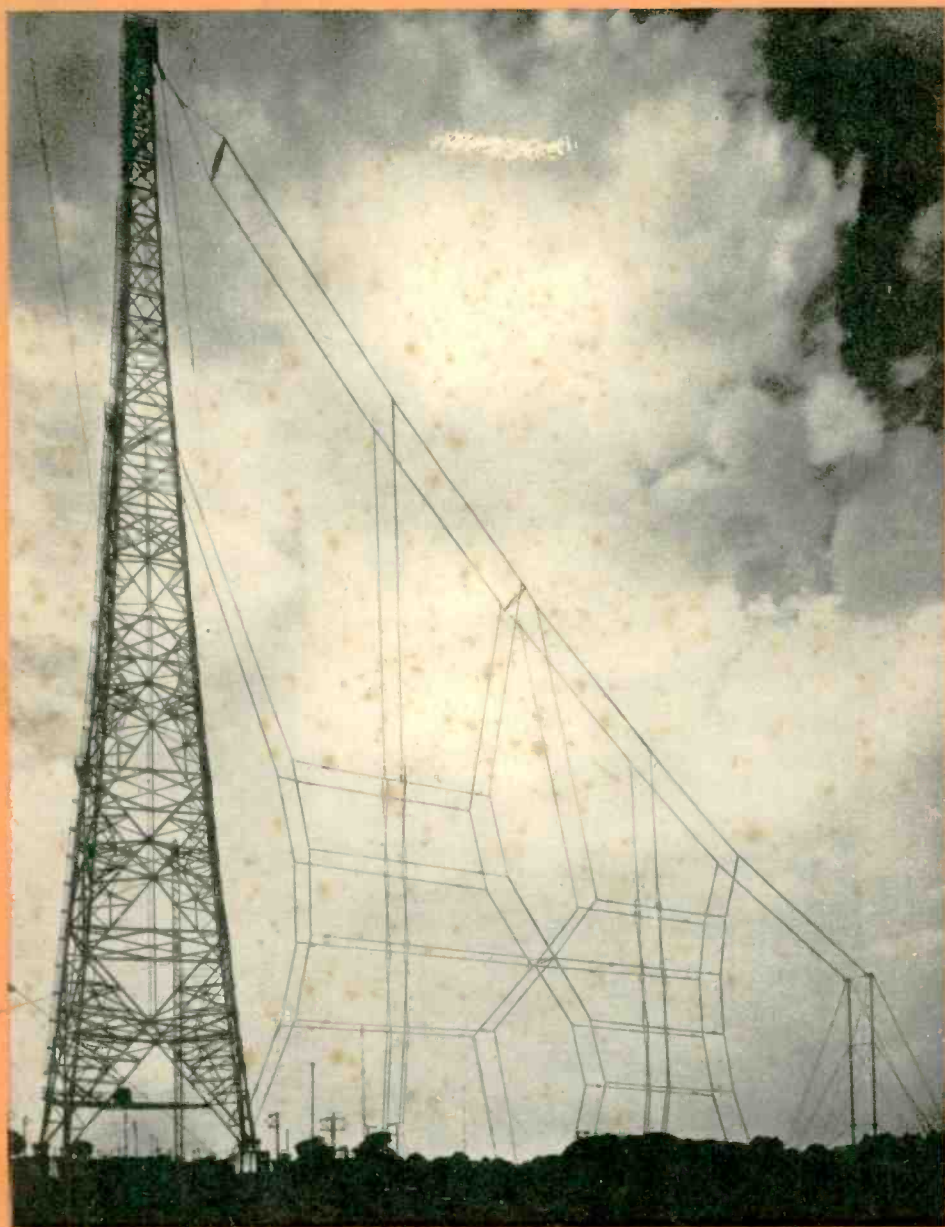


LONDON CALLING THE WORLD



BRITAIN ADVANCES



Broadcasting House, London

BRITAIN ADVANCES

London Calling the World

by
Frank Singleton



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LONDON CALLING THE WORLD

The earth revolves on its axis and moves in an orbit round the sun. That is the underlying fact that has to be remembered by everyone whose work goes into making the Voice of London heard overseas. It is summer in London but winter on the other side of the globe. It is light here but dark there. And all the time through day and night men and women work and fight and live, all the ceaseless life of the earth goes on, and everywhere the vast network of journalists, technicians, and everyone whose business is "the news" is sending reports somewhere. The wires hum, the rotary machines turn, the remote



The roof of Broadcasting House, London

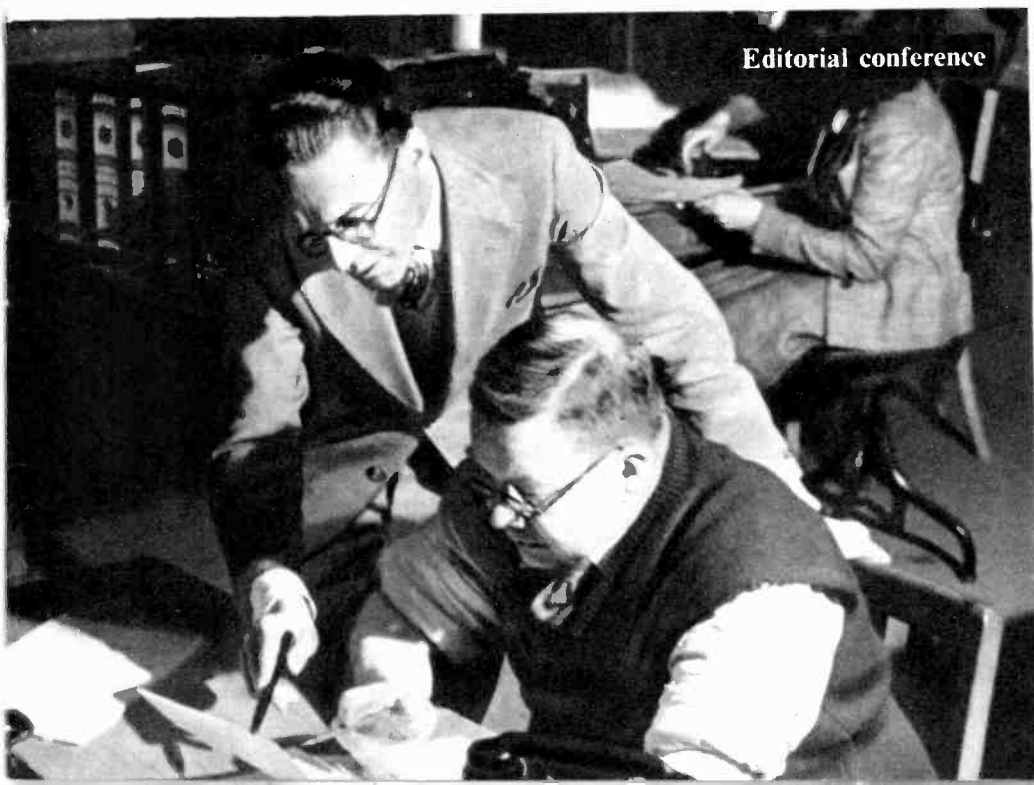
ether is crowded with wavelengths. "The news" never stops. All round the earth, all round the clock it goes on. How can one ever catch up? How can one ever grasp what is important and what is not? How can one understand everything that is happening? And yet at any hour people all over the world are turning on their wireless sets and hearing a voice say, "This is London calling. Here is the news." The voice is friendly, conversational almost, easy to understand. How can it have happened that in a quarter of an hour the owner of the voice is able to give a clear account of the essentials of what has happened since the earth last turned on its axis on its way round the sun?

It begins at the Editorial Conference in the morning. At any rate, that is as good a place for us to break in as any other in the twenty-four hours. Because like the events which it reports, the news service of the BBC never stops. First thing in the morning there is bewildering variety. Reports are coming in from every corner of the earth. But the pattern is beginning to emerge. You do not find that the main newspaper headings in *The Times* describe a famine in China, whilst *The Daily Telegraph* reports a railway accident in Scotland, and *The Daily Express* political



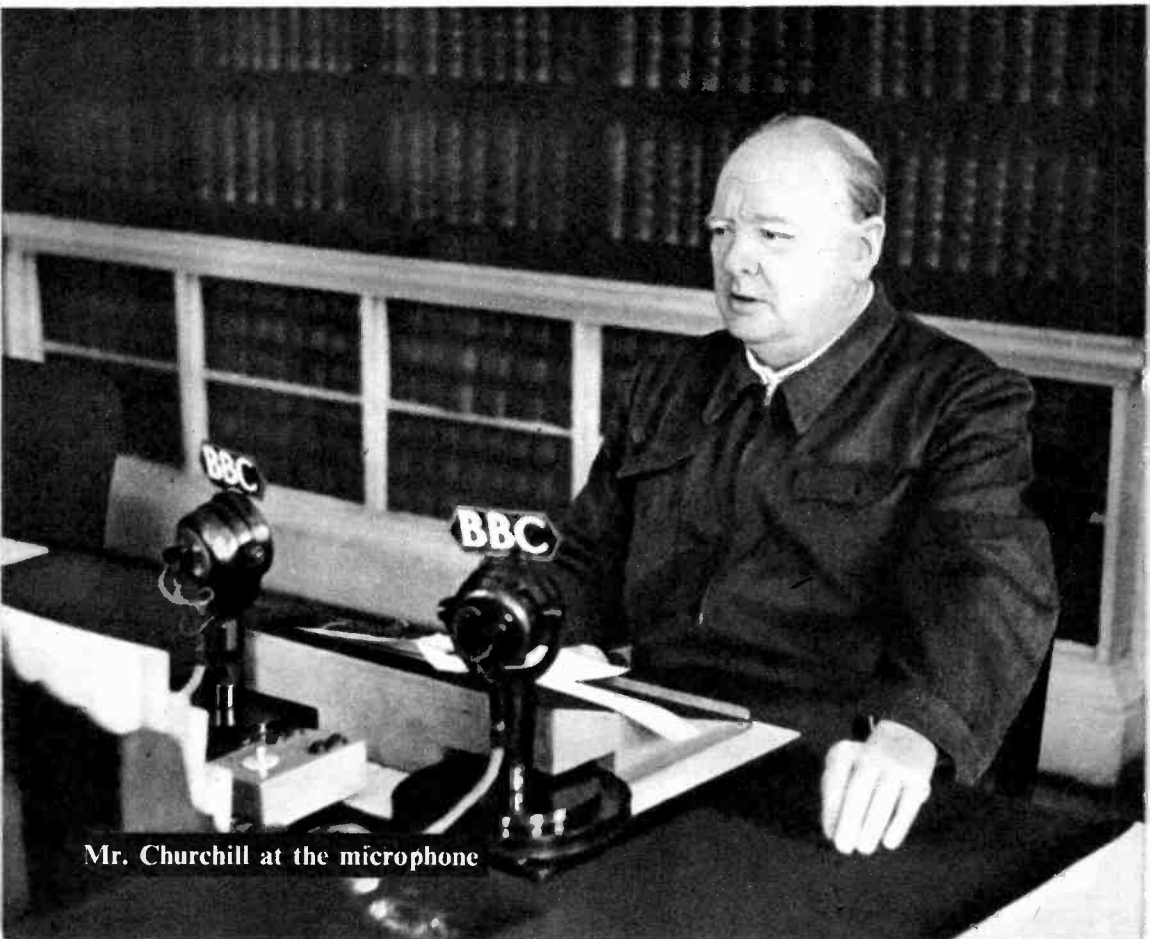
developments in Russia, as the main items, though all of them may carry reports about these subjects. The editors of the great newspapers are pretty well agreed on what are the most important things in the world's news. So are the various people who gather in the Editor's room for the morning conference. This sense of what matters in the news is often spoken of as a sixth sense. But that is the language of journalism. It is not a sixth sense but common sense that decides what matters.

All the people at the editorial conference know that they are going to talk and make decisions about events in Italy, Russia, the Far East, the main news from America, from occupied Europe, from the Empire, from this country. But they all have a different interest in the same news. When the Editor introduces the subject of the Mediterranean, for instance, the Duty Editor first reports on the state of the news up to that hour in the morning. Although the Editor carries the responsibility for the whole output of his service, he cannot himself be present throughout the twenty-



Editorial conference

four hours even to make editorial decisions. He therefore has a system whereby he is represented for practical purposes by the Duty Editors. Four of these cover the twenty-four hours, three of them working eight hours on end and one taking a day off. The Duty Editor present at the meeting is therefore always in close touch with the news. When he has given his account of it, the Editor takes the main decisions about how the news bulletin shall treat the news—again say from the Mediterranean—whether it is to be the first story in the bulletin, whether it is more important to dwell on one side of the whole situation rather than another in order to give the listener a balanced picture, and whether it is more important or less than other items of the news.



Mr. Churchill at the microphone

In addition to the Duty Editor, who speaks mainly about the bulletins, the News Talks Editor is present. He is concerned, like the magazine or features editor of a newspaper, with the talks which illustrate the news. "Do you think we ought to have a talk about Crete?" he may ask. "I have a man coming in to see me who has just flown back from the Mediterranean. He has a good story to tell and a good voice." Or he wants to know which is the best aspect of the war in Russia to get speakers to talk about—the military implications, the sort of country that the fighting is covering, the prospects for the next offensive, or human stories about individuals in the towns or the front line. These decisions are made.

The Commentators Editor has a different approach again. Just as the reader of a newspaper, when he has finished his perusal of the news columns, may find himself somewhat bewildered and turn to the editorials for a little more light on the world situation, so many listeners like to hear after the bulletin a quiet authoritative commentary which helps to underline what is



The news comes in

important in the news, and supply some of the background which it is not possible to get into the bulletin. The Commentators Editor may say: "You know, I don't think our listeners realise sufficiently all the implications for Australia of the fighting in the Pacific." So it is decided at the editorial conference what general themes shall be taken up in the commentaries.

The News Editors who are in charge of special regions are quick to see the implications of each item of news for their own listeners. The Far East News Editor may say: "If we are discussing that aspect of the war in the Far East it is of special interest to China," and he may point to several stories which have come in, which it then becomes important to make use of.

When all those present have a clear idea of what they are going to do, the meeting breaks up and the Voice of London soon begins to reflect the decisions that have been taken.

The Editor pursues his way through a crowded day. From time to time he is consulted on important messages as they come in. He attends the Controller's meeting, at which the work of his department is co-ordinated with that of others in the BBC, he keeps in close touch with all the complicated administrative side of his large department, he deals with a variety of cables pouring in from overseas, some of them bringing important background information, others sharply critical. He probably has many interviews, innumerable telephone conversations, and before he knows where he is, the second editorial conference, which takes place in the late afternoon, is upon him. This is the second great focal point of the day's work.

Before we examine the news room more closely, let us see how the News Talks Editor fares. His interest is concentrated in the programme



News Talks



An American looks at London

now famous all over the world as Radio News Reel. This half-hour programme, of which three editions go out in the twenty-four hours, illustrates the news of the day with all the resources of radio. Dispatches from correspondents overseas which have been used in the bulletins are heard in News Reel as actually spoken by the correspondents. The News Talks Editor goes from the editorial meeting to meet his own staff of script writers, producers and feature writers. They consider first what

material has come in from the correspondents. Then they pool ideas on how to illustrate the news of the day. A distinguished visitor from America is reported to have arrived. Let him be invited to the microphone either to give a short talk or to be interviewed. A convoy has arrived successfully at port, and some of the men have an exciting story to tell: a reporter may be sent to interview them. There is an investiture at Buckingham Palace, a facility visit to a great airfield, some historic ceremony in the city, or an important conference at the Ministry of Economic Warfare. A great hall may be crowded for some mass demonstration, or in some remote part of the country a Polish choir may be giving a concert to which the recording van may be sent, with an observer who would choose some of the high spots and have records made of them on the spot.

In the course of the day this material begins to collect, much of it in the form of "records."

When an overseas correspondent, for instance, speaks from Cairo, Cape Town, Washington, New Delhi, Sydney, or New York, his voice is carried by radio telephone.

The first person to handle it after it has passed through the technical engineering processes and reached the news staff is the dictaphone operator.

When she has word from the engineers that the correspondent is about to start, she switches on her machine, which looks rather like an old-fashioned phonograph. A black cylinder about eight inches long begins to revolve and a needle cuts on its waxed surface the message spoken thousands of miles away. From that cylinder the typescript is made. The operator is able to do this by a device which plays over the record cylinder at a speed she can control. She listens on headphones and types as she listens. The script is sent up to the script writer who has by now



Marking extracts on the discs

got to work on his Radio News Reel. Meanwhile the engineers are recording the correspondent's despatch on disc-recording machines at a quality suitable for rebroadcasting later on. Thus Radio News Reel can use either the correspondent's own voice or have the script read in the Studio if the recorded quality is not good enough.



Discs and the Script



Timing the extracts



Broadcasting House, London

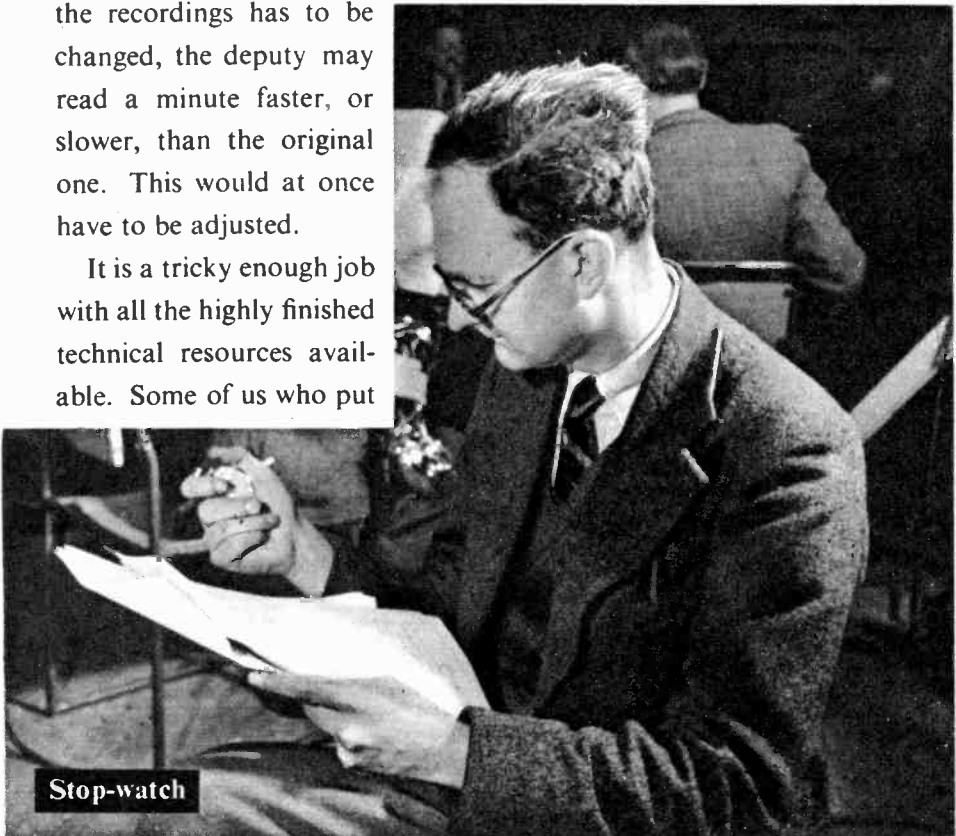


Broadcasting House, London

This magazine programme is made from a great wealth of material, but whatever the resources available it must fit exactly into the agreed time schedule. This involves working to a very fine degree of timing.

The Script Writer chooses the highlights, two or three minutes from all his recorded material, when he has heard it. His programme altogether must last twenty-nine and a half minutes. Of that he may have decided to occupy ten minutes with his script, which leaves him nineteen and a half to be made up from his discs. The Producer will help him in this fining down process. With a stop-watch they time the extracts, each two or three times. If for some reason the narrator of the script which links together the recordings has to be changed, the deputy may read a minute faster, or slower, than the original one. This would at once have to be adjusted.

It is a tricky enough job with all the highly finished technical resources available. Some of us who put



Stop-watch

out this programme during the "blitz" will never cease to marvel that in its very earliest days it went out against almost impossible odds. There was one never-to-be-forgotten night when whilst Radio News Reel was on the air a bomb fell nearby and momentarily cut off the supply of electric light in the studio. Fortunately one of the recordings was playing at the time, and the narrator had time to light a candle before he had to resume at the end of the record. Later, emergency lighting system came into use. Unfortunately, however, the power was also interrupted so that the turntable ceased to turn, and there was still one record to play, containing mostly the recorded music which concludes Radio News Reel. The boy in charge of the record with great presence of mind, by the light of the candle, turned the record with his finger at more or less the right speed so that the music was more or less in tune and News Reel came triumphantly to a close with the familiar words, "We shall be with you again to-morrow at the same time." It has never failed to go on the air since the day of its inception, and has recently celebrated its thousandth edition.





Broadcasting House, London, in the "blitz"

All these resources of radio are of course available for all the news services, in all the languages in which the BBC broadcasts—whether they are the twenty-five languages in which the European Service goes out, or the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other languages of the Middle and Near East, or the Kuoyo, Cantonese, Thai, Hindustani, or Malayan broadcasts in the Far Eastern Service. Similarly, the same principles underlie the editorial direction of the output. Whether the job is the European one of breaking down the wall of silence that Hitler has tried to build round Europe, or whether it is the service of our vast Empire audiences, the work is primarily and above everything else to give the world London's news service.

So let us return to the editorial conference, and from there follow the Duty Editor into the news room. He returns to the newsroom to find it has been running under the expert guidance of the Chief Sub-Editor. This man's responsibilities may be summarised by saying that it is his job to have a bulletin ready to hand to the News-reader a quarter of an hour before it is due to go on the air. The hands of the clock are always moving and the Chief Sub-Editor is dominated by them—"bulletin time" is always coming round. After he has heard what decisions the Duty Editor has brought from the editorial conference they plan the bulletin. It is the Chief Sub-Editor who really gets to grips with the raw material of the news, but even he is not the

1. Persian
2. English
3. Malay
4. Thai
5. Flemish
6. Tamil
7. Portuguese
8. Finnish
9. Burmese
10. Turkish
11. Afrikaans
12. Roumanian
13. Gujerati
14. Belgian
15. Bengali
16. Spanish
17. French
18. Albanian
19. Italian
20. Maltese
21. Spanish
for Latin
America
22. Sinhalese
23. Czech
24. Danish
25. Norwegian
26. Marathi
27. Bulgarian
28. Portuguese
for Latin
America
29. Greek
30. Slovene
31. German
32. Hungarian
33. Cantonese
34. Moroccan
Arabic
35. Chinese
36. Polish
37. Dutch
38. Swedish
39. Gaelic
40. Welsh
41. Serbo-Croat
42. Hindustani
43. Arabic

1 این اخبار روز 2 'HERE IS THE NEWS' 3 ابن خبرهاس ملايو

4 การบรรยายข่าวมีดังนี้ 5 'Hier, Radio België' 6 தந்தைய சமரதார திரபடு

7 'A estação da BBC. Vai transmitir o seo 3º boletim'

8 'Englannin yleisradio Lontoo. Suomenkielinen lähetys alkaa'

9 သတင်းများအစရှိင်ခံပိုဒယ်။

10 'Šimdi Havadis bültенimizі okuyorum' 11 'Hier volg die Nuus in Afrikaans'

12 'Aici este postul de Radio Londra. Bună dimineața! Veți auzi acum primul buletin de știri in limba română'

13 आवाजना समाचार आया 14 'Ici Radio Belgique' 15 এই হচ্ছে সব খবর।

16 'Estación de la BBC. Vamos a radiar nuestro boletín de noticias en castellano'

17 'Ici Londres. Voici notre bulletin d'informations'

18 'Po apim buletin in e lajmeve në gjuhën Shqipe'

19 'Parla Londra. Prima trasmissione serale in lingua italiana'

20 'Se nixandru issa, it-Tahdida ta' Ahbarijiet bil-Malti'

21 'He aqui las noticias'

22 **फुडु कारुनन वेल्सै ली**

23 'Volá Londýn. Vyslechnéte dnešní zprávy'

24 'De hører BBC's aftenudsendelse paa dansk'

25 'God Morgen. Dette er London med morgennyhetene'

26 आता आषण आमचे मराठी बातमीपत्र ऐकाल

27 'Dobár den dragi slushateli' 28 'Aqui estão as notícias' 29 'Ἰδοὺ αἱ εἰδησεις'

30 'Radio London: dajemo prenos porocil ki ga oddajamo vsaki dan v slovenščini'

31 'Hier ist England. Hier ist England. Hier ist England'

32 'Hireket maundunk'

33 現在粵語廣播新聞

34 'أها انفارمة والحرائرین ولسانین والیسن بشرة الاخبار

35 下面今天的中文新聞

36 'Dziendobry Państwu. Nadajemy drugi dziennik Radja Bytyjskiego w języku Polskim'

37 'Goeden middag. Nu volgt het nieuws'

38 'Detta ar London med nyheterna pa svenska'

39 'So iomraán ann an Gàidhlig'

40 'Dyma'r Newyddion'

41 'Radio London daje svojim slusaocima Jugoslovenima vesti'

42 به خبرين آ لندن به سن ريبا هين

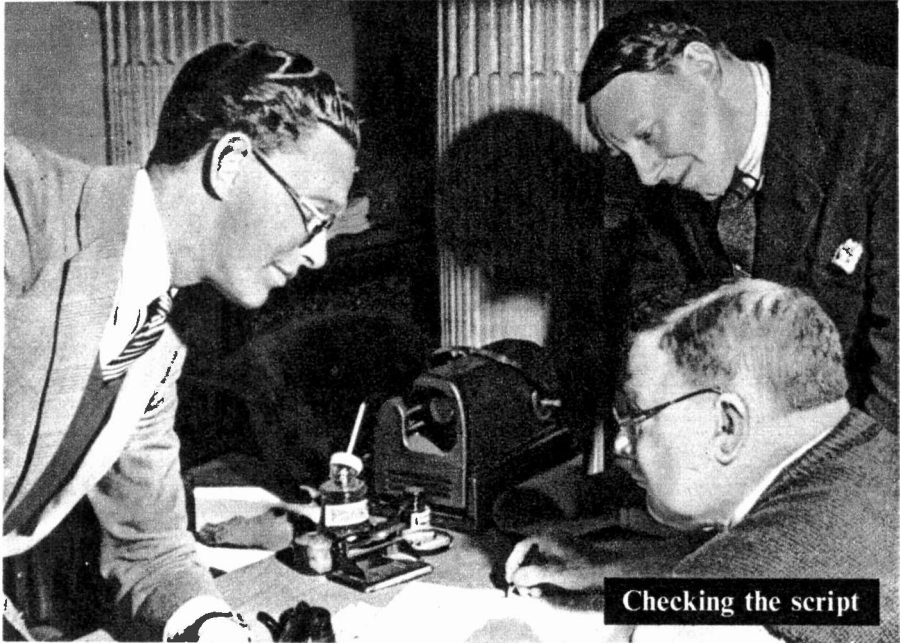
43 والآن اليكم بشرة الاخبار

THE NEWS" in 43 languages used by the BBC

first to begin to make the selection. This is done by the Copytaster.

The Copytaster is the channel through which flow all incoming sources of news. Behind him the tape machines are ticking out messages from all over the world. All the great agencies are available, including, among others, Reuters, the Press Association, Exchange Telegraph, the British United Press, Associated Press. Messengers tear off the tape as it spouts out, and soon it is mounting round the Copytaster who quickly judges what can be thrown away, and what will survive to be considered as a news story. He sorts these, puts together several different versions of one story by the different agencies, and presents the Chief Sub with all the stories that ought to be considered for that day's bulletins. There are, of course, always more than can possibly go in. A quarter of an hour bulletin can only use as many words as fill a column and a half of *The Times*. Yet everything has to be kept in proportion. When the Chief Sub-Editor has decided what stories he wants to use, he hands them out to the sub-editors in the news room who then dictate to expert typists stories having all the special requirements of BBC bulletins. As the Chief Sub. collects these, he sees how one can dovetail easily into another, how several stories of occupied Europe fall together or a new aspect of Anglo-American relations is illustrated by several stories. So the bulletin takes shape.

As the Chief Sub. reads each story he initials the pages and passes them to the Newsreader. The Newsreader in turn goes through them very carefully. Sometimes you will hear him muttering a phrase under his breath before turning to the Sub-Editor. "Wouldn't it be better," he may say, "to put it like this, bringing the weight of the sentence forward, so that I don't drop my voice at the end and lose your point?" The Sub-Editor will agree or disagree, and any necessary alteration is made. These news bulletins must be written for the ear and not for the eye, and the



announcer is the final court of appeal as to what can most effectively be said over the air. He knows perhaps better than anyone else how to re-write a phrase so that it makes the best use of his vocal abilities.

A new name crops up in the report from the Burma fighting. He rings the pronunciation experts. It's a name they're not familiar with. They ring the Burmese expert at the Ministry of Information. Inside two minutes the correct pronunciation comes back. The Newsreader writes it on his script. He also notes it in a notebook where later it will be copied and inserted in a card index for future reference by all the Newsreaders. Or perhaps a new American General is announced in the European theatre of operations. There are two ways in which his name might be pronounced; the Newsreader will ring up the American Embassy and make sure, rather than arouse derision in those who know the right way, and perhaps give offence.

What are the other qualifications of the men who read aloud the news for twenty-four hours a day to the listening world? The Overseas Newsreader is a different person from his colleague whom you may hear reading the nine o'clock news in Britain. He is heard under widely varying conditions by people whose life, whose speech, whose habit, whose whole background are completely different from his own. He will be heard in places where his English accent may provoke laughter, where all that Britain stands for even may be mocked. His speech must be clear, friendly, and yet with the authority necessary to back a statement which comes from London. For London is the key word of all overseas bulletins. Several times in the course of the bulletin you will hear the announcer say. "This News Bulletin comes to you from London"; or "This is London calling." And there must never be any doubt that London's news is truthful and authoritative.

Five minutes before the bulletin is due on the air, the Newsreader gathers up his papers and walks towards the studio—slowly, for one of the worst crimes is to arrive at the microphone out of breath. As he leaves, the writers in the newsroom pick up their headphones to listen critically.

They are not the only listeners—nor are our friends overseas. The enemy, too, are listening. So when the bulletin goes on the air it, like every other organ of publicity in the war, has been censored. Censorship is of two kinds. An item must be scrutinised on grounds of policy, and it must also be censored on security grounds. Policy scrutiny is vested in a few people who are responsible for their decisions. Censorship is carried out by the Ministry of Information, who release certain items and stop others. They work according to a number of clearly defined principles, supplemented by specific rulings, and it is the business of the censors to carry out these decisions. It would be impossible for every news item to be sent first to the Ministry of Information, so the Chief Sub-Editor and the

Duty Editors are themselves trained censors who know what all the rules of security are. If they are in any doubt they get on to the Ministry where the BBC has its own room for the general supervision of BBC interests. A story is safeguarded from the first until the moment when it goes on the air, for the Sub-Editor in the studio is also responsible for the actual words spoken, and if anything goes wrong has only to press a switch to cut the news reader off the air.



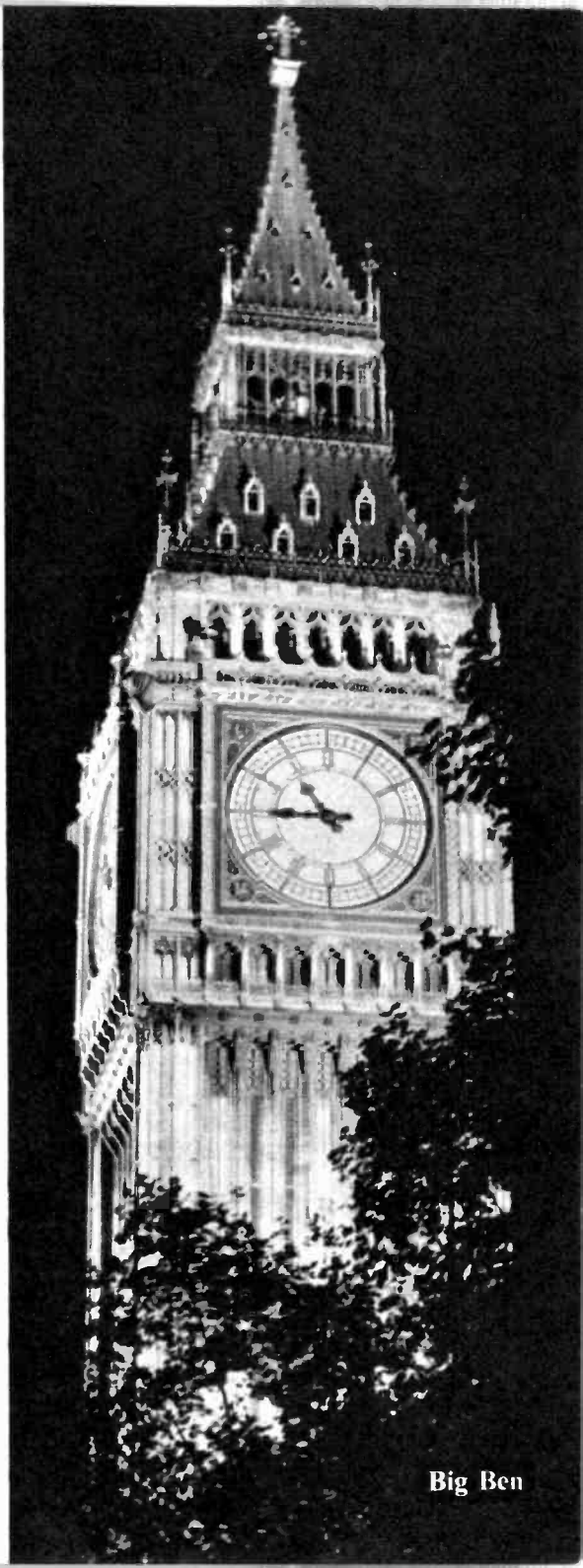
Let us follow the Newsreader into the studio. It's a small room, severely furnished, rather like a monk's cell. It contains two chairs, two tables, and two microphones. Outside, visible through a glass panel, is the girl



Rehearsal

engineer who controls the volume of the speaker's voice. The Newsreader looks at the clock, then at her, and raises his eyebrows. She nods and signals that all is well, through the glass panel. The clock is O.K.—checked with Greenwich five minutes earlier. The Newsreader puts on a pair of headphones lying on the table. On them he can hear the previous programme; it has just come to a close; in another studio an Announcer warns listeners to stand by for the news. Then follows the music which precedes every news bulletin: "Heart of Oak", the march past of the Royal Navy. This tune is played not only as a tribute to the work of our Navy, but also to make identification easier for those who have to sort out London from amidst the welter of competing programmes on the short waves.

Big Ben strikes. The red light glows in the studio. The



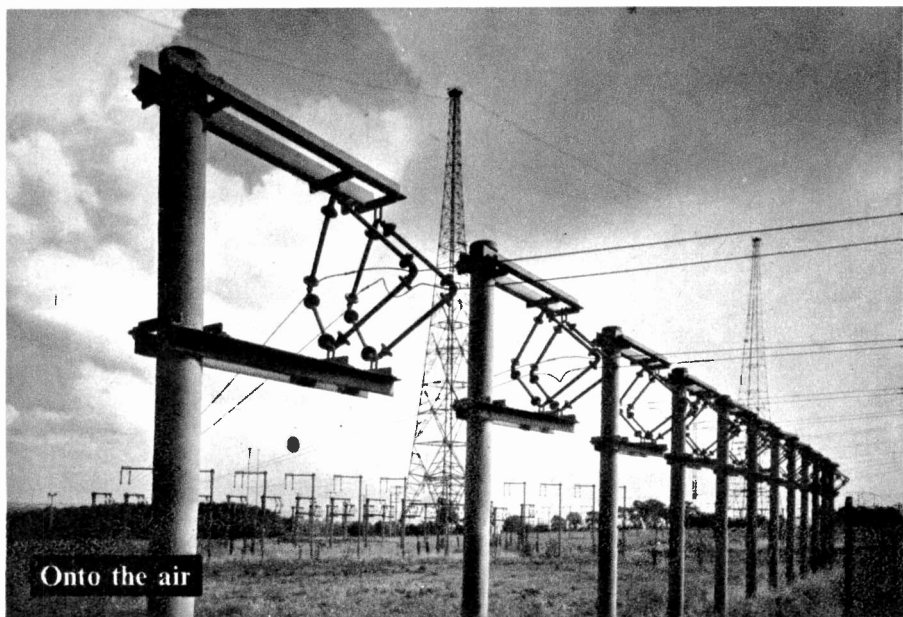
Big Ben



Last-minute news

Newsreader takes a breath and says: "This is London calling; here is the news." Silently the studio door opens and in comes the Chief Sub. bearing more papers; keeping a careful eye on the clock, he sits down beside the Newsreader and feeds him with material as it is wanted. The door opens again. A girl comes in with a piece of paper in her hand just torn from

the tape machine. It is a special announcement perhaps from Moscow. The Chief Sub. looks at it and then at the clock. He'll just have time to get it in. At the end of the next story he presses a key beside the Newsreader, cutting off the microphone. "Here's the Moscow communiqué," he says. "I'm afraid it's on tape; you'll just have to manage as best you can." The microphone is switched on again, and then comes the familiar announcement, "Here is a late message which has just come in," and the Newsreader without turning a hair reads straight from the tape with all its abbreviations and sometimes its misprints. Both of them glance anxiously at the clock. If they're not finished by a certain time they'll be cut off no matter what they're saying. Programmes must run to time, and keep faith with those who are rebroadcasting. But the Sub-Editor has gauged the length of his material to a nicety. The final words have been spoken with two seconds to spare, and as the red light goes out the Newsreader sits





Control room

back in his chair with a sigh of relief. Another bulletin has been sent out to the world from London.

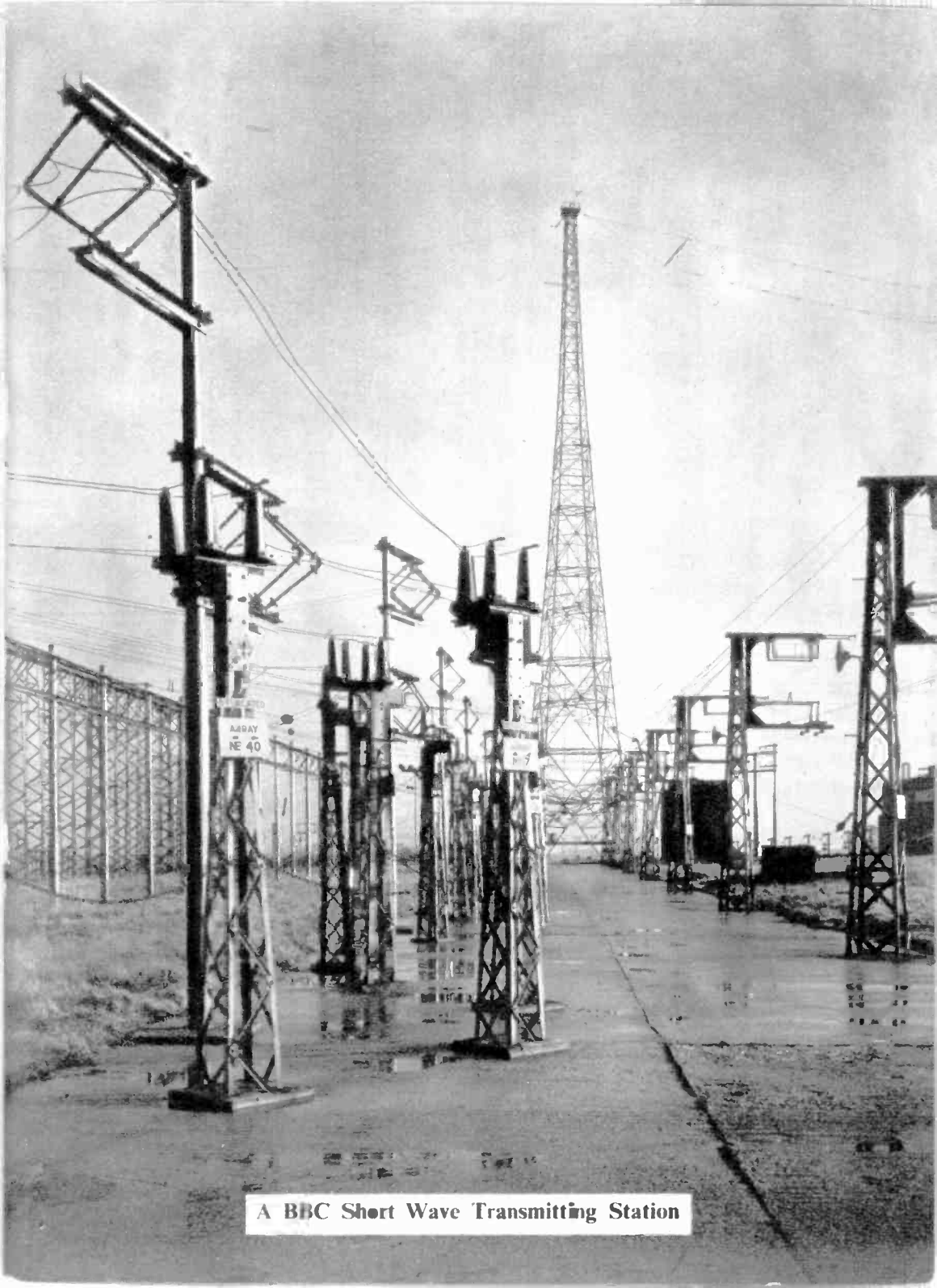
It takes about one-sixteenth of a second for our Newsreader's voice to reach New York from that underground studio like a monk's cell in the heart of London. The electrical impulses from the microphone



Control desk

caused by the Newsreader's voice are very small and go through several amplifiers in a control room before they are finally sent on their way to the transmitters by special telephone line. Short-wave transmitters are like wireless searchlights. They send out wireless waves in a beam pointing up to the sky. A hundred or more miles above the surface of the earth are layers of ionised gas which reflect wireless waves in just the same way as mirrors do ordinary light. The waves carrying the Newsreader's voice hit one or other of these layers; they are bent back again towards the earth and strike it a thousand miles or more from their point of origin. The earth in turn reflects them up again to the sky, which once more sends them down to earth.

And so our Newsreader's voice will have travelled in a series of ricochets between earth and sky. It will have travelled thousands of miles. To far corners of the world, as to nearer places where people run grievous risks to hear the truth, it will have brought the words, "This is London calling. Here is the news."



A BBC Short Wave Transmitting Station

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