was that stretch of ten weeks, early in the war, when there was no news at all. He spends nearly all his days and nights in his tiny, stuffy, artificially lit basement room in Broadcasting House and can hardly bear to tear himself away even to go out to lunch, let alone take a couple of

days' leave. His room, a mere slice partitioned off a larger one, is about half the size of the average ship's cabin, and contains two sleeping bunks, a table, a typewriter, two wooden chairs and a couple of shelves sagging under the weight of books in English, French, Latin and Greek.

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But the BBC does not only edit news ; it also goes out and gets it. Just as a newspaper it has its own reporters in all parts of the British Isles who chase off, on the least hint of a good story, to capture it on the wing. Here the News Talks Unit comes into its own. News talks and postscripts are like the feature articles, eyewitness reports and illustrations which give a newspaper life and colour.

In gathering these special stories, in bringing men or women to the microphone who have seen or done something remarkable, the radio reporters of the BBC's eight 'Regions' are invaluable. It was the BBC reporter for Scotland who interviewed the survivors of the *Athenia*, the crew of the *Altmark*, the farmer who captured Hess, and recorded their stories. Each Region has contributed excellent material and each co-operates with London, putting staff, studios and equipment at its disposal. Thus the BBC is able to spread a nation-wide net in which so many shy but interesting fish are caught.

Each Regional reporter keeps in touch with the naval, military and civil authorities in his part of the world. His eyes and ears are constantly on the alert to catch a hint of anything exciting listeners want—and may be allowed—to hear. As soon as he is on a trail, he rushes to the spot. If possible, he brings the men or women concerned back to the studio to tell their story in their own words direct to you on the air. Or he may record it to be broadcast later. Very often the microphone has to go to the man who may be a sailor or airman unable to leave his base. Then the recording van comes into action. Usually the hero or heroine of the adventure is both modest and tongue-tied. It is the BBC man's difficult job to coax them to 'say a few words' into the microphone, knowing that you would rather hear a halting version from their own lips than the most lucid account from a skilled broadcaster. Occasionally a 'natural' broadcaster like 'Seaman Frank' is discovered. Laskier is not only a good story-teller—hundreds of sailors are just as good—but he has that rare gift, a perfect voice for the microphone.

A day in the life of a news talks editor is both exciting and arduous. Here is Donald Boyd's account of part of a typical one. 'There's word that a pilot is coming in who has just made a successful raid on Munich . . . We ask Robin Duff if he can arrange to



The nine o'clock news in preparation. Sub-editors and news typists get busy making up a 2000-word bulletin from the mass of material that pours in from all sources. Telephones, typewriters and tape-machines defy the 'Quiet please' notice. The men who go on duty round about 5.0 a.m. to prepare the 7.0 a.m. news sleep in this office-cum-dormitory.

go out on a destroyer in the North Sea. Scotland telephones that they are sending a recording car to interview a life-boatman who has just rescued some pilots. A suggestion comes from the news-room that big news may come about—let's say Timbuctoo. Can we find anyone to talk about it?' It is not only, of course, from Great Britain that these first-hand war stories come. They come by beam radio from Cairo and Ankara; from Cape Town and Singapore. The story of the battle of the River Plate and the scuttling of the Graf Spee was picked up from Buenos Aires. When the South Africans recorded on the spot the magnificent flying advance of their 'Steel Commandos,' the discs were rushed back hundreds of miles by despatch riders to Nairobi. From Nairobi they were picked up by the BBC in England, re-recorded and broadcast to listeners at home.

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You probably realize that the BBC war correspondents often risk their lives for a broadcast. In order that you could hear the actual thunder of guns near Tobruk, Dimbleby lay for three hours on an exposed plateau with shells falling all round. Often he has taken his microphone into action under the very noses of German and Italian snipers. Ward in Finland and Libya, Gardner in France and later in the Battle of Britain—both have worked under shellfire, bombs and machine-gun bullets. And do not forget that, wherever a recording car is used, the BBC engineer and the technicians risk their lives as much as the war correspondent.

What you probably do not realize is that BBC reporters go out in destroyers, corvettes and minesweepers, taking the same chances as the crew. They go up in aeroplanes or down in submarines—wherever the authorities can be persuaded to let them go. This applies not only to reporters but to script writers, producers and programme compilers. A man may be having a drink in the Café Royal one night and a few days later be on a BBC 'assignment' in the middle of the Atlantic. The other day a chief was heard saying to a writer who was going off in a destroyer to get local colour for a 'feature': 'Just sign this paper will you? It says you go at your own risk. And . . . I don't want to be tactless . . . but would you mind finishing that other script you have on hand before you go?'

Ever since Great Britain became a target for the Luftwaffe, broadcasting under fire has become a commonplace. There is a certain section of the BBC's work known as 'Outside Broadcasts' or O.B.s. Before the war it was concerned with describing sporting and public events. Its crowning achievement before the war was the full-length broadcast of the Coronation which lasted six and a

half hours and involved fifty-eight microphones. It was relayed all over the world, reaching a potential audience of 2,000,000,000.

During the last eighteen months O.B.s have made 'actuality' broadcasts of almost every aspect of the war effort from fire-fighting to digging for victory. Since no picture of Britain in war-time would be complete without its after-dark life, a great deal of their work has been done during blitzes. Sometimes they deliberately go out in a blitz to get sound-pictures of it; more often the blitz catches them when they are on another job. They are allowed to carry on, but they have to keep a number of security 'don'ts' in their heads. You need to be remarkably cool to stand in a street, with the shrapnel tinkling on the microphone, and bombs dropping all round to remember only to give *impressions* of the scene. The O.B. commentator must not exclaim, as he so naturally might, 'That was a big one. Five-hundred pounder, I should say,' or 'They've shot down a barrage balloon,' or 'There's a huge fire behind St. Paul's.' He must describe vividly, from second to second, yet give nothing away.

One 'London after Dark' programme made a great sensation in America. (For obvious reasons, the most dramatic of these broadcasts are put out in the Overseas Service and not in the Home.) A round-up of various points in London had been arranged, including shelters and railway stations. The siren sounded just as the broadcast was timed to begin and listeners heard whistling bombs, gunfire, shrapnel and all the actual noises of a bad raid. Michael Standing had an unenviable job broadcasting under the glass roof of a station with bombs dropping nearer and nearer; Vaughan Thomas stood on the steps of a church, quietly chatting into the microphone while buildings crashed, bombs screamed and guns roared all round him. Robin Duff was on the spot on the night that Big Ben rocked and the Houses of Parliament were damaged.

As always, the engineers take the same risks as observers and commentators. When recording cars are used during blitzes, as they frequently are, the drivers and the men who cut the discs can have an extremely uncomfortable time. Once a recording car somewhere in England found itself the target of a diving German plane that had just missed a balloon. 'We got down pretty quickly,' said the observer later, 'and I just remembered to hold the mike above my head—or whatever bit of me was uppermost then. When we played the record later, the machine-gun bullets sounded unpleasantly close.'

To give the authentic news, to illustrate it with despatches, commentaries and first-hand stories is only one part of the BBC's informative activity in war-time. In 1914-18, if a statesman made

a great speech, only a few people could hear him. The rest could only read it cold in the next day's papers. Now thanks to wireless, oratory has come into its own again. Churchill can sway, not merely the House of Commons, but a whole empire with his fighting speeches. The words of His Majesty the King, of the Prime Minister, of President Roosevelt, impinge with full force on the listener's mind, reviving, fortifying and stimulating. The spoken word has become as powerful a political factor in the vast new Commonwealth of Nations as in the old Greek city-state.

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In war-time people need more than ever to keep in touch with the world of thought, imagination and ideas. This is no question of 'escapism': on the contrary it is a psychological necessity if they are to keep their heads clear and their feet firm in the world of facts. A nation straining every nerve to win an arduous war needs food for its intellect and its soul as well as its body. Religion, art and science are not luxuries, but basic needs.

The BBC can and does play a part in keeping these values alive, when so many people are cut off by the war from libraries, churches, concert halls, lecture-rooms and theatres. In spite of restrictions in time, due to having only two programmes instead of eight, good plays and good music are frequently broadcast, good poetry—old and new—is read, and writers, scientists, historians and social philosophers still talk and debate over the microphone.

The effect of war on religious broadcasting has been extremely interesting. First and foremost it has tended to break down the barriers between the many different forms of Christian worship in this country. Members of the many different Churches are more concerned to find their common ground of unity than to emphasize their differences. On a national day of prayer the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of Wales and the Primate of All Ireland address the whole nation side by side with the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and of the Federal Council of Free Churches and the Catholic Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster. A Lutheran pastor, a French protestant, an Anglican clergyman and a member of the Orthodox Church broadcast in turn in a programme of 'Christian Unity.' Before the war it might have seemed strange to hear an Anglican archbishop and a congregationalist speaking in praise of a papal encyclical. To-day it seems no stranger than a conservative and a liberal uniting in admiration of the magnificent war effort of Soviet Russia. Hitler has declared war on Christianity as emphatically as on democracy and liberty of thought. It is only right and natural that Christians of all denominations should feel their solidarity in face of their common enemy. And

they can express that solidarity through the medium of the wireless more effectively than in any other way. As Dr. Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting, has said, 'The religious services of all denominations are heard by all; each denomination learns from the others. Listeners feel they are sharing in a Christian, not merely a denominational service; suspicions and misunderstandings are removed . . . and there is a growing sense that, though some differences are great, yet the things we have in common are far greater.'

Another effect of the war is that, in spite of restricted programme space, religious broadcasting has increased in response to the needs of the people. More significantly still, it has broken away from the old 'Sundays only' tradition and made contact with people's ordinary daily lives. One symptom is the large and interested audience of all types which followed the 'Three Men and a Parson' discussions. Another is the constant and growing number of listeners to the five-minute 'Lift up your Hearts' talk every morning before the eight o'clock news. The idea came from Scotland and it revives in modern form the age-old Christian practice of a few minutes' meditation or spiritual reading to orientate the new day.

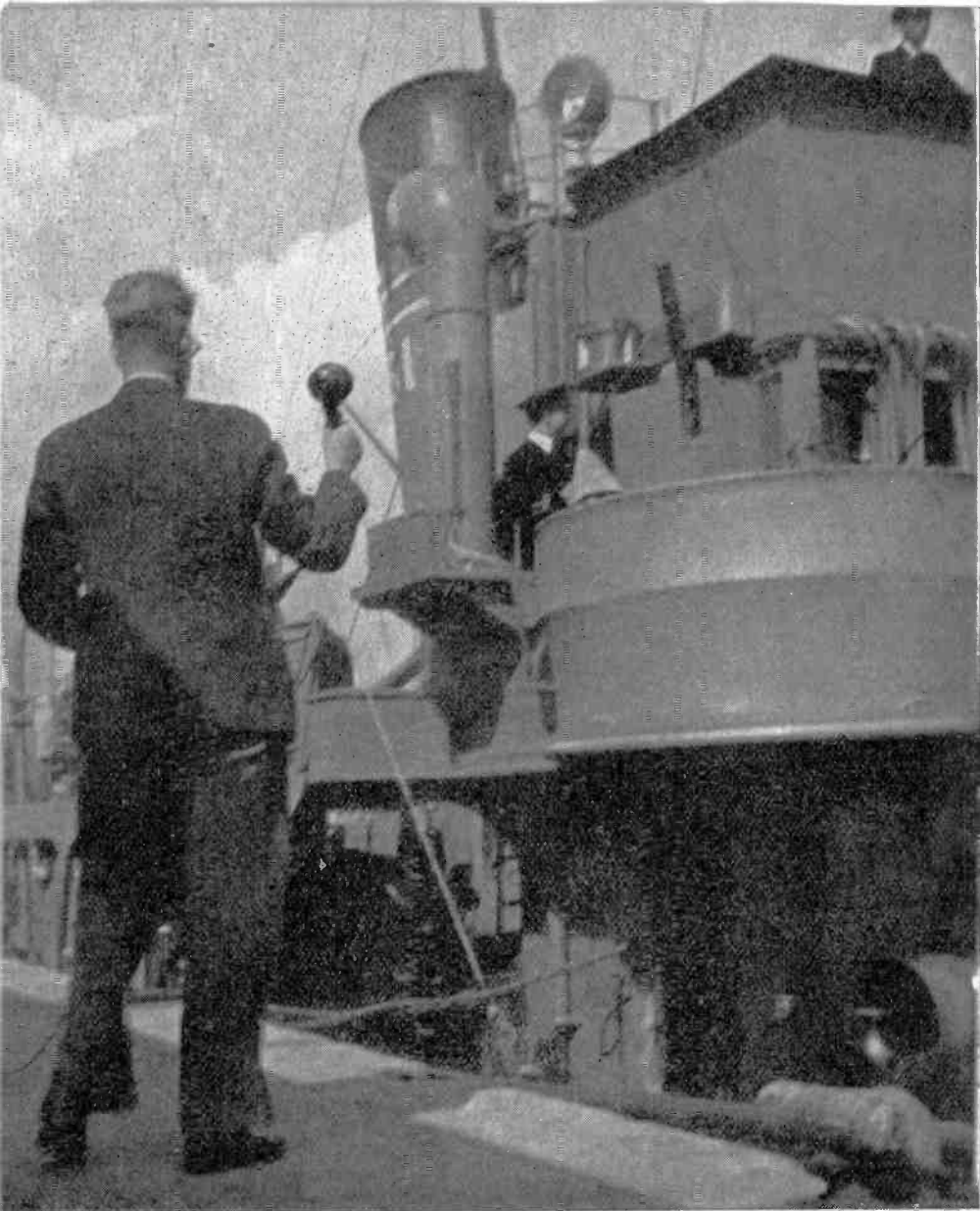
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At the beginning of the war, lovers of serious music were apprehensive. It looked as if they were going to be given a mere mouse's share in the BBC programmes compared to the lion-sized helpings of variety, dance bands and theatre organ. But during the last year their situation has considerably improved. There have been very real difficulties for the BBC in the matter of arranging good music programmes. Few international artists are available and many British ones have been called up. Nevertheless, Sir Adrian Boult has kept the BBC Symphony Orchestra up to a high standard, and the Theatre Orchestra, the Salon Orchestra and the Scottish and Northern Orchestras are all doing excellent work of different types. Certainly there have been less 'connoisseur' programmes. That was inevitable. Yet, as a result of the war, probably more people all over the country have come to take a real interest in the great masters of music. For months Bristol became a new musical centre of England, giving a series of BBC symphony concerts that were enthusiastically welcomed. The Symphony Orchestra has now moved to a town nearer London where it is giving a series of twelve public concerts, and visiting other towns in the neighbourhood.

Another good result is that we have been rediscovering our own national music. The British 'are rather heedless of their rich musical heritage and need to be reminded of it.' Since the war one



A Halifax bomber introduces itself through the microphone.



A BBC observer lets a ship speak for itself.

quarter of the broadcasting time for serious music has been devoted to British composers old and new. Listeners have heard many works by Byrd, Purcell and Gibbons as well as by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Peter Warlock and William Walton. Walton's new violin concerto was broadcast on its first performance in this country by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and again, a few days later, when the BBC Symphony Orchestra played it.

One very interesting new development is the work Sir Adrian is doing on British folk-music. From Scotland, Ireland, Wales and all parts of England he has been collecting local and traditional music and presenting it on the wireless. These programmes, given by folk-singers, choirs, fiddlers, pipers and accordion players, are among the most interesting of musical broadcasts since the war.

The Music Department, like practically every other BBC unit, has had to cope with blitz troubles. The lorry which carries the orchestra's instruments was saved by the courage of its driver, J. W. Birch. Incendiaries were falling through the garage roof as he was putting the lorry away. He promptly reversed and drove furiously through the blitz, and parked the lorry several miles away on some downs. Quantities of printed and manuscript music, precious manuscript paper and hundreds of gramophone records were rescued from a bombed building by the staff who worked for a day and a half among the débris—with the walls threatening to collapse at any moment. Three men were working on musical scores one night when a building was hit. Severely shaken and covered with débris they were dug out and taken to other BBC premises nearby. After a wash, a cup of tea and a visit to the first-aid post, they went down to the refuge and laid out their work once more. One said to another, 'Where were we before we were interrupted?'

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In so brief a sketch it is impossible to dwell on all the manifold activities of the BBC on the Home Front. The work of the Talks Department, for instance, has greatly increased in scope. Besides continuing its normal flow of stimulating talks and discussions, it now reflects all phases of the war by land, sea and air. Great ingenuity has been shown by the men and women of the department in giving a human form to the dry bones of government advice and instructions. Drama has done more than maintain its pre-war level; it has risen above it. The 'listener research' survey shows that radio plays have a wider and more enthusiastic audience than ever before. Talks, features and drama each deserve a section to themselves, but I have only space here to note some new and important developments which deal constructively with special problems created by the war.

First comes the entirely new educational problem created by evacuation. Here the BBC has been able to do work which would have been physically impossible by any other means.

In the very first stages of evacuation, a programme for school-children was asked for in order to interest and amuse them and to help them find their new bearings. Members of the BBC School Broadcasting Department hurried back from their holidays to the emergency base where a library of scripts and recorded programmes had been prepared in case of need.

Long before, the BBC had agreed with the Central Council for School Broadcasting that they should continue their broadcasts to schools as long as circumstances permitted. The idea had been that such broadcasts should not begin until at least a fortnight after war was declared. What actually happened was that special broadcasts—six items a day—began on 5th September 1939.

Those first programmes had to be very simple. As Miss Mary Somerville, Director of School Broadcasting, wrote: 'Instead of a travel talk being used to provide a "memorable interruption" in a classroom lesson in geography, it would be listened to by individual children at home or in billets or by groups of children gathered in halls or barns. While the good weather lasted you might even have seen some listening going on out-of-doors with the loudspeaker perched on a window-sill.'

During those first three weeks, the Schools Department worked in a perpetual crisis. Two small rooms housed twenty-two people and six typewriters. 'Some 1,500 scripts had to be frenziedly searched through, on the floor, to find suitable material for adaptation. Not only had the daily programme of six items to be improvised, edited, typed out, cast, rehearsed and broadcast while everything material to success in normal circumstances was also in a state of improvisation, but advance planning too had to be done, against the day (25th September) when the schools not affected by evacuation would expect a normal Autumn Term programme to begin.'

The work of those first few weeks was strenuous and nerve-racking, but it was well worth doing. As a headmistress wrote later: 'The short broadcasts to scholars were like lifebuoys in a queer turbulent scholastic sea.'

Very soon, a 'modified peace-time routine' of school broadcasts was established. Many features had to be simplified and revised, and new ones added. The admirable pamphlets which illustrated the talks so that the children could see the things they were hearing about had to be abandoned because of paper restrictions. To overcome this, more and more use was made of dramatization and narrative to fix the children's attention and print a more vivid image

on their minds. Here the BBC schools repertory company is doing admirable work.

Schoolchildren take an insatiable interest in the war. A weekly talk on current affairs and a daily five-minute news commentary are new features which have had immense success.

The difficulties to be faced were innumerable for every town had its own problems. Some schools were running more or less normally, apart from the interruptions of 'alerts.' Others were working on the double-shift system. As more and more towns were evacuated and schools bombed out, the local schools could not accommodate the flood of newcomers. Church halls and public libraries became classrooms. In one place the village pub was transformed into a school during closing hours. School broadcasting, which has to work to a fixed time schedule, was hard put to it to devise ways by which it could be useful to as many types of school as possible in these extraordinary chaotic conditions. Yet somehow it managed it, and children and teachers up and down the country blessed it.

In the winter of 1940, in some of the cities where schools were not allowed to open, teachers went round visiting small groups of children in private houses and broadcasts were used in the most enterprising ways. One school, unable to obtain enough text books, used five series of school broadcasts as the basis of its syllabus and cleverly linked up every subject taught with them. The BBC arranged special programmes for children who were unable to go to school at all, so that their education should not be entirely disrupted.

Figures prove the value of school broadcasting in war-time. At the beginning of the school year 1938-9 about 8,500 schools used the BBC service. At the beginning of the current school year (September 1941), 10,000 schools in England and Wales and 1,000 in Scotland registered as listeners. In spite of the closing of town schools through evacuation, the bombing and requisitioning of school buildings, and other shocks to education, school broadcasting has to-day the biggest classroom audience of its history.

The result is that children from five to fifteen have now a complete BBC service of their own, ranging from musical games to orchestral concerts, from physical training to dramatized history, science and commentaries on current affairs. They have their own news broadcasts, their own religious services and their own feature programmes. There are special series for Scottish and Welsh children, for children in the town and children in the country. The children's hour has become a children's day.

It is not only children who learn by radio. To-day the BBC contributes both to military and civil adult education by

programmes designed for group listening and discussion. Since the war there has been increased activity in yet a third educational category—the important group of young people between 14-18 who now have their own special series and organize their own study and discussion circles.

The educational department of the BBC has its special war work in broadcasts to the forces. The 'Radio Reconnaissance' series on 'The Commonwealth at War' and 'The United States and Ourselves' are part of the army education scheme and are listened to in training time. In many training centres, soldiers also follow, in their own time, the other adult education series and form their own listening and discussion groups.

One interesting sideline on these educational broadcasts is that they often change the mental habits of people who may never hear them. By providing themes for general discussion they stimulate conversation, not only among the listening groups themselves but among their friends. As a nation we are shy of talking on general topics. Family conversation is too often limited to a recital of the day's personal worries and gossip about one's acquaintances. Now that so many families are broken up and redistributed and people are making friends in all sorts of unfamiliar walks of life in the new grouping of the services, the A.R.P. posts, the air-raid shelters and the hostels, this isolationism is disappearing. The private family topics will no longer do; something of general interest to which everyone can contribute is needed. The instantaneous success of the 'Brains Trust'—originally designed as a kind of education without tears for the forces and now one of the most popular programmes with all types of listeners—proves the demand for stimulating themes for talk. When the 'Brains Trust' started, its fan-mail was twelve letters a week. It has already reached 2,500 letters and is increasing weekly. It is estimated that 8,000,000 to 10,000,000 people listen to it—nearly a quarter of the population. A programme planned for the minority was avidly taken up by the majority of the listening public.

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Now we come to some of the most important people on the Home Front to-day—the men and women working in the factories. Can the BBC do anything to relieve the strain and monotony of their lives? And can it contribute in any concrete way to increased production? The answer in both cases is definitely 'Yes.' It is expressed in two programmes—'Workers' Playtime' and 'Music while you work.'

Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, devoted a special message to the value of these two programmes. 'The

BBC,' he said, 'is a factory for entertainment and education, and must be regarded as one of the vital services. It represents a necessary link and contribution to production.'

'Workers' Playtime' is a lunch-time entertainment given 'live' three times a week in factories and broadcast to others all over the country. It provides a stimulus of gaiety in the lunch-time break which sends the worker back to bench or machine with new heart to work harder than ever. Shakespeare showed that he was a good industrial psychologist when he wrote:

A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.

For 'Workers' Playtime,' BBC engineers and artistes go, at the factory's request, to the works itself. World-famous stars trap miles in buses to factories in the heart of the country. A small wooden stage is put up in the canteen, the microphone slung from the roof, and the audience consists of as many workers as can jam themselves into the room; clustering at the foot of the platform till the front row is almost touching the singer. 'Often the singer or comedian is propped up between two grand pianos on a tiny platform about a foot high, the size of the average dining-table, in a converted hangar or a half-completed machine shop,' said John Watt, describing the shows in a broadcast. 'On the other hand there may be lights and curtains and all that in one of those enormous green and chromium-plated canteens that you find in some of the factories with a proper stage. But whatever the setting, the audience is the same—an enthusiastic bunch of workers—anything between 500 and 4,000 of them.'

With 'Music while you work' the BBC comes not merely into the canteen as with 'Workers' Playtime' but right into the workshop while production is in full swing. This new and highly constructive activity of the BBC began some eighteen months ago. Wynford Reynolds, who has run many bands, has made a study of music in industry and is now organizing two half-hours of special music to be broadcast in factories during working hours.

'Music while you work' is not in itself a new idea. It is as old as history. The sailors' shanty, the soldiers' band, the songs women sang as they turned their spinning-wheels, are all proofs that work goes better and more easily to music. In the last war, in the market-place of St. Quentin, Sir Tom Bridges roused the men who were lying all round in the last stages of exhaustion by improvising a band with a toy drum and a penny whistle. In a few minutes they were on the march again.

The music that has been proved to allay fatigue and boredom and definitely to speed up production is not necessarily the loudest

or liveliest. It is a tonic, not a stimulant, and its effects must carry on right through the day. Too strongly marked a rhythm clashes with the workers' actual movements and only makes them nervous and irritable. Too dreamy a rhythm slows down movement and increases monotony. Songs, unless they are familiar, are unsatisfactory. The worker unconsciously strains his ears to catch the words. In practice, Wynford Reynolds finds the most satisfactory 'working music' to be light rhythmical dance music with a 'clear melodic line, such as that played by Victor Sylvester and his band.

If music went on all day as a background to work, it would lose its effect. The BBC has found by research in the factories that two half-hours in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon periods, when boredom is greatest and workers tend to slack off and chat, has the best results on production. That it does increase production has been conclusively proved. I have only room to quote three typical reports from factory chiefs.

'A programme of dance music daily stepped up production thirty per cent in our factory.'

'You will be interested to know that production figures for the period covered by the "Music while you work" programmes are consistently higher than those for other periods of the working day.'

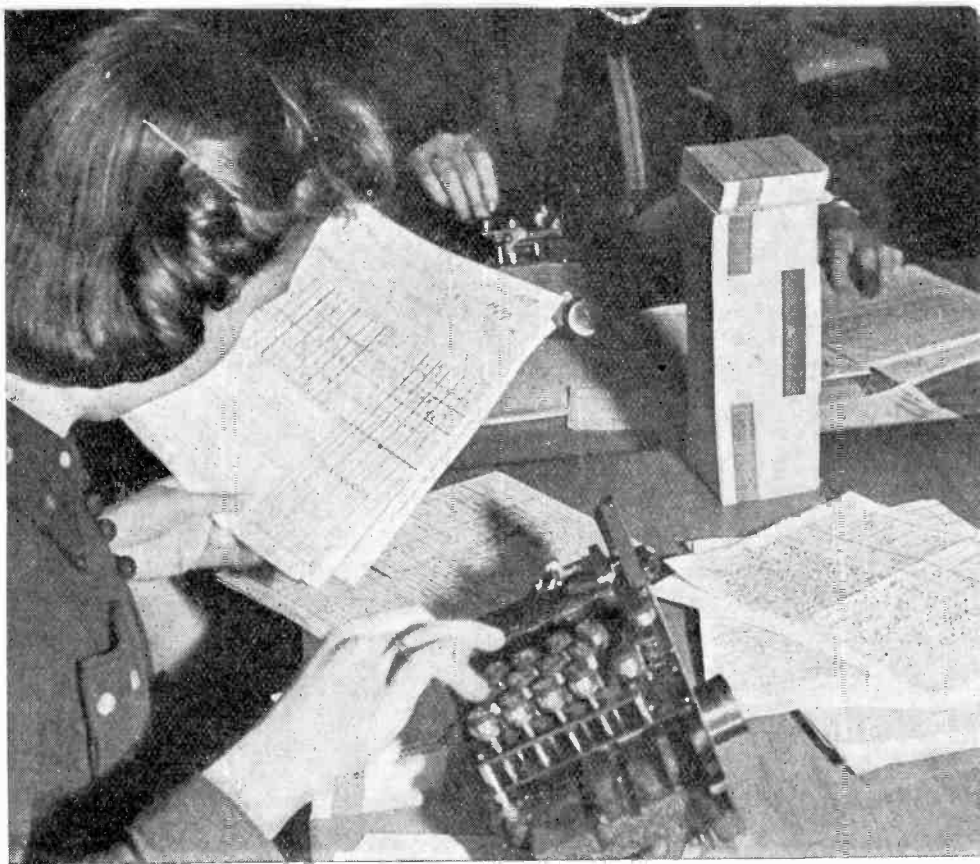
'Our planning engineer said that, if he could have a programme like that every time, he would be able to cut the overtime by half.'

'A programme like that.' Those words prove the importance of finding exactly the right type of music for this vital work. The BBC is constantly visiting factories, questioning managers, foremen and operatives, to get fresh information so as to give workers the maximum help in their tremendous task.

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The BBC does not only conduct research in factories. More than ever to-day it wants to know what listeners want to hear; what pleases, stimulates and helps them most. The war has created a whole new set of conditions for listeners, and aroused new needs and new interests. The Listener Research Department investigates these in a practical and scientific way.

Every day a 'cross section' of the public, consisting of 800 people, is interviewed by a staff of part-time fieldworkers. The fieldwork of the survey is organized on behalf of the BBC by the British Institute of Public-Opinion. The daily sample is carefully graded so as to ensure that all types of listener are included in their proper proportions. At each interview the 'contact's' listening on the previous day is carefully recorded. Nearly 600,000 interviews have been made in the first two years of the survey's existence. Rebuffs



Compiling the statistics of the 'Listener Research' survey. Every day 800 listeners, representing a cross-section of the whole public, are interviewed. Every day their answers to questions as to what programmes they listened to, what they liked and what they disliked are carefully recorded and filed. The BBC want to find out what you want to hear and when you want to hear it. All your criticisms are welcomed, and tabulated under various headings.

are rare. As always, the public has co-operated readily when it has seen that its help contributes to the common interest.

But it is not enough to know how many people listen to a programme. It is equally important to know whether those who listened to it liked it. And if not, why they did not. Listener Research supplies this need with the help of volunteer listeners—both civilians and listeners in the forces—who are organized into a number of listening panels. The panels are questioned about the programmes they heard. Their answers reflect the mood of the audience as surely as, and perhaps more surely than, the rustle of boredom or the burst of applause reflect the mood of the concert- or theatre-goers.

Recently R. J. E. Silvey, the Listener Research Director, asked for 3,500 volunteers to make up 'listening panels.' No less than 12,000 immediately offered their services. The local correspondents at present include parsons, milk roundsmen, housewives, trade union branch secretaries, postmen and many more. They do their voluntary work with the greatest keenness. One remark, typical of many, deserves to be quoted as an example both of their splendid co-operation and the inimitable spirit of the British at war. A woman, a shop assistant in a north-east town, wrote :

'I am extremely sorry not to be able to complete this form this time. As a result of enemy action I have been unable to make the usual inquiries, but will begin again next week, when we open a new shop.'

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Before the war, most people thought of the BBC as an aloof and impenetrable organization. Since the war it has become physically more impenetrable, for armed sentries meet you at every corner of Broadcasting House and your pass becomes dog-eared from being shown several times a day. But, psychologically, the barriers are breaking down. It is becoming more and more alive to people's needs and it is no longer a background, but an integral part of their lives. On the one hand, an influx of men and women from all walks of life has brought new freshness and vigour into it ; on the other, it has gone out itself into the factory, the camp and the air-raid shelter and shared the perils and discomforts of the people whose life in war-time it is its privilege to reflect.

Chapter III

THE BATTLE FRONT

In peace-time the BBC had to talk. In war-time it has also to listen. Besides a mouth, it has had to develop ears—ears of extraordinary acuteness and intelligence—that can catch a significant whisper in the torrent of a million words poured out day and night in thirty different languages.

That mysterious word 'Monitoring,' which originally merely meant listening 'to check the technical quality or programme content of a wireless transmission,' has now acquired a dramatic new significance. It is the name of the service which keeps a continuous watch on radio news bulletins and broadcasts from all parts of the world.

The Monitoring Service is the listening post of the Battle Front. 'In the war of 1914-18'—says one of its former chief editors—'it was scraps of guttural conversation, the detonation of a shot, the unmistakable murmur of unit relieving unit which the soldier risked his life to hear and report from the listening posts set up against the enemy front-line trenches. In the short space of a generation, the naked ear of the soldier, applied close to the ground, has been replaced by the antennæ of dozens of receiving sets tuned to the transmitters of the world.'

How does the monitor actually do his work? Imagine a room, somewhere in England, looking rather like a library fitted with wireless sets instead of bookshelves. At each set sits a man or woman with earphones, usually wearing the strained, concentrated expression you see on the faces of the deaf who are trying to catch the drift of a conversation. Suddenly a pencil poised over a pad will begin to scribble furiously. That means that the monitor is 'on to' something interesting, making lightning notes of the vital points.

Have you ever tried reporting an ordinary BBC news bulletin as you get it with perfect reception on your own set? You'll find it a good deal harder than you think. Now, imagine yourself listening through earphones to a broadcast in a foreign language, often against a background of deliberate jamming. When reception is bad, the speaker can only be heard muttering away to a deafening accompaniment of shrieks, whistles and crackling. Picture yourself listening to that unintelligible din and reducing it to a clear and

accurate précis for eight hours at a stretch and you know what the monitor is up against. The brightest brain develops a blind spot now and then : the quickest ear a deaf one. So it is obvious that an elaborate system of checking and counterchecking has had to be devised. The night shifts are the trickiest (monitoring goes on all round the clock) for the monitor usually comes to it after an exceedingly inadequate day-time sleep in his billet, broken by the telephone bells, crying babies, barking dogs and his landlady's wireless. It was in the small hours that one monitor listening to one of Lord Haw-Haw's colleagues broadcasting to the Empire was puzzled by the statement: 'Mr. Hore-Belisha was praised by all of his family.' Counterchecking revealed that what the German speaker said was: 'Mr. Hore-Belisha was replaced by Oliver Stanley.'

Like other war-workers, monitors soon get used to sleeping by day, having their meals backwards, and bicycling to duty at 11 p.m. 'by moonlight, starlight, bat-light or no-light.' They even claim that there is something exhilarating in getting up with the nightingale and going to bed with the lark. But just before dawn, when vitality is lowest, the mind like the body is at its most vulnerable. That is the moment when the monitor, his brain and eardrums assaulted by the ceaseless hammering of German lies, feels his sanity slipping and hears a demon whisper: 'Suppose . . . suppose after all . . . this is the truth?' A cigarette, a cup of coffee, a joke with a colleague, and he can laugh at the demon. He is once more a sane man among sane men.

For days or nights on end the monitor's lot may be nothing but monotony, weariness and strain. Then something happens which makes it all worth while. The *Graf Spee* is scuttled, Roosevelt is re-elected, Yugoslavia announces her intention to resist the German invasion. Then the monitor, clamping his headphones on more firmly, hushes interruptions, signals for help and scribbles frantically all at the same time. Colleagues tune in to the same station. The story is rushed to the editorial section, typewriters rattle and telephones ring. Within a few minutes the scoop is 'flashed' to the news section and all departments concerned.

Since the early days of the war, the Monitoring Service has expanded by leaps and bounds and is still expanding. It had grown from a staff of sixty or seventy to one of over 500. At this moment it is dealing with nearly 300 broadcasts a day in thirty different languages. About half of the monitoring staff are foreigners of proved loyalty to our cause—many of them refugees from Hitler's persecution who are fighting back in this most effective way. The rest are British; men and women who are not only exceptional linguists but exceptionally intelligent. One of the best monitors is blind; he takes his notes on a braille machine and dictates to a typist. The

director of the Monitoring Service says emphatically, 'No one can be too good to be a monitor.'

Listening is a dramatic and important part of the Monitoring Service—but only a part. The other side is less picturesque but even more strenuous. Every twenty-four hours the notes the monitors take down in shorthand or in some personal form of 'speedwriting,' transcribe and translate, amount to something like a million words—the equivalent of ten full-length novels. It is the task of the editorial section of the service to condense that material to a clear and readable summary of from 50 to 60,000 words—about one-twentieth of the original. Think of précis-writing at school where you boiled down a thousand-word essay to a hundred words. Then think of ten long novels being boiled down to the length of one short one every twenty-four hours. That is the work of the thirty-odd sub-editors. During their twelve-hour shifts a continuous stream of closely typed pages blow down the tubes on to their desks and pile up in a mountain of paper. Redundant matter is deleted, long speeches are summarized, crossheads inserted, mistranslations queried, all at breakneck speed, and the corrected copy collated into one lucid document.

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How is this huge amount of material, amassed every day, used by the BBC? In many ways. Some is incorporated in its own news bulletins and commentaries. Some is used as the basis of counter-propaganda to enemy countries. Some is used to disseminate information in occupied countries. Some is used to warn our friends overseas about Goebbel's methods. In an important feature, 'Listening Post,' James Fergusson analyses for overseas listeners various aspects of Nazi radio propaganda. Often he shows how Goebbel tells one story in German and very different stories in English, French and other languages. 'Listening Post' exposed to overseas listeners the cunning but unsuccessful Nazi attempt to divide us from our American friends by using the same technique as had been employed in 1940 to try and make us and the French mutually suspicious. Extracts from 'Listening Post' have been broadcast in some of the BBC European services so that occupied countries whose radio is under German control could hear what Germany was saying in other countries and contrast it with what they heard themselves—and with the truth.

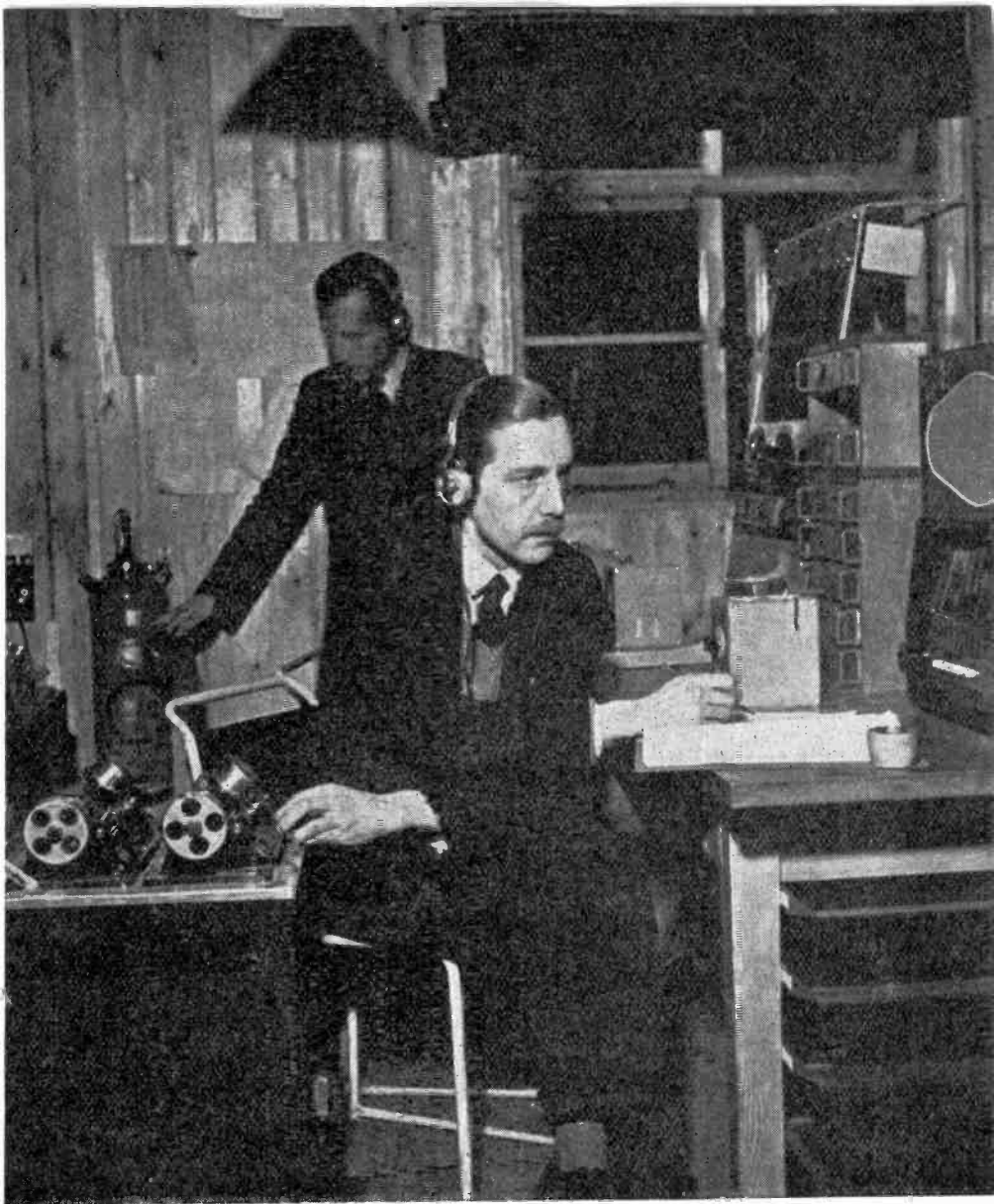
W. A. Sinclair, who now broadcasts a fifteen-minute weekly analysis of German propaganda in 'The Voice of the Nazi,' also uses the monitoring summary. To produce 500 words for the microphone, he reads through its 50,000 words to get his raw material. Equipped with the Scot's shrewd, logical and sceptical

mind and trained in modern philosophy by Whitehead, he has a sixth sense for detecting lies and ambiguities. He once tried an interesting test. For three weeks he cut himself off from all news except those given out in German broadcasts. Later, checking up his impressions with the real news he found a close connection between his own deductions from reading between the lines of German suppressions and distortions and what had actually happened.

Side by side with the expansion of the Monitoring Service has gone the expansion of our own broadcasts in foreign languages. At the beginning of the war the BBC was broadcasting in nine languages: to-day its news bulletins go out in no less than thirty-nine. At the outbreak of war the European News Service was broadcasting in French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Almost immediately Polish and Czech were added. Since then N. F. Newsome, the editor, has had over and over again to recruit yet another language staff at short notice till now the schedule of his department includes twenty languages, and the daily transmission of 300,000 words in thirty-six hours of broadcasting. Working elbow to elbow in stuffy basement rooms by artificial light, the seventy-five editors and sub-editors deal with the incessant stream of news that pours in from typewriters, telephones and tape-machines. Each diverts part of the stream into the channels of the particular country for which he works, emphasizes the points most likely to interest its inhabitants and presents them in the way that appeals to their temperament and psychology. But though presentation and emphasis may vary, the basic facts are never tampered with. The essence of the work of the European Service—and this applies equally to neutral countries, enemy-occupied countries and enemy countries themselves—has always been to put out straight honest news from London.

The reputation for truth which British news built up long before the war is far too valuable to lose in any misguided attempt to outdo Goebbels at his own game. It is on this basis of reliability that our news bulletins and commentaries have built a permanent and ever-growing audience of listeners throughout Europe not only in enemy-occupied countries but in the Axis itself. News bulletins take ninety per cent of the broadcasting time of the service and they are the keystone both of our support to our friends and our attack on our enemies. All the time we are forcing the hand of the Germans. True news is going out from this country and the German news bulletins are perpetually being driven to attempt to explain it away and to admit facts they would prefer to suppress.

Throughout Europe we are aiming on a long-range target, in the firm and reasonable belief that, as Harold Nicolson says, 'no



The monitor is on to something important. Ears and hands register at top speed. Colleagues tune in to the same station. The story will be rushed through to the editors.



The BBC has had to develop ears as well as a mouth since the war. Every twenty-four hours a million words are taken down, transcribed, translated. Listening to what the rest of the world says is a vital war job. Every day the editors condense material which is the length of ten novels into a clear readable summary of fifty thousand words.

permanent propaganda policy can in the modern world be based upon untruthfulness. The day will come when Herr Hitler will desire with all his soul to be believed by his own people and by the peoples of the world. He will then find that, having forged so many cheques, having issued so many fraudulent balance sheets, he is unable to borrow five pounds upon the market. Even in propaganda, honesty is the best policy every time.'

At this point you are justified in saying, 'That is all admirable. It is obviously both good ethics and good sense to follow this policy of telling the truth and telling it well in your news bulletins and news commentaries. But does the BBC do nothing more dynamic? Does it attempt to undermine the morale of the people of Germany and Italy? Does it launch a counter-offensive against German radio propaganda among the victim nations? And does it exert any influence on the opinion of neutral countries at critical moments?'

The answer is definitely 'Yes' to all three. Let me give some concrete instances, taking the questions in the order raised.

First, what line does the European Service take with the Axis countries themselves? Every day eleven transmissions, totalling 245 minutes of broadcasting, go out to Germany. In the news talks there are three main 'personality' commentators, Professor Lindley Fraser, R. H. Crossman and Sefton Delmer—all of whom not only speak German perfectly but have an almost uncanny insight into German mentality. Sefton Delmer's speciality is to deliver brilliant and smashing replies to Fritzsche's libels and deliberate misstatements within an hour or two of hearing them.

Special programmes, which include dramatic 'features,' monologues, dialogues and music, are aimed at specific sections of the German community—workers, soldiers, airmen, sailors, peasants, housewives and intellectuals. It is known that 'Frau Wernicke,' the character star of one of the programmes, has a large listening public in Germany. 'Frau Wernicke,' who first appeared in July 1940, is a Berlin housewife speaking the equivalent of German 'cockney.' Her politics are naturally strongly anti-Nazi and her indictments are all the more scathing for being cunningly concealed under a layer of homely humour and injured innocence. In her lively conversations with the Blockwart, the Nazi neighbour or the air-raid warden, she always contrives to confound them with their own arguments. Other telling characters are Kurt, the cynical Nazi propagandist, Willi, the simple, kindly schoolteacher and Lance-Corporal Hirschal, the bewildered soldier who is kicked from one end of Europe to the other.

Lance-Corporal Hirschal is by no means a mere product of the German section's imagination. More than a year ago, on a railway

truck in Poland these words were found scribbled in chalk by a real German soldier—words that obviously voice the feelings of thousands of his comrades :

Wir fahren immer hin und her,
Wir haben keine Heimat mehr—

which means : ' We're always travelling here and there ; we haven't got a home any more.'

When the German section of the BBC heard of this, a clever woman on the staff promptly wrote a whole song in German on those words. It was set to a catchy tune and ' plugged ' by our radio to the German forces. Music is one of the most effective ways of getting under the enemy's skin. If you hear a tune often enough, it will run through your head at the most unexpected moments. And the words it carries, especially if they echo your own repressed thoughts, stick in your mind.

No less than eight broadcasts go out daily to the Italian people. Besides the news bulletins which give plain honest facts, there are telling talks and discussion features. Colonel Stevens whose voice is well known from Rome to Naples gives the unhappy Italians provocative themes for argument . . . themes which are taken up with avid interest by his listeners for the friction between the Axis partners increases daily. ' Sotto Voce,' a series in which Leo and Paulo—Italians without strong political leanings—discuss current events with a firm Fascist, Rossi, drives home still further Italy's humiliating and uncomfortable position as Hitler's ' tattered lackey.' Leo and Paulo talk of the daily hardships and difficulties of the Italian people—rationing of bread, fear of increased bombardment, the German throttling of Italian industry, the trivialities given in the newspapers to a people hungry for real news. Even Rossi the Fascist wishes the R.A.F. would bomb the railways at Milan and so prevent the sending of Italian foodstuffs to Germany. In another feature ' Axis Conversation,' a German business man discusses the implications of the New Order with his opposite number in Italy. The Italian is hard to persuade that German-Italian co-operation is age-old and is not even convinced by the fact that Dante the poet and Theodoric the Hun are buried near each other in Ravenna. The German and the Italian always fall out violently when the argument touches the crucial sore subject of Italians giving their lives for German ambitions with no hope of reward.

* * * * *

We now come to the second and perhaps the most important aspect of the BBC's battle front—the encouragement of resistance in enemy-occupied countries. London is now the seat of government of Norway, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugo-

slavia and Greece. It is also the headquarters of General de Gaulle and the Free French Forces: Each of these nations uses the BBC as its mouthpiece to keep in touch with its own people. Were it not for British radio, seven countries of Nazi-occupied Europe would be completely cut off from any contact with their governments as well as from authentic and unbiased news. And the vast numbers of the French people who are still opposing German control, not only in spirit but in deed, would be severed from their comrades here who are fighting for the Allied cause in the Free French Forces.

It is impossible in so short a space to go into the remarkable work of each foreign section the BBC has formed to co-operate with the governments concerned. Let us look at a representative one—the French. Of course, the French section differs from the others in one important matter. The French Government is at Vichy, and London is officially only the rallying point of the Free French who are still fighting on our side. But 'Free France' is a spiritual category and all over France, more especially in the occupied zones, there are millions of French men and women who are proud to belong to it. It was to encourage them, unite them, and keep the fire of confidence and hope burning in their minds that the French section of the BBC was formed after the fall of France.

A certain amount of its broadcasting time is allocated to General de Gaulle and the Free French Forces. This part of the programme, 'Honneur et Patrie,' includes de Gaulle's own stirring messages to his compatriots. In the rest of the broadcasts, the BBC's concern is to put out a programme essentially French in character (it is almost entirely designed by Frenchmen) which interprets the true relations between France and ourselves.

Those relations were cloudy and confused immediately after the disaster of 1940. Probably the main part of the population of both countries felt suspicious and resentful about each other. But Frenchmen who knew and loved England and Englishmen who knew and loved France both realized the tie between the two countries must not be broken. General de Gaulle's broadcast call to France to rally to our common cause reminding her that 'she had lost a battle; she had not lost the war' was posted up in every French restaurant in London and read with sympathetic admiration by its English patrons. A group of Frenchmen who had fought side by side with our army during the retreat, banded together with Englishmen whose faith in France had never wavered, to keep in touch with their stricken country by radio. That was the nucleus of the BBC French Service.

* * * * *

During the first months after France's fall, this group had five objectives. To disseminate true news to German-controlled France;

to clear up misunderstandings between our two countries ; to make France realize that her misfortunes had not lowered her prestige with her allies ; to let the French people know of the exploits of the Free French Forces, and lastly to tell them that our own determination to fight on was unshakable, to give them signs of hope such as our victory in the Battle of Britain and to promise, in Churchill's words, to ' restore them to their integrity and grandeur.'

By the end of 1940, the broadcasts had produced definite results. Britain had regained the confidence of every freedom-loving Frenchman. The London radio had become not only the recognized source of reliable news but to thousands of families living in the isolation and darkness of German oppression the voice of a friend and the voice of home. They were listening to Frenchmen like themselves, men whose wives and children were suffering in France at that moment, men who were longing for the day when they could return with honour to their beloved country.

The Frenchmen who work in this section of the BBC make up as lively and as vivid a group of people as you could meet in the wisest and wittiest circles of any civilized capital. London hostesses fight in vain to lure them to dinner parties for any one of them would make the dulllest evening sparkle. Some of them are brilliant and acrid French journalists ; others are distinguished painters, writers, lawyers, scientists and politicians. For obvious reasons they are known now in France and even over here by pseudonyms. Until the war is over, they are not interested in social life. They prefer to sit in a stuffy canteen or an obscure Soho restaurant—eating with one hand and dashing off new ideas and embryo scripts with the other—to lingering over a Mayfair dinner table. They pride themselves on being a first-class *équipe*, combining the comradeship and discipline of a ship's crew with the readiness to play any part from lead to ' noises off ' of a provincial repertory company. They make a little corner of Paris in the heart of London, an oasis of French clarity, French warmth and French gaiety—above all of passionate French love of country. For the *équipe* lives, thinks, works, eats, sleeps and dreams for one end only . . . the liberation of France.

Since the beginning of 1941 it has had a new task to perform—to help our French sympathizers in France in their struggle against oppression, to unite them in opposition to the Germans, and by linking up with the rest of the European Services of the BBC to marshal them side by side with the other victims of Hitler in one great army whose slogan is ' Europe against the Nazis.'

Every day, between 6.15 a.m. and midnight, eight French news bulletins and two-and-a-quarter hours of programme material goes out from London. It reaches not only France but Syria and the

Near East, the Far East, Africa, Canada, and central and western Europe. Pierre Bourdan and Jean Marin, the news commentators, are two of the most popular figures in France to-day and receive large packets of fan-mail, even from occupied France where it is highly dangerous to smuggle out letters to England. Jacques Duchesne, one of the leading spirits of the section, is famous for his nightly *réflexions*. Another favourite series is the weekly discussion by 'Les Trois Amis.' The three friends meet, talk out their witty conversation just as if they were sitting at a café table, work it into a script and broadcast it an hour or two later.

One of the most important features is the *Courrier de France* in which selections from the many letters received from all parts of France are read out on the wireless. You will realize how important this is if you try to imagine yourself in the same predicament as the French at this moment. Suppose that the north and the midlands were under German occupation, and that you lived in unoccupied Cornwall. You would be able to get no uncensored news (if you could get any news at all) of how your friends in Newcastle and Birmingham were faring. Your daily paper would be entirely under German control. And the Germans would, of course, have taken over the BBC and be bombarding you day and night with false news and propaganda designed to undermine your morale. Now suppose that, from Canada, for example, you could hear not only authentic British news about the progress of the war, but authentic letters which told you what was really going on in other parts of England. Could anything be more heartening? That is what the French news bulletin and the *Courrier de France* does for the French. Soldiers, sailors and airmen can also send messages back to their anxious families. Naturally, whether the letter comes from France or the message from England, the sender's name is never mentioned for fear that a family should be victimized by the Gestapo.

Another way of keeping up the French people's sense of unity is to broadcast 'regional' features in which each province is reminded of its heritage and its tradition. It means as much to Lorraine and Provence to hear over the British radio their own accents and their own folk-songs as it would mean in similar circumstances to a Yorkshireman to hear a real Yorkshire voice or to a Scot to hear the music of the pipes.

Music is used with great ingenuity in the French programmes. Topical words are over and over again set to nursery-rhyme tunes or popular songs and sung on the air. We know from many sources that these catch on like wildfire and that people of all kinds from schoolchildren to train drivers sing with glee amusing anti-German songs, made by France-in-England, to such innocent tunes as

'Frère Jacques,' 'Auprès de ma blonde' and 'La Cucaracha.' Sometimes the French smuggle out the words of songs they have written themselves such as 'La Chanson de la R.A.F.,' and they are sung back to them over the wireless. These continual pinpricks of satire often pierce the thick German hide of complacency more than a broadside of denunciation. When the situation became so tragic in France, many kindly people thought it might be cruel and tactless to broadcast jokes and comic songs. They were wrong. It has been proved over and over again from the evidence obtained by the European Intelligence Department that they are welcomed—and welcomed most of all in those parts of France where the Nazi iron heel treads hardest. The French are remarkably like the English: the worse things are, the more they like making fun of them.

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What has been said about the French section could be repeated, with slight variations, of the other European sections. But it is time to give one instance of the co-operation of the whole European Service—the V campaign—which gives you proof of the effectiveness of the broadcasts.

You probably know how all over Nazi-dominated Europe the V sign is chalked up, painted up, whitewashed up and scribbled up by the oppressed inhabitants, in spite of heavy penalties. You know that it was spread by the European broadcasts from London, using 'Colonel Britton' as the mouthpiece for all countries. But you may not know the problems behind the V campaign nor how it originated.

For a long time one particular problem had confronted all who were concerned in the BBC broadcasts to Europe . . . how to counteract the physical presence of Germans in occupied countries.

Remember that their inhabitants were exposed daily to *total* propaganda from the Nazis. Films and newspapers, as well as broadcasts, all dinned into them the anti-Ally story. Germans paraded their streets, filled their restaurants, were billeted in their homes. Add to that the horrible loneliness of oppression—the sense of isolation, the terror of the Gestapo, the fear that your neighbour may be an informer. It was not enough to listen in small groups all over the country to the forbidden British radio. What was needed was an outward expression—some image people could see, some gesture they could make to remind them that they were not alone, that millions of others shared their feelings and their hopes. Because national emblems were forbidden, an international emblem was needed.

The choice of the letter V, symbol of Victory in so many languages, was arrived at by a mixture of imagination, and experiment,



As a direct result of the BBC French broadcasts many young men have risked great dangers to get across to this country and join the Free French Forces. These five French boys, aged 16-20, crossed the channel one dark night in canoes. Nazi troops fired on them as they paddled off. For thirty-six hours they battled with the sea. Finally, cold, hungry and almost exhausted they were tossed up on the English coast. Here you see Mr. and Mrs. Churchill receiving them at Downing Street. Later they broadcast in the French Service.



M. de Laveleye, the originator of the V sign, discusses its possibilities with M. Geersens.



A few of the hundreds of letters sent to the BBC from France.

and first launched in the BBC's Belgian programme by Victor de Laveleye. From Belgium it spread to France and then ran like wildfire all over the occupied countries. In vain the Germans fulminated, whined and punished. In vain the police washed off the V's from walls, pavements and hoardings. Fresh crops sprang up like mushrooms as soon as their backs were turned. Then some genius discovered that the morse signal for V (. . . —) had the same rhythm as the opening bars of Beethoven's fifth symphony. German ears were assaulted everywhere by that rhythm. Motor horns tooted it. Schoolboys whistled it. Audiences applauded in it. The war of nerves was turned against the Nazis who inaugurated it. The V is the symbol of European solidarity and co-operation—an expression of the common will of the peoples of occupied territories to resist the Germans till the great day when they can rise up and throw them out. More than that even, it is the first move in a radio-directed war of vital strategic importance. Each new move in that war strikes two direct blows at the enemy. It builds up the resistance in occupied countries, thus forcing the Germans to keep large armies of occupation in them, and it contributes to the demoralization of those armies.

There is no space to quote the remarkable and moving letters which come from all parts of Europe testifying to the eagerness with which people listen to British radio and the risks they run to do so. Many have been shot, many more sent to concentration camps, whole towns have been penalized by fines and repressive measures for no other crime than listening to the news bulletins from London. Yet still the spate of listeners grows. In Poland to-day, no less than eighteen illegal newspapers are secretly circulated. To possess a radio set is a crime, yet those newspapers contain the London news bulletins transcribed verbatim. A girl who escaped from Czechoslovakia last March wrote to the BBC, 'People who were almost too poor to buy bread have now a radio. They need it. A man told me, "The stomach is hungry but the soul still more so. London is the only thing to feed the soul."'

Our broadcast campaign to boycott the Nazi-controlled papers in Czechoslovakia had a speedy and thorough success. It was launched on Sunday, 14th September; by Tuesday, the 16th, news was received in London of the progress of the boycott, and on the 17th M. Jan Masaryk spoke to Czechoslovakia thanking the boycotters for their help. Later reports showed that the campaign was so successful that it almost amounted to a hundred per cent plebiscite of the Czech people's feelings against their 'protectors.'

The story of the campaign reveals that during the week the circulation of the principal morning newspapers dropped by two-thirds, and the evening newspapers, which have no subscribers,

almost disappeared. So poor were street sales that newsvendors went on holiday, though at the beginning of the week some people paid for their papers and then carefully refused to take them away. In tramcars and coffee-houses was seen the unfamiliar spectacle of people abandoning their newspapers and ostentatiously reading the Czech classics.

In France there was no need to run a boycotting campaign. It is now so universally recognized that there is no authentic news to be obtained from the German-controlled press that the circulation of even the best-known papers has dropped to practically nothing. France to-day relies on one source of news only—the radio bulletins from London.

Lastly, to deal very briefly with the third question of how far the BBC's foreign broadcasts influence neutral opinion, here are two concrete examples. It was Mr. Amery's broadcast to Yugoslavia on the eve of the German invasion that turned the scales and decided her to make her magnificent gallant resistance. And it was the Persian section of the BBC Near East Service—that exceedingly interesting service of which only this one instance of its valuable work can be quoted here—that played an acknowledged part in the abdication of the Shah of Persia. In the *Spectator* of 26th September 1941, Glorney Bolton concluded an article on 'The BBC and Persia' by saying, 'The Indian would resent falsehood and misrepresentation as deeply as the Persian. He wants the truth; always the truth. The Persian announcers spoke simply, but they spoke the truth and won their victory.'

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the heaviest gun on this battle front is the truth. It is a long-range gun that week by week is finding more and more targets. Whether we are talking to our own people, to our Allies, to neutral countries or to the enemy himself we believe, as Harold Nicolson says, that 'truthfulness is more effective than untruthfulness and honesty more durable than cunning.'

Recently an advertisement appeared in the Portuguese press headed:

GERMANY SPEAKS
AND THE WORLD HEARS HER.

The answer now spreading from country to country and continent to continent is:

LONDON SPEAKS
AND THE WORLD BELIEVES HER.

Chapter IV

ACROSS THE OCEANS

Members of the same family, separated by immense tracts of sea and land, can easily lose touch with each other's ways of life and habits of thought. The war united the whole British Commonwealth in the same cause. Yet, just as most Britons have never visited Canada or Australia or South Africa, so Britain itself is an unknown country to most of the inhabitants of the Dominions. The immense expansion of the BBC's Empire Service since the war has put the nations of the Commonwealth in immediate contact not only with the mother country but with each other.

The BBC Empire Department is like a microcosm of the Empire itself. It includes Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Indians and West Indians. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation also has its own unit in the BBC. It uses BBC facilities and contributes both to its Home and Forces programmes and to its North American Service, but works directly under its own parent corporation. Robert McCall came all the way from Australia to direct the Pacific Service. Grenfell Williams, a bi-lingual South African, directs programmes to South Africa in English and Afrikaans. Indians share in arranging the programmes to India. British radio speaks to the Commonwealth with the authentic voices of its own peoples.

News bulletins and commentaries, talks and 'features,' all adapted to the special interests of different sections of this immense audience, go out in many languages besides English. They go out in French for French Canada, in Hindustani, Burmese, Bengali, Tamil, Thai, Malay, Cantonese, Kuoyu, Afrikaans, Cypriot Greek and Maltese. Nor does the BBC rely only on its own system of transmissions. It works in close co-operation with the broadcasting services of Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and All India, and the many smaller broadcasting organizations in colonial territories in Africa, the East and the West Indies. All of these pick up our short-wave transmissions and rebroadcast them on medium wave.

Speaking to the Royal Empire Society on 11th November 1941, the Director-General of the BBC said: 'Empire Broadcasting is not to be thought of as a one-way traffic outwards from Britain. Empire broadcasting is Empire exchange; all parts of the Empire making the best broadcasting use of all available means and material.'

Recently Cypriot soldiers in the Near East wanted to send messages home to Cyprus. It was an Australian unit which recorded the messages, and the Egyptian service which broadcast them across.' He quoted the comments of the radio correspondent of the *Cape Argus* on a series of current broadcasts. 'What will the New Zealander want to know about South Africa when he gets his chance of popping off questions on Tuesday night? Last Tuesday an Australian asked questions about Canada. This "Empire Exchange" series is a brainwave of the BBC. It gives us all the opportunity of refreshing our minds with knowledge of the rest of the Empire. This war has awakened our interest in everything relating to our Commonwealth of Nations.'

Co-operation and interchange go on all the time between the Home Service, the Empire Service, and the broadcasting organization of the Commonwealth. For example, much material obtained from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, such as the admirable despatches of Chester Wilmott from Crete, has been used in our own home programmes. Records of the Australian forces in Tobruk, made by the ABC, are sent by radio-telephone to London, put out in the BBC Pacific transmission and rebroadcast on medium wave in Australia. The BBC also co-operates with the great American broadcasting systems. Representatives of the Columbia, National and Mutual networks use BBC facilities and sometimes take part in linked programmes such as 'London after Dark' which are heard in the U.S.A. as well as in the Empire. Fred Bate, Ed Murrow and John Steele have all done magnificent work and are three of the most popular figures at Broadcasting House. America in her turn gives the same facilities to the BBC's representatives in the United States.

Every night the BBC's North American Service operates for seven and a half hours. The transmissions can be heard both in Canada and the United States. This programme includes, besides news bulletins, talks, features, music and variety, special commentaries by American and Canadian as well as British commentators. It also gives vivid, authentic pictures of Britain's life in wartime, bringing men and women from all walks of life to the microphone to talk about their jobs and their adventures. Many of these items are regularly picked up and rebroadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and on the great American networks. 'Sound snapshots' of the war on all fronts, war adventures of people of many nations make up the nightly 'Radio News Reel,' one of the most popular BBC features in all parts of the world. So the exchange between the nations goes on, stimulating mutual understanding and bringing new voices and new interests to a whole world of listeners. J. B. Priestley and Wickham Steed have a big

following among listeners in North America. Gerry Wilmot of the CBC is one of the favourite compères in the BBC's home programme, while Quentin Reynolds and Raymond Gram Swing have a huge audience throughout Great Britain.

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Canadians, South Africans and Australians who have come over here to help us in this important work of keeping the Empire in constant touch with Britain had plenty of hardship and danger as a reward for their loyalty. Robert McCall, Director of the Pacific Service, broadcasting recently to his fellow Australians, talked of 'grimy men in scorched and tattered uniforms, heroes by the hundred, heaving great hoses into flame-filled buildings, hacking their way through burning débris, poised above the white heat of collapsing masonry.' He did not mention that one night, when an 'incident' caused a huge fire in certain BBC premises, he himself was one of those grimy heroes. J. B. McGeachy, a Canadian commentator in the North American news, was in Broadcasting House on a particularly bad night. As he was walking down a passage, blast caught him and hurled him backwards while (as he put it afterwards) his legs were still going forwards. He remained imperturbable, merely remarking, when he recovered his breath, 'So that's what blast's like.'

On that same night, something happened which shows better than any comment the real comradeship between the BBC staff and the representatives of other broadcasting corporations now using its facilities. Fred Bate, the representative of the National Broadcasting Company of the United States, had been severely wounded on duty. His news bulletin for New York was due at midnight. Mildred Boutwood, his English-born assistant, managed to get through on the telephone to Rooney Pelletier, head of the CBC unit, to ask him if he could do the bulletin. Pelletier was in bed. The lights had failed in his flat, but he pulled on some clothes by candle-light and dashed out through streets on which shrapnel was falling like hail. It was impossible to get through to New York from the usual studio. And the news bulletin, presented in the commented form required by NBC had yet to be written. The news-room, protesting violently, had already been evacuated to another building. No information could be got from news agencies for the telephone lines were down. Somehow or other, a bulletin was made out—mentioning nothing, of course, of the drama of destruction going on all round, beyond that 'a somewhat severe raid was in progress'—and tapped out with one finger on a typewriter while walls rocked and cracked and stretcher-cases filed along the dust-filled passage.

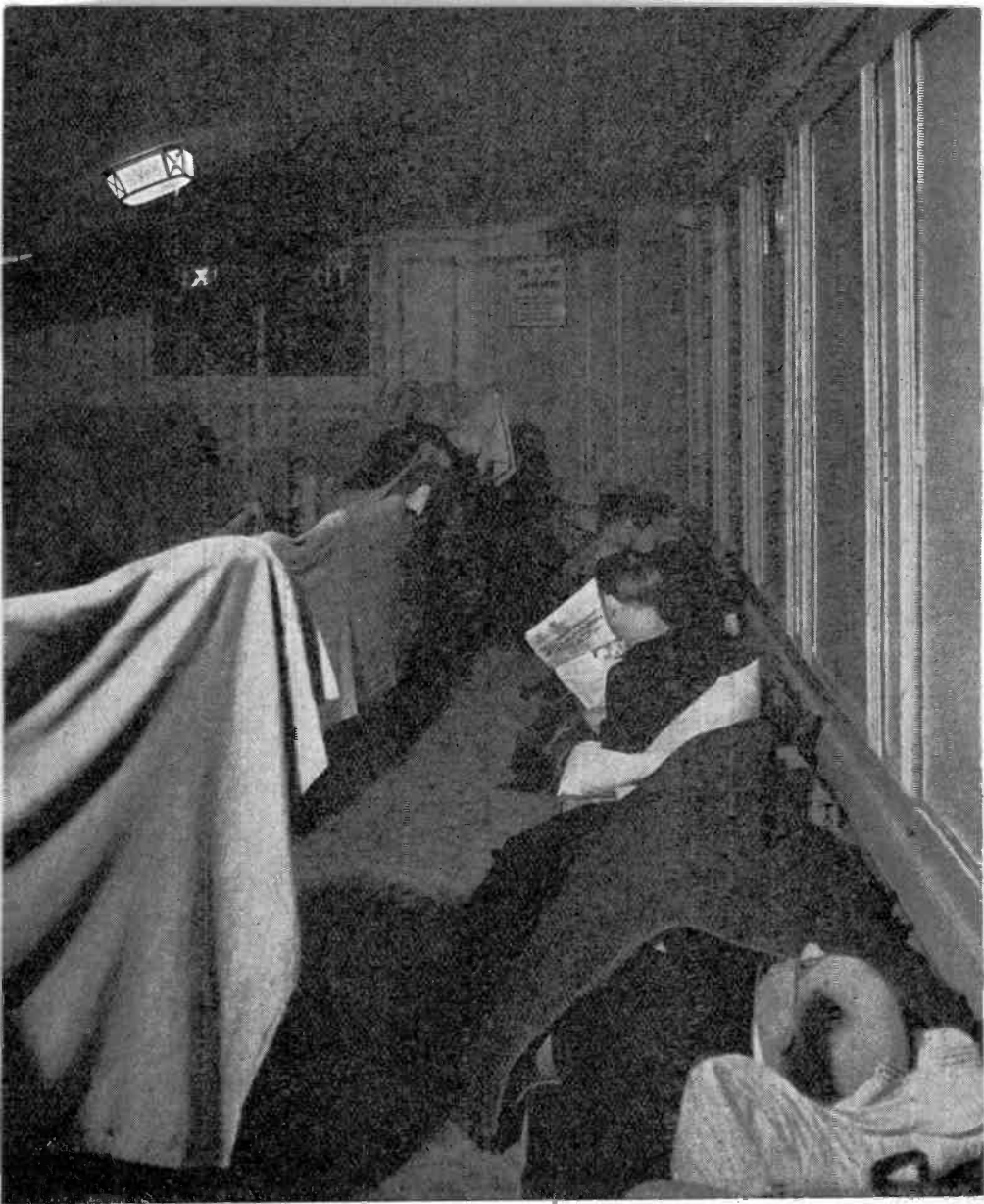
Then began the chase for a microphone. Laurence Gilliam of the BBC, Rooney Pelletier and Florence Peart of the NBC, set out to walk to the rallying point where a Scotland Yard car had been promised to take them to an emergency studio in another part of London. 'We walked for several blocks on a continuous sheet of broken glass, wood splinters, iron railings and girders. The black-out didn't matter because of the fires.' They arrived safely at their first destination. 'The car would come in fifteen minutes. The car didn't. The car would come in twenty minutes. The car didn't. I suggested a motor-cycle. There wasn't one. And all the time the fateful time of the broadcast to New York was drawing nearer and nearer.' By now, apart from the blitz, it was too late to get to the emergency studio on foot. Pelletier and Gilliam decided to go back to Broadcasting House and try and find bicycles. Just as they got outside into the pelting rain of shrapnel, Mildred Boutwood joined them. Nothing would dissuade her. The three of them got back to Broadcasting House but they did not get the bicycles. It looked as if New York would not have its news bulletin that night.

Then Gilliam had an idea. He knew that, even if the broadcasting ship were sinking, the radio engineer would play the traditional role of the wireless telegrapher. The 'control room boys' would be at their post. They tore down into the bowels of Broadcasting House. Water was pouring down the stairs in torrents. The 'control boys' were at their post, as they had known they would be, in front of their plugs and wires and knobs.

Gilliam explained to the engineer what was wanted. 'We'll fix it,' he said. I give the next part of the story in Pelletier's own words. 'Then followed an amazing succession of orders that were gibberish to me: "That plug, Smith." "Circuit So-and-So, Brown." "You can cut it out there and make the circuit on . . ." A microphone was rigged up in the corner of the control room. Earphones were provided. And then, Mildred Boutwood suddenly remembered that our material had not been censored. We signalled frantically to Laurence Gilliam and asked him if by any chance he was a censor. His reply was: "By the grace of God, I am." He read the script while we waited breathlessly for New York. It was a question of minutes now. One minute left. No word from New York. The stopwatches inexorably function. Thirty seconds less. And then—a cackle, a splutter, a faint sound of voices. We were through. "Is that New York? This is Mildred Boutwood speaking," said Mildred, trying to keep the tension out of her voice. An unmistakable New York voice replied, "Hello, sugar. How are ya'?" For about the first time that night, we all laughed. She explained that Fred was injured



Cecil Madden's office is a star's dressing-room.



Orchestra sleeping in the dress-circle of a theatre
after a midnight broadcast to North America.

and that I would speak the news. I did. With drama going on all round and half expecting the building to collapse on top of us, I spoke a newscast innocuous to the point of banality.'

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Apart from broadcasting to all parts of the Empire, the BBC provides special programmes to the British and other Imperial Forces serving overseas. No branch of its war work is done with more enthusiasm. These programmes not only provide entertainment to relieve the hardship and monotony of the soldier's life, but they are a medium through which, as you will see later, men from Britain and all parts of the Empire can keep in active touch both with their homes and their comrades in the forces.

The Empire Entertainments Unit, organized in June 1940 by Cecil Madden, has an underground London theatre as its war-time base. From this it sends out fifty programmes a week overseas—gay and informal programmes produced in a highly informal atmosphere. The unit uses the actors' dressing-rooms as offices, sleeps in the boxes and broadcasts from the stage. The royal box is a control room; the ante-room is fitted up with gramophone turn-tables; the theatre bar dispenses tea and biscuits. Through the stage door passes an endless stream of radio comedians, blonde crooners, dance bands with their instruments, and men and women in uniform. Any member of the British or Imperial Forces on leave is welcome to be 'audience' to the show which is being broadcast to his comrades overseas.

There is one occupational disease from which every soldier on active service in a foreign country suffers—home-sickness. The BBC makes a life-line between the people at home and the men overseas. It also arranges for soldiers, sailors and airmen, from all corners of the Empire, who are now stationed in Britain, to send messages to their friends and families. To and fro the messages go; from Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and South Africans back to their homes in the Dominions; from the forces serving 'over here' to their comrades 'over there'; from British wives and mothers and sweethearts to their menfolk in Africa and India, in Malta or 'Gib.'

Nearly every day women come to the microphone to send the little reassuring messages. They have of necessity to be brief and bald but that only makes them more moving. The fuller your heart, the more difficult it is to say anything original. Everything is done to put the senders at their ease (the messages for the forces in Africa are sent from a tea-table over which Freddy Grisewood presides), but the consciousness of the microphone and of other people listening is bound to be inhibiting. Usually the message

isn't much more than 'Hullo, Charlie. Hope you're all right. We're all fine here. Grandfather and Auntie May send their love. Baby's got a new tooth. Well, thumbs up, Charlie, and God bless you.' Unromantic, unexciting words—but they put new heart into a man far away from home.

Sometimes the messages are sent 'live'; sometimes they are written by the sender and read out by the compère or commère. Typical of the latter kind of programme is Joan Gilbert's weekly 'Calling Gibraltar.' Before Joan goes to the microphone, much hard work has to be done behind the scenes, for every week hundreds of touching letters arrive asking that messages should be included.

'Song Time in the Laager' for South Africa, Rhodesia, and East Africa is an example of the second type of programme in which soldiers from the Dominions send messages to their families. The background of the programme consists of traditional South African songs sung in English. A soldier, Ned Williams, gets leave once a week to act as compère. Nearly all the messages in this programme are 'live'; sometimes a whole batch of sailors on leave will broadcast, sometimes women who are on war work at South Africa House will call up their sons serving in their own country.

The third kind of programme is mainly 'soldier to soldier.' Typical of this is the big New Zealand magazine programme for the New Zealand troops serving in the Middle East. Marjorie Skill, a New Zealand girl, who works in business in London, and who has a great gift for broadcasting, is the unofficial commère of the show and the official compère is Alick Hayes. Marjorie makes it her job to comb the Service Clubs, and even the streets, for New Zealanders on leave. If they cannot come to the microphone in person, she takes down their messages and reads them herself.

Messages, much as they mean to sender and receiver, can hardly give more information than a reassuring telegram. It was the realization of this from the soldier's side that inspired a quite new kind of programme for the forces—'Home Town.' Alick Hayes, the producer, and Ronnie Shiner, the compère, have both been in the army themselves (Shiner was a Lance-Corporal in the 'Mounties,' and Hayes has recently been invalided out), and they decided to plan a programme—by soldiers and for soldiers—based on their own experience of what a man away from home most wants to hear. They decided to go to a different district in England each week, look up several soldiers' families, talk to them, go over their houses and get the whole atmosphere of each man's life. Then, every week, Shiner devotes two or three minutes to each soldier by name, giving him such a vivid picture of what's going on at home that the man feels as if he had only just closed his own front door behind him. The other soldiers who come from the same district, whether it is

Liverpool, the Weald of Kent or the East End of London, enjoy it almost as much as the ones mentioned by name, for Shiner conjures up the whole place for them and slips in the little bits of local news they love to hear.

Up to now 'Home Town' has only been run for British forces in Malta, but it has been such a success from the first broadcast a few months ago that it is likely to be extended. The programme for R.A.F. men now training in Canada, with its 'Radio Girl Friend' who visits their homes in Britain, is a development of the same idea.

Sometimes Ronnie Shiner arrives in the middle of washing-day or spring-cleaning, or 'Mum' has to receive him in the kitchen instead of in the best room because there's something cooking on the stove that can't be left. She may be a little embarrassed, but Shiner is delighted because he knows that it is just those little homely details a son or a husband likes to hear about. Washing-day is an unromantic affair when you're living at home, but when you're an exile in the middle of a scorching desert, the thought of the washing flapping on the line in a Surrey garden and your mother or your wife, in an overall you remember, walking down the path among the sunflowers you planted before the war, is more refreshing than an oasis.

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Every department of Overseas broadcasting has its special and intricate problems. For one thing there are physical difficulties of time. By working all round the clock, the Empire Department can deal easily with the fact that it is evening in Australia when it is dawn in London, and evening in the East at midday here. But there are local time variations to be thought of such as the difference between east coast and west coast time in North America, not to mention the varying local 'summer times' and their relation to our own 'double summer time.' The Overseas Planning Department, working out its vast jig-saw puzzles of times and wavelengths, lives in the world of Dunne and Einstein. But time has to be considered humanly, as well as mathematically. The news, for example, must be timed so as to arrive when most people are at home to listen to it.

That means an accurate knowledge of the habits of every audience you are addressing. And the BBC must know not only its habits but its psychology and its special interests. That is why the addition of Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians and Indians to its war-time staff is so necessary and so valuable.

In planning for India and Burma, for instance, Professor Rushbrook-Williams must consider what will appeal to soldiers, civil

servants and others who really form an extension of the 'Home and Forces' audience and what will most interest English-speaking Indians and Burmese and those who speak Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil or Burmese. Z. A. Bokhari and his Indian colleagues arrange programmes both in English and in Indian languages. Special lectures on English literature are often given to fit in with university courses for Indian students. Examples of the music and poetry of both nations, news commentaries and political discussions have an interested audience all over India.

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Apart from the services to the Empire, there is a special service to Latin America which broadcasts for four hours and a quarter every night in Spanish and Brazilian. Every week there are dramatic feature programmes in Spanish. Extra ones are added to celebrate national days and anniversaries. George Camacho, the Latin-American programme organizer, has formed a small repertory company which includes both actors and amateurs. Many of the European and Latin-American members of the BBC have remarkable dramatic talent and some of the British staff who speak Spanish of the right kind well are often pressed into service.

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If there is one thing that has made the people of Great Britain realize the human ties which bind us to the other nations of the Commonwealth and to the United States, it is the warm, almost recklessly generous hospitality offered to evacuated British children. The broadcasting organizations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the U.S.A. co-operate with the BBC in keeping parents in touch with their children overseas. Every week one-way messages from parents go out from London in all the BBC programmes. There are two-way message programmes to North America once a month and to Australia and South Africa once every eight weeks. In these, parents and children talk to each other over thousands of miles by 'beam radio' and hear each other's voices as clearly as if they were merely talking by telephone.

The two-way 'Children calling Home' programmes need elaborate preparation at both ends of the microphone. But even the 'one-way' messages require an enormous amount of detailed organization on the part of Enid Maxwell in London and the Regional staff who arrange for parents in other parts of the British Isles to come to the microphone and record their messages. It means trouble for the parents, too, who may have to make long journeys so that a boy or girl overseas can hear their voice for two minutes. But neither parents nor members of the staff ever com-



Ronnie Shiner talks to the family, collecting a budget of intimate news to be broadcast to a soldier stationed in Malta in the 'Home Town' programme.



'Children calling Home.'



plain, except to wish that it were possible to send thousands more messages. Every child on the list to receive a message that week has first to be located—not always easy since foster-parents may have moved or have taken the child away on holiday—and then cabled so that the great event is not missed. Nor is it always easy to find the parents, for programmes have to be planned in advance; they may have moved, be on war work in another district or have been bombed out. But somehow, with many last-minute tensions and heartburnings, Enid Maxwell's programme always goes out. Once an atmospheric storm made listening conditions in Melbourne so bad that not a word could be heard. Without a murmur, the parents turned up very early the next morning—it was a bitter winter day—and did the whole programme again.

Recording the one-way messages is always rather an emotional occasion both for the parents and the programme staff. However hard you try to be detached, it isn't always possible. The braver the parents are—and heaven knows they are brave—the more difficult it is for the producer to keep down that lump in the throat. Of course the children are safe and happy, of course it's wonderful that they should have found such splendid homes with such kind people—but, all the same, the fact remains that they are very, very far away.

In the very first recording session, the producer who was deputizing for Enid Maxwell was secretly rather annoyed with one parent who had not answered the BBC's invitation and who arrived very late. But there was just time to record her message, so the mother sat down at the microphone. She began gallantly enough—then suddenly she broke down and began to cry. 'You must excuse me, Miss,' she said, between sobs, 'I'm a bit on edge. You see Baby and I were bombed out last night and we didn't get any sleep.' The producer, now feeling thoroughly ashamed of herself, said she would arrange a special recording session on another day when Mrs. X was feeling better. But Mrs. X would have none of it. 'I'll be all right in a jiffy. You'll see. Just give me a sip of water—and my handbag.' She swallowed some water, dried her eyes, powdered her nose, and began all over again in a voice of determined cheerfulness. But when the record was played back to her, the sensitive microphone had caught a slight tremor inaudible to human ears. 'I can't let Heather hear *that*,' said Mrs. X decidedly. 'She'd think I was upset. Could I do it just once more?' She did—and this time her voice had a convincing ring of gaiety which the most brilliant actress could not have bettered.

Funny things happen as well as sad ones. Mothers often have to bring their babies with them as there is no one to look after them at home. Then the BBC becomes a crèche with harassed commis-

sionaires, secretaries and programme staff attempting to keep crying babies quiet while the red light is on and the mother is recording her message. And once when Enid Maxwell said sympathetically to a father who had just broadcast to his four children, 'How empty the house must feel without them,' the father answered, 'Don't worry, Miss. I've got four more of the little blighters at home.'

How about the children who receive the messages? We know that they are pleased and excited. We know that the ones who have become careless about writing home begin sending letters again, for home has once more become real. But we also know that, just as the most affectionate child will glower at a parent who turns up to the school sports wearing the wrong clothes, so the evacuees are alarmingly critical. They are anxious their fathers and mothers should make a good impression on their new friends and foster-parents. The highest praise a parent can receive is a letter saying: 'Thank heavens you didn't let me down and thought of something original to say.'

Roy Rich who introduces the two-way programmes has to combine tact, resourcefulness and a faculty for improvisation to an almost unnatural degree. At any minute he may find himself deputizing for a tongue-tied parent and talking to an unknown child thousands of miles away. He has tactfully to round off a conversation which may be threatening to encroach on another parent's precious time. In fact he may be called on to do anything from holding a baby to leading an unrehearsed Christmas carol.

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So the Empire Service goes on, carrying news of international importance or the tiny details of someone's family life. The news that a country has been invaded; the news that a hundred German planes have been brought down; the news that a child in Glasgow has just learnt to walk—the great transmitters gather them all up and toss them to the farthest corners of the world. Broadcasting has made exchange and contact between all parts of the Empire a living thing.

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This is the story of the BBC at war. It is a human institution and therefore a fallible one. But the BBC now broadcasts about half a million words a day—as much as five full-length novels. It broadcasts them in forty languages and to nearly every nation in the world. These facts alone prove its efficiency and work.

POSTSCRIPT

SO long as the war lasts, British broadcasting will continue to bring to the homes of this island people, through the hard days, things of strength and beauty and fun. It will continue to bind together, as only broadcasting can, the members of the British Commonwealth in free and welcome partnership. It will continue to sap the spirit of the enemy, and to quicken the sense of liberty in the oppressed peoples, carrying the voice of truth and sanity and courage across the frontiers.

And when victory is ours, the high task of radio will be to help in building civilization upon more enduring foundations, and to a better and a livelier pattern. Once again, through broadcasting, 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation.'

