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# THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES



## British and Dominion War Correspondents in the Western Theatres of the Second World War

Brian P. D. Hannon

Ph.D. Dissertation  
The University of Edinburgh  
School of History, Classics and Archaeology

March 2015

# The Story Behind The Stories: British and Dominion War Correspondents in the Western Theatres of the Second World War

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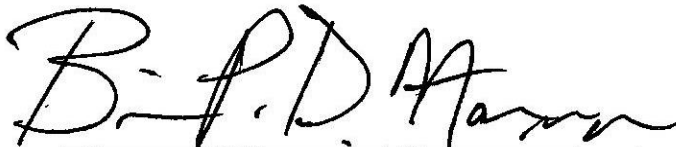
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Title Page Photo: War correspondent Alan Wood of *The Daily Express* types a dispatch in a wooded area outside Arnhem, the Netherlands, while with the 1st British Airborne Division during Operation Market Garden, 18 September 1944.<sup>1</sup>

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

In accordance with the regulations of The University of Edinburgh, I affirm the following Ph.D. dissertation is the original product of my independent research and writing and contains the work of no other author or scholar except as properly referenced in the notes and bibliography. This dissertation, in whole or part, has not been submitted for any other academic or professional qualification.

 4 MARCH 2015

**Brian P. D. Hannon**

**Date**

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<sup>1</sup> The British Airborne Division at Arnhem and Oosterbrook in Holland, Imperial War Museums, <<http://media.iwm.org.uk/iwm/mediaLib/166/media-166946/large.jpg?action=d&cat=photographs>> (accessed 25 June 2014).

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## **ABSTRACT**

British and Dominion armed forces operations during the Second World War were followed closely by a journalistic army of correspondents employed by various media outlets including news agencies, newspapers and, for the first time on a large scale in a war, radio broadcasters. These war reporters on foreign soil, under the direction of their editors and managers on the home front, provided an informational link between the fighting military personnel and the public – in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the British Dominion nations – eagerly awaiting news of their progress.

The purpose is to look beyond the news stories that came out of the reporting and analyse the correspondents themselves: how they acquired their positions and prepared for deployments, what sort of monetary support they received, how they operated under difficult field conditions, what they wore and carried, what specific tools made their work possible, how they moved among the battles, what they did when they rested, and how their labours made some of them household names. This study aims to pull together these various aspects of the work and lives of the journalists, illuminating the methods and motivations that made them war correspondents; in short, the story behind their stories.

The focus is solely on British and Dominion correspondents in the European and North African theatres of the Second World War in order to keep the parameters within reasonable limits. It also provides the opportunity to concentrate on a specific group of correspondents, which is still large but not so much as attempting the outsized and therefore less distinct job of looking at all Allied correspondents.

Primary sources include the archives of news organisations and the United Kingdom National Archives, as well as the invaluable memoirs of correspondents who related their personal experiences and details of their work. Other sources include relevant secondary material such as historical manuscripts about the overall war or specific battles, news articles, and sound recordings.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Jeremy A. Crang and Dr. Paul Addison, who pointed me toward the important sources I needed to complete this study, showed me how to write like an academic, and encouraged me throughout. I would also like to thank my examiners, Dr. Trevor Griffiths and Dr. Siân Nicholas, whose corrections and suggestions were a great help. Professor Jill Stephenson was a wonderful mentor and role model from my first day at Edinburgh University. Yvonne McEwan provided me with professional opportunities I otherwise would never have had. I am grateful to them all.

The staffs of the National Archives at Kew, the Reuters archive in London, and the BBC Written Archives Centre in Reading were all extremely helpful in guiding me to the vital research material required to write this dissertation.

I would like to extend an immeasurable amount of gratitude to my family: my brothers, Mark (#3) and Jay (#2), and their wonderful wives, Samantha and Jenni; my effervescent niece, Lila Beatrix (Go! Go! Go!); my new nephews, Fergus and Francis; my cousin Cindy Hannon; and my mother, Barbara, and her husband, John. I could never have finished without the unswerving support they all provided.

Thanks go to my good friends: Dr. Andrew Vince Colthurst, Dr. Pertti Ahonen, Dr. Julius Ruiz, and Dr. David Kaufman, without whom Edinburgh would have been far less interesting; my email debate team, Shane Cough and Liam McCarthy, for consistently giving me something to discuss, regardless of its merit; my friend and fellow Tanglewood veteran Alyssa Radcliff; Stuart Campbell, John McClay and Dana Higgins, for remaining my greatest friends over twenty-nine years; and to my flatmate and friend, Dr. Katherine Nicolai, for encouragement, kindness and understanding in all matters, BRE.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Frank J. Hannon.

Brian P. D. Hannon  
Edinburgh

# INTRODUCTION

## **The Topic**

The actions of the British and Dominion armed forces in the most destructive conflict to ever plague mankind have been well documented in historical books, films, television and radio programmes, and in countless remembrance and memorial pieces in magazines and newspapers. Yet at the time of the Second World War, the sources of information about the war beyond the government were the print and broadcast reporters who often risked their own lives by traveling with the forces abroad and relaying the news of the losses and victories in the field back to the readers and listeners at home. The media reports, due to official government and military censorship, as well as self-censorship by the journalists, did not always paint the full picture, as can be seen in the examples of Dieppe and “The Miracle of Dunkirk”. Also, at least for the first part of the war, the news was hardly a source of high morale, with military defeats abroad and the disruption of normal civilian life. Yet the public relied on the daily news reports, those at home during the Blitz but later in large part those from distant battlefields, to learn of the course of the war, with mixtures of anger, fear, sadness and, ultimately, widespread joy. The British public – those at home struggling with what would be characterized as The People’s War – demanded ceaseless information about the events of the conflict in foreign lands and subsequently some of the most important figures outside of the government and the military in the Second World War were those who served as eyewitnesses to these events: the war correspondents.

British and Dominion armed forces operations overseas were followed closely by a journalistic army of correspondents employed by various newspapers, magazines and, for the first time on a large scale in a war, by radio. These war reporters on foreign soil, under the direction of their editors and managers on the home front, provided an informational link between the fighting military personnel and the public – in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the British Dominion nations – eagerly awaiting news of their progress. The Second World War was unprecedented in its breadth, and in the same way the news reporting of the daily events of the war was also of a scope never before

experienced. Therefore, beyond the news stories that came out of the reporting, it is crucial to analyse the correspondents themselves: how they acquired their positions and prepared for their deployments, how they operated under difficult field conditions, what they wore and carried, what tools made their work possible, how they moved among the battles and what they did when they rested, and how their labours made some of them household names. The aim of this dissertation is to fill the gap left by the previous works of historians, writers and broadcasters with a detailed study focused specifically on the job of being a combat correspondent covering the British and Dominion armies during the Second World War.

### **Literature Review**

Opportunity for analytical consideration of the war correspondents is found in the wide span of secondary sources. Yet among all the books that study the war in general or specific war correspondents, such as biographies, none of these books takes on the job of analysing in detail the various aspects of working as a combat correspondent in the Second World War, which is distinct from previous wars through its new technology and the grand scale of the conflict. This dissertation will fill that gap by looking at the Second World War correspondents as a whole, both in their work and their lives as journalists, and not just one prominent correspondent or a particular battle covered in the press like Anzio or Dunkirk, or a single media outlet such as *The Times* or the BBC. From this more extensive study that looks at a wide range of issues related to the media and parts of the government, while remaining focused on the war correspondents of this particular conflict, we can learn the methods used as well as the successes enjoyed and hardships endured in bringing the news of the Second World War to the British public.

Phillip Knightley produced what might be considered the gold-standard history of war correspondents with his 1975 book, *The First Casualty*. Knightley starts with the Crimean War and, in an updated edition, works through the Iraq war of 2003, addressing the issues of, as the book's subtitle indicates, the varying roles of the war correspondent "as hero, propagandist and myth-maker". While this dissertation takes its cue from Knightley and will deal with some of the same issues, that work was much more



historically broad in discussing the work of correspondents from a variety of time periods and nations; this dissertation will focus solely on the Second World War and drill down more deeply into the various facets of the war correspondents' work during this specific period. Also, the focus remains on the correspondents of Britain and its Dominion nations rather than Knightley's research, which considers a much wider range of correspondents and therefore is not able to bring as much detail about his subjects as this thesis intends.

Siân Nicholas's comprehensive history of the BBC's War Reporting Unit found in her book, *The Echo of War*, and her chapter on the WRU in the compilation, *War and the Media*, inform this study by bringing to light important details about the WRU and its development and putting those facts into context regarding the news coverage of the war as a whole. Richard Havers' book, *Here is the News*, is helpful in that it contains numerous verbatim excerpts from BBC broadcasts, including those from the Normandy invasion, which act as scripts that can be used to get the feel of the type of reporting done by the war correspondents. In a lighter vein, Tom Hickman's book, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?*, provides numerous photographs as well as personal accounts to illustrate its depiction of the wartime BBC organisation, while Trevor Royle's *War Report* also contributes to a greater understanding of BBC battlefield reporting. As these are all focused solely on the BBC, however, they only provide pieces of the overall picture of Second World War correspondents that is intended to be filled by this thesis.

Asa Briggs is the most prominent historian of the BBC; his *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, especially *The War of Words*, the third in that five-volume series, is the best authority on Britain's wartime airwaves and is crucial to understanding the events surrounding the development of the BBC's War Reporting Unit. His book is a big-picture view that focuses on the Corporation including its various editors and managers and its dealings with government, as well as the opinions formed in the leader articles that Briggs explained were quite influential among power brokers in continental Europe and Britain alike. Yet for the most part he does not deal with specific correspondents or their work, so for the purposes of this dissertation the book is more helpful in putting the BBC in the larger context of the war rather than details about its

reporters. However, like Jonathan Dimbleby, Briggs also responded in writing to questions put to him exclusively for this dissertation and his comments were helpful in regards to the BBC's lack of preparedness for the war as well as censorship of journalists and self-censorship by them.

In *The History of The Times* book series, produced and published by the newspaper, two volumes were valuable to this study, but also offer a contrast in how to go about looking at wartime news. The fourth volume, *The 150th Anniversary and Beyond: 1912-1948, Part II: 1921-1948*, focuses largely on managers and editors in a romantic, almost sycophantic manner. The *150th Anniversary* volume says of the editor who served from 1912 to 1919 and from 1922 to 1941:

[Geoffrey] Dawson delighted in and keenly enjoyed the opportunity his position opened to him of influencing the trends of politics and the careers of friends. No man was more faithful to family, village, county, school, college and university... The intimate connexions he had were with the hereditary English governing class, the middle class gentry and their ennobled offspring. He, himself, ended as he began, a simple Squire, with all the Yorkshireman's dislike for frills and histrionic tricks.

The book also intersperses descriptions of world events with quotations from the paper's articles in a way that makes the commentary and analysis of *The Times* seem as if it was part of the British government's foreign policy apparatus: "This, therefore, was the burden of the British Prime Minister's letter delivered to the German Führer by the British Ambassador personally, and that of leading articles in *The Times* which were written with the hope of impressing official circles in Berlin." In the same vein, the book states of the next editor, Robert McGowan Barrington-Ward, who served as the paper's editorial head from 1941 to 1948: "He now looked forward to helping the prosecution of the war by a programme that would encourage the people at home, hearten the subjugated peoples of Europe, give even the Germans the prospect of some alternative to National Socialism." In the meantime, there is little discussion of the news gatherers working in the field leading up to or during the war, except to repeat quotations from their dispatches. It does not usually even name the reporters, instead preferring to refer

to them as “the Military Correspondent” or “the Vienna Correspondent” or by saying “a Correspondent was at Prague”.<sup>1</sup> Yet the book is still valuable to this study by offering an understanding of what was going on at the top of the organisation and invariably trickled down, to some degree, to the correspondents in the field. In contrast to the more institutional study that preceded it, *Vol. V, Struggles in War & Peace: 1939-1966*, written by Iverach McDonald, a veteran editor for *The Times*, gives much more consideration to the people who gathered the information for the stories that filled the paper, and not just those who wrote the leaders on the front page. McDonald states the book is intended to fill holes left by the previous volume, specifically the ones that had overlooked the people whose graft made the paper so revered: “The purpose is to tell the paper’s story in a full and rounded way, not concentrating solely or even largely on its political opinions as presented in its leading articles, but telling also of the men and women engaged in all the many departments of a great newspaper.”<sup>2</sup> This included the paper’s defence and war correspondents, such as Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, Robert Cooper and Kim Philby.<sup>3</sup> While both books are valuable to understanding the history and workings of one of Britain’s most respected newspapers, the volume by McDonald provides much more specific – and subsequently valuable to this dissertation – information on the correspondents.

David Ayerst’s 1971 book, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper*, provides some valuable information on the war reporters who worked for the *Manchester Guardian*, such as Evelyn Montague and David Woodward, but as with *The History of the Times*, it focuses largely on the organisation, its various editors throughout the years, and its impact on British politics. The same is mostly true of Donald Read’s 1992 book, *The Power of News*, a comprehensive history of Reuters. Its focus is also primarily the organisation and its major editorial figures rather than reporters. Read, however, is far more willing to delve below management and share memorable anecdotes about the

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<sup>1</sup> *The History of The Times, vol. IV, The 150th Anniversary and Beyond 1912-1948, Part II: 1921-1948* (London: The Times, 1952), pp. 978, 981-982, 984.

<sup>2</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, vol. V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> McDonald, pp. 43-45, 916-917, 924-925.

working journalists of the venerable wire service. Read's examination and writing are so respected by the company that researchers looking through its archives will find notations at the beginning of some file folders indicating items within that were used in Read's book.

Two biographies of Richard Dimbleby are crucial to understanding the Corporation's renowned reporter and possibly the most famous correspondent of the war. The first is *Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster*, edited by his BBC colleague Leonard Miall, which is a slim volume that includes anecdotes and essays about Dimbleby by those who worked directly with him at the Corporation. The other is by his son, Jonathan Dimbleby, titled, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography*, which is much longer and provides a far more complete picture not only of his father's work over a long and storied career but of his life outside of journalism. Jonathan Dimbleby also answered direct questions about his father for this dissertation via email, parts of which are quoted.

Books that are not strictly histories of news reporters or media organisations but still provided valuable information on topics discussed in the dissertation include Ian McLaine's *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*. As a history of the ministry that controlled censorship of the press, the book is a helpful aid in understanding the thinking and work that went into creating wartime censorship policy. Contrary to what might be assumed about this control centre of censorship and propaganda, McLaine posits that the Ministry of Information actually helped contain wartime censorship, rather than let it run wild: "Freed from peacetime constraints, the government possessed the power to impose almost any kind and degree of censorship on the press. Although mindful of the effect on parliamentary and public opinion of the exercise of this power, the War Cabinet had no hesitation in banning the *Daily Worker* and attempting to intimidate the *Daily Mirror* when the evidence proved no foundation for the charge that these newspapers were harming morale and the war effort. Had the Ministry shared the Cabinet's dark suspicions of the press there is no doubt that freedom of expression would have been another casualty of war."<sup>4</sup> While

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<sup>4</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 276-277.

focused on a single ministry in much the same way that the books on *The Times* and *The Guardian* are focused on those individual media entities and their editorial and management staff and procedures, this book provides detailed information on government policies and the players involved in forming and executing them that had some of the greatest impacts on the work of the war correspondents and is subsequently very valuable among the secondary sources.

Angus Calder's book *The People's War* articulated an important thesis about the great involvement in the war of ordinary people on the British home front. In it Calder writes, "'Morale' – that word which haunted the politicians, the civil servants and the generals. What the people demanded, they must now be given."<sup>5</sup> Among the many factors that affected popular morale during the war years – including living conditions and the availability of food and other crucial supplies – was the information procured from the news. Whether the print and radio reports hurt morale as in the early years of the war when the Allied forces were suffering continued losses and the United Kingdom was suffering the death and destruction of the Blitz, or the news boosted morale as the war rolled toward its victorious conclusion, the people demanded information about the conflict. "The British were well known to be the world's most avid newspaper-readers," Calder writes. "In 1943, the number of newspapers bought per head of the population was even higher than before the war. It was estimated by the Wartime Social Survey that four men out of five and two women out of three saw a newspaper on any one day."<sup>6</sup> This made the job of a war correspondent all that more important to *The People's War*. In *The Myth of the Blitz*, Calder's 1991 follow-up to *The People's War*, he brings up an important point that is to be addressed in this dissertation. He writes, "I began around 1980 in reviews and articles and papers... to write and talk about 'the Myth of 1940' and 'the Myth of the Blitz'. I did so in a spirit of self-criticism, since I realised that many, perhaps most, readers of my *People's War* (1969) had seen the book as confirming the Myth. Looking it over again, I saw that I had accepted almost without question the

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<sup>5</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 504.

mythical version of ‘Dunkirk’, though elsewhere I flatter myself that I wasn’t beguiled.”<sup>7</sup> This dissertation addresses the Dunkirk Myth in the chapter about censorship, specifically regarding the issue of self-censorship by journalists, as well as in the final chapter that discusses, in part, the overall accuracy of the news stories presented to the public. In doing so Calder’s analysis in both of the books offers important information and context regarding these subjects.

Also, books about specific events, battles or people that were of assistance to this dissertation include *D-Day: June 6, 1944, The Battle for the Normandy Beaches* by Stephen Ambrose, which is a detailed account of what might be considered the war’s most famous battle, while similar historical detail and skilful analysis were employed in *Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man* by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore. Neither of these delves too deeply into the work of war correspondents who covered these battles, but they provide historical examination that helps to understand these events and compare them to the news reports published and broadcast at the time.

While there are a number of books about the wartime media and the larger individual news organisations, with the exception of the aforementioned works of Phillip Knightley, Siân Nicholas and a handful of others, such as Jonathan Dimbleby’s biography of his father and sections of the corporate histories by Iverach McDonald and David Ayerst, the overview of the literature indicates there is a dearth of scholarly work focused on British war correspondents, either as a group or as individuals, during the Second World War. That is the gap this study intends to fill by looking at the details of the work and working lives of the British and Dominion war correspondents and building a record of this distinct set of journalists.

## **Research Agenda**

The aim of this dissertation is to provide a detailed account of the mechanics of working as a war correspondent, as well as the impact of their work on the British public. That will include how they were chosen and in some cases trained, the

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<sup>7</sup> Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. xiii.

institutional support received from their employers, and the practical working arrangements and living conditions in the field. This study of the day-to-day aspects of the correspondents' work is intended to provide a better understanding of the reporters themselves – how and why they did the jobs for which they lived and sometimes died. The dissertation will also consider the question of what role the war correspondents played in what has been called “The People’s War”, a label that indicates the great degree to which the Second World War engulfed the lives of the British public. The war correspondents were the heralds of the day-to-day successes and failures of the British and Dominion forces warding off the Axis menace abroad and the dissertation will explain how they maintained this vital connection to the public and subsequently undertook a vastly important role in society through the news reporting in the pages of the daily newspapers and over the radio.

The dissertation focuses solely on British and Dominion correspondents, which has been done for the purpose of the study remaining within reasonable parameters and in order to concentrate on a specific group; it is still a large set of professionals to examine but not so much as attempting the outsized and therefore less distinct job of looking at all Allied war correspondents. While the dissertation is focused on British and Dominion journalists covering British and Dominion forces, there were also British reporters who covered the American military and, at times, examples of these are used to make salient points. Also, the study limits itself primarily to war correspondents covering ground forces; while there are references to Royal Air Force and Royal Navy operations, the wars conducted in the skies and on the seas constitute specific stories in their own right and trying to encompass them would come at the cost of a more concentrated examination of the reporting within the land theatres. The reporters in the Pacific theatre are excluded for much the same reason: the necessity of maintaining focus on specific areas – the European and North African theatres – rather than the entire worldwide conflict. Finally, while there were female correspondents, they are not included in this dissertation, not due to a lack of quality among their ranks but because there were only a small number who normally worked in different or more limited

circumstances than male correspondents and therefore would not readily fit into the parallels being drawn.

When considering why reporters from countries such as Canada and Australia should be included in this study, and that it should not be solely restricted to journalists from Britain, the answer is to be found in four areas: the monarchy's continued rule over Britain and its Dominion nations during the Second World War; the deployment of the forces of the Dominion nations; the employers of the correspondents; and the attitude and outlook of the war correspondents from these various places. Included in the 12 May 1937 Coronation Oath of the man who would become the wartime sovereign, King George VI, was a vow by which he would govern the citizens of the Dominion nations. As read by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Oath solicited: "Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the Peoples of Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, of your Possessions and other Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, and of your Empire of India, according to their respective Laws and Customs?" The king replied: "I solemnly promise to do so."<sup>8</sup> With this pledge – to some symbolic and to others a sign of real, continued leadership over these other nations outside of Great Britain as part of the global network of Dominions – it is likely that many journalists of those nations felt they were indeed still part of the British Empire (although to what extent depended on their personal views and cannot be gauged as a whole). Second, the war correspondents of nations like Canada and Australia should be considered together with United Kingdom reporters because none of them were solely covering British forces or the forces of their own nations, although this was true in some cases, but usually they covered both simultaneously. The British and Dominion armed forces often fought side-by-side, from Dunkirk to Tobruk and Alamein to D-Day and the push east, and subsequently were covered by war correspondents in kind. Meanwhile, the American armed forces largely remained self-contained fighting formations, operating apart from, although in concert with, the British. Therefore the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Coronation of their Majesties King George VI & Queen Elizabeth, Official Souvenir Programme* (London: King George's Jubilee Trust/Odhams Press Ltd., 1937), p. 23.



correspondents covering the British and Dominion forces and the journalists reporting on the American forces can be considered separate entities, although there was some crossover with British correspondents at times covering the Americans, as will be shown in limited examples. Third, British news organisations employed citizens of Dominion nations as war correspondents. The BBC's Chester Wilmot would be a prime example; following on his coverage of the war for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Wilmot was loaned to the BBC and became one of its most renowned combat correspondents. The BBC also employed as war correspondents Stewart MacPherson from Canada and Denis Johnston of the Republic of Ireland (although from a neighbouring nation rather than a Dominion state, Johnston had previously covered German aerial bombings in Belfast, Northern Ireland). Dominion nation reporters were employed by news outlets in their own countries, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) or newspapers in various Commonwealth countries, but also worked as war correspondents at British news outlets: Canadians Charles Lynch reporting for Reuters and Robert Cooper for *The Times*, while the *Daily Express* deployed Australian Alan Moorehead, who became one of the war's most prominent print correspondents. Finally, within the pages of the memoirs of correspondents from Dominion nations there is a clear theme that they had Britain as well as their own nations at heart, with a view that their countries were part of the British collective of states. Peter Stursberg of the CBC expressed this sentiment in his book, *Journey Into Victory*, while recounting a meeting with Lieutenant General Guy Simmonds, commanding officer of the First Canadian Division: "The Canadian commander looked even younger than his forty years; at that time he was the youngest general in the British forces."<sup>9</sup> Another example is found in war correspondent Matthew Halton's memoir, *Ten Years to Alamein*. Halton, a Canadian, frequently speaks of the British army as "us" and "we". He writes in praise of the withdrawal of both Canadian and British troops from Dunkirk in terms of the indomitable spirit of the British: "The British are good at retreat: they cannot be

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Stursberg, *Journey Into Victory: Up the Alaska Highway and to Sicily and Italy* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1944), p. 93.

demoralized and they always know they'll come back.”<sup>10</sup> He describes fondly his brave Canadian countrymen who fought in the North African campaign, but he also speaks of the English, Scottish, Welsh, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and Indians who fought in the desert together along with the Canadians as part of one larger group – a big tent British fighting force. For these reasons the war correspondents of the Dominion nations will also be considered with the journalists from Britain in this study.

## Sources

While the secondary sources mentioned previously will be utilized in the dissertation both for factual content and context, the most primary sources about the war correspondents during the Second World War are the memoirs of the correspondents themselves. William Howard Russell was a pioneer when he spawned the genre of the war journalism memoir with his 1858 book, *The British Expedition to the Crimea*. The book, as he explains in his “Notice to the Reader”, is comprised of edited copies of his dispatches to *The Times*, one of the first examples of a professional journalist on the staff of a newspaper covering a war rather than newspapers publishing accounts from freelancers, civilians or officers serving in the field. With these stories Russell became known as an advocate of the foot soldiers, describing their hard living and mistreatment by the officers above them, which did not make him popular with military and government authorities. He wrote in the book: “My sincere desire is, to tell the truth, as far as I know it, respecting all I have witnessed. I had no alternative but to write fully, freely, fearlessly, for that was my *duty*, and to the best of my knowledge and ability it was fulfilled.”<sup>11</sup> Richard Harding Davis, an American, wrote *Notes of a War Correspondent*, published in 1911, describing his work covering the Cuban-Spanish War in 1897 followed by the Greek-Turkish War, the Spanish-American War, the British battles with the Boers in South Africa, and the Russo-Japanese War. Other memorable

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Halton, *Ten Years to Alamein* (London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1944), p. 216.

<sup>11</sup> William Howard Russell, *The British Expedition to the Crimea* (Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005; reprint of London: Routledge and Sons, 1877), p. vi.

examples of war correspondent memoirs are Philip Gibbs's coverage of the First World War, *The Soul of the War*, published in 1918, and *At War With Waugh* by W.F. Deedes, a first-person and often comical narrative about reporting on the war in Abyssinia alongside Evelyn Waugh, who went on to write the novel *Scoop*, which satirizes war correspondents. While memoirs are largely narrative, they are extremely important to any analysis of journalists covering war because they provide details and perspectives far beyond what might be divined from the news reports those reporters filed. The newspaper and radio stories are their observations and evaluations of the war for a daily news audience that simply wanted the facts, but the book-length memoirs provide insight into how they got there and what they experienced, how it affected them both physically and mentally, and their personal thoughts about all aspects of the war without the hindrance of official censorship. The biggest difference between the news stories and the memoirs is that the memoirs inject the personal viewpoint of the correspondents that were not allowed, and not considered relevant, in their dispatches. The Second World War memoirs are not meant to be pure history, but rather a slice of the past from the perspective of the authors relating their own anecdotes, observations and assessments of the conflict. As Halton of the *Toronto Star*, and later the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, states on the opening page of *Ten Years to Alamein*: "The book is a record of some of a newspaperman's adventures and conclusions in Europe during the years of democracy's shame and in a far wasteland in later years when brave men were expiating the shame. It is not a history, it is the impact of history on one observer."<sup>12</sup> For this reason, memoirs cannot be considered completely reliable. This is not to say the writers were intentionally embellishing, but certain factors could slant their accounts: nostalgia, foggy memories, or a lack of objectivity that could veer as far as propaganda. Halton, for his part, was a virulent anti-Nazi as far back as 1933 when he had begun to observe with concern the manoeuvres of the NSDAP and then interviewed Hermann Goering, which cemented his fears; he does not try to hide his disdain or forego an agenda that condemns the German fascists. He also criticizes the British leaders for inaction against

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<sup>12</sup> Halton, p. 7.

the Nazis prior to the war.<sup>13</sup> In his depictions of life and battle in North Africa he does not paint an objective picture of the Desert War, as was obvious in the dedication to his book: “Dedicated to the British 8th Army with whom I saw the beginning of the revenge.”<sup>14</sup> Throughout his memoir he portrays the German troops and leaders as villains and the British and Dominion forces as long-suffering heroes who eventually overcame the odds with superior tactics, skill and heart to win the fight of the desert in places like Tobruk and Alamein. While a portrait of history, it was clearly one made from a certain angle and, as it was published and sold in 1944 as the war in Europe still was being fought, it could be construed as pro-British propaganda. Halton was not wrong in his conclusions about the inherent malevolence of the Nazis, as the historical record bore out, but his memoir was certainly not an objective historical account.

Peter Stursberg was another Canadian correspondent covering the war for a news outlet from his home country, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. And just like Halton, he wrote a relatively short account of his war exploits that was published in 1944, *Journey Into Victory: Up the Alaska Highway and to Sicily and Italy*. Yet he also added a much more developed memoir of his wartime broadcasting experiences covering Montgomery’s 8th Army that was published in 1993. Stursberg admits in his preface to *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent*, that there is a possibility for nostalgia to slip into correspondents’ remembrances of the war: “As reporters, we tended to look at it through rose-coloured glasses, owing, in part, to the prevalent patriotic fervor, and, in part, to censorship, which allowed no criticism of the war effort.” He observed that the passage of time helped bring the war into focus, but he knew “how selective memory can be”, which is why he did a large amount of research for *The Sound of War*. Stursberg consulted “a wealth of reference material” including official war histories, books by historians, and hundreds of war news accounts stored in the Canadian National Archives, among them transcripts of his own CBC radio reports. He also

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 8, 10-13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

consulted with various other Canadian war correspondents of the time.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, this memoir might be considered a more historically accurate piece of work and subsequently more useful as a historical document, although that does not diminish the contribution of his earlier work written before the end of the conflict, as it provides his impressions while the war was ongoing.

Regardless of their pure historical merit, memoirs still undoubtedly give the perspective of the war correspondents who wrote them and therefore an insight into their lives and experiences that will not be found anywhere else, except possibly in interviews conducted with them, and even then they are being asked questions rather than conjuring their own issues and memories to be related. The greatest value of the correspondents' memoirs lies in their recollections of working in the field – encompassing everything from delight to incredible fear and personal hardship – that cannot necessarily be found in archival documents and internal organisational reports; the correspondents were storytellers and that is how they have passed down the details of their trade during the war and whose revelations lie at the heart of this dissertation. Many of the memoirs are very well written, descriptive and articulate. The authors were literary and skilled writers in relating their accounts and have a strong grasp of history and the context of the war. Some memoirs, or at least parts of them, seem almost like travelogues of the places they visited as part of their work, which run the gamut from exotic to dreary and very often dangerous. Certain distinguishable themes run through many of the memoirs. They often express great humanity in their concern for the victims of the war, whether they were soldiers or innocents caught up in the destruction. They also show almost unanimous respect and admiration for the foot soldiers, while senior officers and censorship officers, with whom the correspondents were occasionally frustrated, come in for a fair bit of condemnation. They all recall a great sense of camaraderie with fellow correspondents, despite often being professional competitors. The correspondents moved in the field together and, while trying to get their own stories out first, many seemed to form a bond born of shared hardships and small comforts and pleasures. In various

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. x-xi.

memoirs stories are told of traveling in groups in military vehicles and hiding from shrapnel in slit trenches next to one another, as well as sharing eggs from street vendors in Middle Eastern cities or pilfered bottles of wine in abandoned European villas. Alan Moorehead and Alexander Clifford became lifelong friends, although the former worked for the *Daily Express* while the latter was employed by its direct competitor, the *Daily Mail*, and they each speak fondly of the other in their books about the war. Also, many correspondents speak of how they are attached to their typewriters and consider the clacking hunks of metal their most important piece of kit, whether working in print or radio. Describing his exodus to cover the Winter War, Halton writes: “I slung my pack over my shoulders, picked up my typewriter and walked across a long, low wooden bridge into Finland.”<sup>16</sup>

During the Second World War there was great public interest in the correspondents’ memoirs, many of which were published before the cessation of hostilities. Notable correspondent memoirists of the Second World War include Alaric Jacob of Reuters and later the *Daily Express*, who described his sometimes arduous movements through the conflict with *A Traveller’s War* from 1944. Alan Moorehead of the *Daily Express* produced a trio of books on his experiences in North Africa, compiled in one 1944 volume, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943*; he published another war memoir in 1970 titled, *A Late Education*. Some took it upon themselves to write about their experiences soon after the war, such as the case of BBC correspondent Stewart MacPherson’s 1948 book, *The Mike and I*. Others waited to finish or nearly complete their careers before telling their war stories: Doon Campbell’s 2000 book, *Magic Mistress*, describes his many years at Reuters, including his time as a celebrated war correspondent for the British news agency. Talbot of the BBC wrote two books, *Ten Seconds from Now* and *Permission to Speak*, in 1973 and 1976, respectively. Contributions from Canadian war correspondents came from Charles Lynch, whose book, *You Can’t Print That!*, provides the recollections of a long journalism career at Reuters, including significant war reporting.

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<sup>16</sup> Halton, p. 68.

In addition to the published memoirs of war correspondents, unpublished archival records provided extremely valuable information for this dissertation. Some of the greatest detail regarding the correspondents and how they worked is uncovered through internal organisational records from the British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre in Reading, the Reuters archive in London, *The Times* archive in London, and the *Manchester Guardian* archive at Manchester University. These collections were invaluable in providing information on the inner workings of these media concerns such as memoranda between managers, documents regarding financial arrangements and costs, letters and telegrams between editors and reporters, as well as correspondence between the organisations and the government and military.

In the course of the research for this dissertation, requests were made to the BBC Written Archives Centre to examine the personnel files of certain combat correspondents from the Second World War that were, at the time of the applications, still sealed. BBC policy proscribes the release of employee personnel files until s/he has been dead for at least thirty years, but in the hopes that the information would not still be considered overly sensitive, a special request was made in December 2010 for the file on Edward Ward, who died 8 May 1993, as well as the personnel folders of Denis Johnston (died 1984), Wynford Vaughan-Thomas (died 1987), John Snagge (died 1996), Frank Gillard (died 1998) and Godfrey Talbot (died 2000). These remained closed until September 2011 when the BBC deemed them suitable for release after vetting by the archive staff to protect confidential personal or Corporation details. This researcher was subsequently the first scholar to view them. These files were especially helpful in writing the sections on the selection of war correspondents, salaries and other monies designated for their work, and specifically in the case of Edward Ward, the efforts made by the Corporation on his behalf while he was the BBC's only correspondent to be captured and held as a prisoner of war. (Ward also wrote a memoir about his experiences as a POW titled, *Give Me Air.*)

Also within the BBC archives are internal reports, memoranda and correspondence regarding war correspondents before the outbreak of war and in its early years, as well as the establishment and operation of the War Reporting Unit that

provided the bulk of its coverage following D-Day. There are reports regarding the financing of war reporting, as well as correspondence with government and military officials who ranged from obstructionist to sceptical to enthusiastic about the British national broadcaster taking up frontline combat journalism. The archives also contain both letters and telegrams from the war zones back to the BBC's headquarters. Additionally, the Corporation published its own annual handbooks with essays by editors and reporters regarding the previous year's highlights and progress. A print collection, entitled *BBC War Report*, provides transcripts of the best broadcast dispatches from D-Day to the end of the war. Beyond the BBC's own archives, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College London provided BBC correspondent Chester Wilmot's diaries from the field, including notes about his travel to the western theatre of war.

Like the BBC, the most valuable information to be found in the archives of Reuters, *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* was the trove of personnel files on individual war correspondents. The United Kingdom National Archives in Kew was a source of many valuable government documents, as well as government and military correspondence. These documents were important for understanding the dealings between the War Office and the various news organisations, the regulations and paperwork for licensing a war correspondent to work in the field, censorship rules, and the focus and scope of other official memoranda regarding the Ministry of Information's attempt to control the flow of news during a very sensitive period.

## **Methodology**

This dissertation attempts to synthesise the reminiscences of the correspondents with the archive material and the secondary sources. Taken together this will provide an academic analysis of war reporting, as laid out in the dissertation's chapters. The attempt has been made to provide an informational flow throughout the dissertation that progressively builds the reader's understanding of the specifics of the war correspondents' jobs and lives, as well as their importance to the home front. The elements to be discussed have been chosen in order to put a bright, comprehensive



spotlight on the war correspondents without drifting too far afield into a general history of the war, its strategy, or related elements such as politics at home, although there is necessarily some of the latter. Therefore, the thesis is comprised of two main parts which, taken together, exhibit the major factors that went into gathering and delivering the battlefield news to the pages and the airwaves for public consumption.

The first part of the dissertation addresses issues peripheral to but still bearing upon the field work of the war correspondents. The first chapter, “The Media Environment”, briefly lays out an overview of the British news landscape, including newspapers and broadcasting, as well as the size of their readership or listening audience. Another important issue to be considered shall be the different treatment of the press and the BBC by the government and the dispute it caused throughout the war years. This shall serve as a primer on the media industry that employed the war correspondents and the extent of its reach into British society before delving into a closer examination of the correspondents themselves and the various aspects of their unique jobs in the chapters that follow.

The next chapter, “What Made a Correspondent”, focuses on how the correspondents were selected to perform the unique role of representing their organisations in the battle zones. Attributes such as experience and seniority were indeed important, but so were intangible qualities observed by editors and managers who chose the men who became their war correspondents, and even these desired assets changed as the war progressed and the organisations re-evaluated their needs. This chapter also considers the training that was conducted to prepare the correspondents for their deployments, although this varied depending on the organisation, with the BBC clearly taking the most pains to groom its War Reporting Unit. The training was focused primarily on military issues ranging from information about formations and equipment, and how to avoid giving away valuable information to the enemy, right down to actual physical training with army units. Additionally, they needed to know specifics about their profession such as how to send stories back to Britain and the rules of censorship; in the case of radio reporters, they had to learn everything about their recording and

transmission equipment in case their sound engineers were incapacitated in some fashion.

The chapter entitled, “Supporting the Correspondent”, considers the important issue of how correspondents were supported at home by their employers through salaries, insurance, and other corporate expenses. The salaries are considered in terms of how they indicated the value of a correspondent, both within his company as well as within British society as a whole, by comparing their pay rate to that of members of the public working in different types of positions. For this comparison Guy Routh’s book, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-79*, proved helpful, as did A.J. Youngson’s book, *Britain’s Economic Growth 1920-1966*, and Sidney Pollard’s work, *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967*. The chapter also considers how the correspondents and their managers were not always in agreement when it came to monetary issues, especially base pay and expenses in the field such as hotel charges and the cost of entertaining – usually in the form of drinks or meals purchased for officers – to curry favour and gain access to valuable sources. Finally, the chapter looks at how the media companies offered moral support, such as the efforts made by the BBC on behalf of its correspondent Edward Ward when he was captured and held as a prisoner of war for a significant period of time.

The chapter entitled, “The Correspondent and Censorship”, examines the extensive censorship system under which the correspondents worked, including the censorship apparatus within the government that dealt with the media on an organisational level, the structure that was established in the field to censor the work of correspondents before their words left the frontlines, and the issue of self-censorship by journalists and what prompted them to curb their own reporting to various degrees. A case study is made of the reporting on the Dunkirk evacuation as an example of self-censorship by the British media as a whole. It also takes account of how the working relationship between the news media and the military developed, including the nature of the interactions between war correspondents and military commanders and censors who curbed the extent of their stories.

The dissertation then moves into a direct analysis of the work of the correspondents, from their processes to the practical challenges that confronted them in the war zones. The chapter, “Techniques and Tools”, focuses on the mechanics of reporting in the field and the equipment used to get the stories back to Britain for publication or broadcast. These range from carrier pigeons and letters to the advances made in radio recording and broadcasting technology over the course of the war, including portable recorders that could be carried by one reporter to large broadcasting trucks that could send correspondents’ voices back to London from the continent. These are some of the operational technicalities overlooked by historians, thus filling a gap in the historiography.

The study of the correspondents in the field continues with the chapter, “Life and Peril in the War Zone”, which conveys a cross-section of the lives and activities of the correspondents as they worked in the theatres of war. This includes matters such as their methods of travel, how they obtained food and shelter and what those consisted of, and the conditions under which they worked including journeying for hours to cover briefings that were then cancelled, or having to perch their typewriters on the bonnets of vehicles or in their laps. Also discussed are the extreme privations and dangers faced by the correspondents who insisted on being close to the battles, including being fired upon by enemies who did not distinguish them from the Allied troops. Yet there is also a consideration of how the correspondents remained in close proximity to the soldiers but still managed to enjoy perks that were beyond the reach of the ordinary fighting men. While they often lived rough alongside the soldiers in camps or out in the open, the correspondents frequently enjoyed the comforts of hotels, or villas that had been deserted by their owners; these abandoned homes and other buildings also could be sources for the bottles of wine or beer and good, fresh food that the reporters were happy to pilfer even while the troops outside were drinking from their canteens of water and eating tins of bully beef. In short, they were with the armed forces but not strictly of them; although they had many rules to follow and could be sent home by the military commanders for not adhering to them, they still enjoyed many of the freedoms of privileged civilians.

The final chapter, “The Correspondents’ Stories”, analyses a selection of reports about some of the war’s biggest battles and how the news of these events was conveyed to the public as they happened. By offering information about the war straight from the battlefields and briefings with military officials, the correspondents provided vital information that enabled the British people to have a direct connection with the war, more so than in any previous conflict. This also speaks to why the correspondents, news editors and media company managers considered their work to be so important to the British public and, in the case of the reporters, why these jobs were worth risking their lives. Richard Dimpleby, for example, expressed a belief that he was serving as a link between the military personnel and the families and others labouring through hard times at home and even coming under fire themselves in The People’s War. By looking at the correspondents’ stories, there can be an analysis of why and how they wrote what they did and what impact these stories might have had at the time.

The British people were eager for information about the conflict being fought by their loved ones, friends and neighbours, and the correspondents provided updates on the fortunes of those men with a breadth, frequency and, in the form of radio, in a medium never before experienced with wartime news. Before those circumstances or details about individual correspondents can be analysed, however, it is important to examine the larger structure under which these war reporters worked.

## The Media Environment

The British news environment during the pre-war and early-war period is fairly easy to sum up: the press was dominant, although its long-held territory was quickly being encroached upon by the burgeoning medium of broadcasting. The press – as newspapers were collectively known – was the established and trusted outlet for news, with certain of the higher-standard papers being especially adept at analysis and depth reporting. The BBC was a different sort of vehicle than the press in terms of news reporting, providing regular bulletins with facts but little analysis, and with much of the information it reported actually provided by the Reuters news agency. The BBC subsequently received different treatment from the government and degrees of disdain from the press, but it had a large and growing audience and this resulted in a dispute that helped shape the role of media outlets in British society during the war and contributed to the rise of the radio war correspondents.

Francis Williams describes how during the 1930s some newspapers attempted to increase circulation with offers of gifts to new subscribers. The main competitors in this “circulation war” were the largest newspapers: the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *News Chronicle*, and *Daily Herald*. The papers at one time or another tempted potential subscribers with offers of books such as a complete set of the works of Charles Dickens, cameras, fountain pens, stockings, shoes, coats, trousers, cutlery, kettles and watches, among other things. It was said that a poor family could outfit itself with a large range of its necessities by switching back and forth between papers a few times. The strategy worked, though, with the *Herald* becoming the world’s first newspaper to pronounce that it had reached a circulation of two million copies. By 1937, as the *Herald* hovered at two million, the *Express* surged past with a circulation of over 2.3 million, with the *News Chronicle* reaching 1.3 million; the *Daily Mail* circulation dropped from its 1930 figure of 1.8 million in 1930 to 1.5 million in 1937.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), pp. 201-203.

The battle for circulation figures had “twisted the permanent values of journalism,” according to Williams, “turning the relationship between newspaper and reader so largely into a mere matter of barter.”<sup>18</sup> This inter-war development in the industry, however, had one largely positive benefit in the years that followed. Williams writes:

Yet what remains of lasting significance is that despite all its excesses the newspaper war of the ‘thirties did succeed to a remarkable extent in permanently increasing newspaper readership. A surprising number of the bought readers stuck. The average daily readership of national morning papers in 1930 was 8,929,000. By the end of 1939 it had risen to over ten and a half millions.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, by the end of the 1930s the combined circulation of all British daily newspapers – national, provincial, morning and evening – had risen to approximately 19.5 million and the Sunday papers alone were around sixteen million.<sup>20</sup> As Williams notes, “...all over the country people who had never read newspapers before were doing so. They were to go on reading them in increasing numbers.”<sup>21</sup>

Newspapers in Britain in the inter-war and Second World War years, and perhaps still today, were categorized into two general types in the public mind that provide a better understanding of the state of the British newspaper industry: quality press and popular press. Williams explains that they can be further dissected into an additional type. He writes:

*The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Telegraph*... fall naturally enough into one group: that of the so-called quality press carrying out those functions traditionally belonging to a serious newspaper. At the other end of the scale come the two great mass-circulation newspapers of our times, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*.... In between these two there lies a middle group of medium-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-205.

circulation popular newspapers of a somewhat more serious character, the *News Chronicle*, *Daily Herald* and *Daily Mail*.<sup>22</sup>

Williams quotes fluctuating circulation numbers from the 1930s, through the war, up until his published study in 1957, but the general designations of the newspapers remains accurate. Certainly there are more British newspapers that fit in each category – the *Financial Times*, for example, undoubtedly should be placed in the ranks of the serious papers – but for the sake of historical analysis the important distinction remains between the “quality” and “popular” press.

William Berry, the 1st Viscount Camrose, was the owner of the *Daily Telegraph* and previously the owner and editor-in-chief of the *Sunday Times* and until the end of the war the chairman of the *Financial Times*.<sup>23</sup> His 1947 book, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers*, written under his titled name of Camrose, details the ownership of all British daily newspapers at the time, as well as also helping place the publications within their perceived categories based on content and readership in more detail than Williams. Regarding those situated in the capital, which naturally included the biggest and most influential, Camrose writes:

The twelve London morning newspapers can be classified as follows: – Two higher priced dailies – appealing to the more serious public – *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*. Four dailies of “mass” circulation – *Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail*, *News Chronicle*. Two picture dailies of smaller size – *Daily Graphic*, *Daily Mirror*. One financial daily – *Financial Times*. One daily paper representing the Licensed Victuallers’ trade – *Morning Advertiser*. One Communist daily – *Daily Worker*. One sporting daily – *Sporting Life*. The three evening papers are the *Evening News*, the *Evening Standard* and the *Star*.... The nine Sunday papers can be arranged as follows: – Two appealing to the more serious public – *Observer*, *Sunday Times*. Five normal-sized newspapers of mass circulation – *Sunday Dispatch*, *Sunday Express*, *News of the World*, *People* and *Reynolds News*. Two picture papers of smaller size, also of mass circulation – *Sunday Graphic*, *Sunday Pictorial*. Of the morning papers the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>23</sup> William Ewart Berry, 1st Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* (London: Cassell and Company, 1947), pp. 30, 35.

*Financial Times*, *Morning Advertiser* and *Daily Worker* have no connection with any other newspaper.<sup>24</sup>

Camrose's 1947 list of the existing papers and qualifications that separate them into different types display the landscape of London's press<sup>25</sup> that was likely identical or at least extremely close to what it was during the war. There were still other notable large dailies around Britain, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, but the listing adequately indicates the variety of choices available to newspaper readers. Camrose notes that this is reflected in the size of the readership that was gained in the years of the Second World War:

The number of newspaper readers has substantially increased during and since the war but there is not much evidence that there is any change in public taste. The mass circulations, as they are sometimes called, are considerably larger than they have ever been. As compared with 1939, the *Daily Express* has put on 1,300,000, the *Mirror* more, and the others, with few exceptions, have made lesser, but still substantial, gains. Some of the Sunday papers have made very large increases indeed.<sup>26</sup>

After the war began, the economic pinch hit all sectors, including publishing, and the government ordered newsprint to be rationed beginning in 1940, causing newspapers to shrink to "less than one-third of their pre-war size."<sup>27</sup> This meant a fall in the costs of producing the papers, but also in the amount of advertising that could be carried, meaning less revenue as paid advertisements accounted for the majority of money made by newspapers. Advertising declined from sixty percent of London daily newspaper revenue in 1938 to thirty-one percent in 1943, as well as falling from forty-seven to twenty-seven percent for Sunday newspapers during that same period. Newspapers,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> He focuses only on newspapers circulated to the general public and leaves out trade papers aimed at specific industries, nor does he include weekly papers besides the large Sunday publications.

<sup>26</sup> Berry, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Fontana, 1981), pp. 98-99.



however, continued to be sold at pre-war prices despite their diminished number of pages, meaning the finances of papers became more reliant on the readers who purchased them rather than advertisers.<sup>28</sup> This also meant that companies, still seeking to make consumers aware of their products, spread their advertisements around to publications that normally would not have been targets for their business. James Curran and Jean Seaton write:

Newsprint rationing reduced the distance between quality and popular papers. Popular papers were no longer under such pressure to seek ever larger audiences because circulation levels were ‘pegged’ during much of the war. By reducing costs and redistributing advertising, newsprint controls also increased the profitability of many newspapers.<sup>29</sup>

The other effect of paper rationing, according to Curran and Seaton, was that the popular press devoted more of its limited space to news and commentary on public affairs: “This brought their level of informative journalism much closer to that of the quality daily press.” This also helped in the rise of the publications considered to be on the left side of the political discourse by bringing them to different readers than they might otherwise have attracted. The *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Pictorial*, *Daily Herald*, *Reynolds News*, and the *Daily Worker* had a combined circulation of nine million in 1945, this despite the *Daily Worker* having only accounted for one percent of the total national circulation before being shut down by the government between January 1941 and September 1942 for its communist views considered detrimental to the war effort.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this general improvement in the fortunes of the newspaper industry during the war, it might have done even better except for the rise of another medium that became exceptionally significant in the news business: broadcasting.

Prior to the war the BBC, a state institution funded by public money, was primarily an outlet for entertainment, talks, documentaries, and “outside broadcasts” comprising live commentary on events such as sports matches, state funerals, and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 88-89, 100.

parades; BBC news consisted mostly of bulletins read by studio announcers. Yet the BBC had one very large asset: its audience. In September 1939, there were more than nine million wireless licenses in the United Kingdom, approximately 73 for every 100 households. BBC transmitters broadcast 75,636 hours of programming for the home isles in 1939, while the Overseas Service delivered 43,198 hours. The king delivered speeches over the BBC six times in 1939, including on 3 September to address the outbreak of war.<sup>31</sup> BBC administrators perceived the outbreak of war as a significant opportunity to expand its mandate and format, but the *BBC Handbooks* give somewhat contradictory reports of the Corporation's war preparedness. The 1940 edition, which focuses on the events of 1939, states that at the declaration of hostilities the Corporation ordered "the change-over to war conditions.... BBC plans had soon to be modified to meet the condition of a war which, in its freedom from attempted invasions and, as both Press and BBC were soon to discover, in its lack of news, departed widely from accepted forecasts." The 1941 *BBC Handbook* is more confident, explaining that Ralph Murray made the first broadcast from abroad in 1934 with a report on British troops travelling through Calais to the Saar, as well as highlighting Richard Dimbleby's Spanish Civil War reports and the early work of Charles Gardner. Yet the handbook admits that the "doldrums period" of the Phoney War produced stumbling blocks: "Plans to cover the war were made long before war came. Admittedly we based these plans on the completely wrong idea that from the start there would be, as in 1914, violent action."<sup>32</sup> As Siân Nicholas explains, "BBC plans for reporting the war were equally rudimentary [in 1939], its role conceived simply as a mouthpiece for government information." Beginning on 25 August 1939 there were two daily bulletins at 8 a.m. and 12 p.m., which first engendered public enthusiasm that quickly turned to annoyance with the rise

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<sup>31</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1940* (London: BBC, 1940), pp. 10-12.

<sup>32</sup> *BBC Handbook 1940*, pp. 9-10; British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1941* (London: BBC, 1941), pp. 99-100.

to “eight daily bulletins [that] became hopelessly repetitive”, forcing the decision on 7 September to reduce the bulletins to six with the most recent news reported first.<sup>33</sup>

The government for which the BBC was supposed to be a “mouthpiece” still gave preferential treatment to the press. As prime minister during the early period of the war, Neville Chamberlain not only advocated strong censorship of radio but had considered doing away with broadcasting altogether.<sup>34</sup> The Newspaper and Periodicals Emergency Council lobbied hard for a specific sort of regulation on broadcasting requiring that radio news reports should be held “until after newspaper reports of the same vent had already been published.”<sup>35</sup> The close relationship between the Ministry of Information and Fleet Street resulted in reluctance to let radio beat print publications to big stories, instead requiring the BBC to hold broadcasts until the morning hours when newspapers hit the street. The press even went so far as to run what Nicholas calls “scare stories” about the BBC coverage of the war:

When the *Radio Times* publicised that Dimbleby, accompanying the BEF with the courtesy rank of captain, had managed to record some battle sounds from the French lines, newspaper articles condemned BBC ‘plans’ to put microphones on the battlefields (‘A more ghastly idea was never conceived’, trumpeted the *News of the World*). The BBC hurriedly reassured listeners that, ‘There will be no awful sound-glimpses of the battlefields where those we love are perhaps giving up their lives.... The bulk of the recordings ... will be made with troops resting or at headquarters’. In the first months of the war, with military news subject to stringent censorship, even this was better than nothing.<sup>36</sup>

Yet the BBC’s Foreign News Committee complained in a December 1942 internal report that the broadcaster had made little impact on the public overall and was

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<sup>33</sup> Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 191.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> Siân Nicholas, “War Report (BBC 1944-5), and the Birth of the BBC War Correspondent”, *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003*, edited by Mark Connelly and David Welch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 142.

considered an “upstart competitor” by the print news outlets: “To this competitor favours are allotted according to some arbitrary rule or ratio, or, more simply, in sufficiently grudging measure to ensure the minimum of offence to newspaper interests.” The committee also opined that “there has been failure to recognise broadcasting as a public service and an instrument of war.” Its report stated the BBC, in late 1942, was still contending with “the severe limitations imposed by the official attitude and policy” of the government.<sup>37</sup> In the 1941 *BBC Handbook*, News Editor R.T. Clark had penned a subtle swipe at the government in this on-going argument when referring to “limitations, technical and political, under which the BBC’s news service must work – which does not exist to embarrass the newspaper.” Up until 1943 the BBC argued with the War Office over accreditations for individual correspondents, although this was partly the Corporation’s fault for initially requesting credentials for numerous correspondents who then went unused.<sup>38</sup> News Controller A.P. Ryan concluded the BBC’s difficulties stemmed from its treatment “as a new and troublesome kind of newspaper. In fact the BBC is something of a newspaper, something of a cinema, and something of its own.”<sup>39</sup> In terms of news delivery, the BBC aimed to stop treating its distinctive medium like a print publication, redistributing bulletins from news services such as Reuters, and adapt war reporting to radio technology, believing the microphone and the sounds it captured could bring the conflict to the public in a manner more original and immediate compared to what newspapers delivered. Essentially, the managers of the BBC were attempting to convince both the British government and the public to accept a break from the established norms of war news reporting, which included trying to adapt censorship policies to a medium that was growing along with the war and therefore not as easily regulated as print journalism. Various internal BBC memoranda discuss the war as a

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<sup>37</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, Written Archives Centre (hereafter BBC WAC) R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, “Report to Controller (News) on Radio War Correspondence and News Services from the Fighting Fronts”, 8 December 1942.

<sup>38</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1941* (London: BBC, 1941), p. 99; BBC WAC R28/280/4, Marshall, “D.G.’s Meeting with A.G. and D.P.R. War Office”, 18 December 1943.

<sup>39</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942; BBC WAC R28/280/2, Ryan, “BBC Reporting of Second Front”, 8 February 1943.

singular opportunity for the Corporation in which it could produce “sound pictures of battle” and “exploit the qualities of immediacy and reality which make broadcasting unique as a medium for bringing the war to life.”<sup>40</sup> Yet they also express awareness that the opportunity was being squandered. The December 1942 report by the Foreign News Committee notes, “We all share... feelings of disappointment, indeed of shame, that British radio should still be failing, after three years of war, to exploit its unique possibilities as a medium for reporting military operations.” The report perceives the small group of BBC correspondents as having “made no deep impact on the public mind” and that the Corporation was still considered “a little brother to the Press” which must produce a disparate product in order to change this perception. Addressing propaganda potential, the report also notes “there has been a failure to recognise broadcasting as a public service and an instrument of war.”<sup>41</sup>

As the BBC was a unique state institution where editorial independence butted heads with wartime propaganda, and the immediacy of radio made it harder to control the message, Whitehall and the armed forces attempted to influence BBC policy and the correspondents it deployed. Asa Briggs states that while the MoI and the BBC had many common goals, “Relations were obviously at their worst when the Government became uneasy about the constitutional position of the BBC, tried to urge the Ministry to establish tight control or even contemplated a complete take-over.” In 1940, then Minister of Information Alfred Duff Cooper assured Churchill that the MoI could exert “complete control” over BBC news reporting. According to Briggs, this attempt to dominate the broadcaster was a continual source of discussion in Whitehall: “The BBC was accused of ‘unrelieved pessimism’, and criticism of its bulletins was a feature of the meetings even of the War Cabinet.”<sup>42</sup> As Duncan Anderson explains, “The BBC

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<sup>40</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, “Report to Controller (News) on Radio War Correspondence and News Services from the Fighting Fronts”, 8 December 1942.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.; see also BBC WAC R28/280/2, Standing, “Front Line Broadcasting”, 19 January 1943; Nicolls to Foot, “Front Line Broadcasting”, 26 January 1943.

<sup>42</sup> Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 175; Asa Briggs, *The War of Words*, Vol. 3 of *The History of*

presented more of a problem [than the print media]. Churchill and Duff Cooper both wanted to exert more control, but the corporation managed to maintain a surprising degree of independence.”<sup>43</sup> BBC Director-General Cecil Graves wrote to the MoI in October 1942 asking for government support at the same level as British newspapers and American broadcasting organisations appeared to receive by allowing BBC news observers on all Allied operations: “Unless, therefore, the British Government backs the B.B.C. and puts its case at least as high as that of the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association, there is a real danger that British prowess will be swamped by American stories.” Graves claimed to be sensitive to the difficulties of “adjudicating” between the press and broadcasting, but framed the BBC’s needs as part of the national war effort: “I have no hesitation in saying we could not put our national propaganda on a modern war-time basis unless the British Authorities are prepared to fight [for the BBC].”<sup>44</sup> R.W. Foot – who from January 1942 shared the director-general role with Graves, until he took sole command of the position in September 1943 – made a similar point about the BBC’s usefulness to public morale and propaganda when he addressed perceived press competition in a February 1943 note to Minister of Information Brendan Bracken:

I don’t care twopence about the prestige of the BBC or anything of that sort, but I do care, as I know you do, that broadcasting should really be used to serve the country to the full extent of its possibilities, and until we can really get away from the complete fallacy that broadcasting is a competitor of the Press, and therefore must be treated as if it were just

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*Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 32-33, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Duncan Anderson, “Spinning Dunkirk”, *World Wars in-depth*, *BBC Online*, 8 September 2010, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/dunkirk\\_spinning\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/dunkirk_spinning_01.shtml)> (accessed 14 October 2010).

<sup>44</sup> BBC WAC, R28/280/1, Graves to Radcliffe, 2 October 1942; see also BBC WAC R28/280/2, Ryan, “BBC Reporting of Second Front”, 8 February 1943. BBC WAC, R28/279, “Meeting on B.B.C. Raids Requirements”, 29 October 1942, BBC and military officials met that month to discuss the possible placement of recording equipment on ships and landing craft.

another newspaper, the country must inevitably fail to receive from broadcasting the service to which it is obviously entitled.<sup>45</sup>

Whitehall had been slow to perceive the growing stature and value of radio. However, according to Nicholas, “By November 1943 it had been officially conceded that the BBC could make a unique contribution to Forces morale by reporting the war, and the press lobbied against this new encroachment on their prerogatives in vain.”<sup>46</sup> Asa Briggs explains that the wartime press restrictions helped drive the public toward broadcasting: “A shortage of newsprint, leading to the rationing of space in newspapers, magazines and books, gave added power to words on the air.” Briggs adds that in this changing news environment, the BBC eventually achieved an imperative status among the British public: “Whatever its content, good or bad, the 9 p.m. news bulletin became in most households an institution almost as sacrosanct as family prayers are said once to have been.”<sup>47</sup> The contest between the press and the BBC not only reached parity but eventually reversed, with some in the newspapers complaining that the BBC received preferential treatment. *Times* war correspondent Robert Cooper told his editor in a 21 June 1944 cable from France, “It’s pitiful that British correspondents are still rationed to 400 words by wireless, which doesn’t always work, when Americans have direct transmission to New York by Press Wireless. Cross-Channel cable is laid, and there’s no reason why we should not have telephone or up-to-date teleprinter. B.B.C., of course, is getting favoured treatment for broadcasts by army channels.”<sup>48</sup>

Despite this ongoing battle between the press and the BBC and the changing news environment it engendered, the role of the war correspondents during the Second World War seemed to have been clear cut. The correspondents in the field were not in the business of forming public opinion, but rather keeping the public informed. They

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<sup>45</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Foot to Bracken, 9 February 1943.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p. 211.

<sup>47</sup> Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*, pp. 175, 188.

<sup>48</sup> “Transcript messages from the front: Messages between Robert Cooper (War Correspondent) and Ralph Deakin (Foreign News Editor) sent during June 1944”, *Times Online*, 31 May 2004  
<[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article426796.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article426796.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009).

attempted to report factually on the war and, in the case of newspapers, let the writers of the editorials (known at the time as “leaders” for their place on the front page) offer their views and enable the public to make their own subsequent decisions. Paul Addison writes:

‘Public’ or ‘popular’ opinion has to be sharply defined. The editorials in the *Daily Mirror*, for example, are evidence only of what the editor wanted to say. The fact that three million people bought the paper is no help in discovering how many read the leaders, agreed with them, or were influenced by them. Then as now politicians and journalists made large and often partisan assertions about the way public opinion was moving. To depend on such judgments is to go hunting the unicorn.<sup>49</sup>

Commenting for a March 2014 article in *The New York Times* about former United States Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld – one of the architects of the 2003 Iraq war who was known for giving misleading comments – NBC News Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski stated that reporters covering the military in wartime do not want to deal with government attempts to shape public opinion, but simply to report the situation at hand:

Whenever we go to these briefings and we question anybody... we’re not looking for opinions, we’re not looking for political spin. We’re just looking for facts. That’s what drives this press corps, covering the military in particular: ‘Just give us the facts and let us report them.’<sup>50</sup>

This statement is significant because it shows an historical continuity in war reporting: in memoirs and correspondence, a significant number of war correspondents who covered the Second World War write about how they wanted to be given solid information without spin from military officials in the field so they could make an unblemished contribution to the daily news and public record of events. Yet that was an

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1994; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Errol Morris, “The Certainty of Donald Rumsfeld (Part 1)”, *New York Times*, 25 March 2014, <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/25/the-certainty-of-donald-rumsfeld-part-1>> (accessed 26 March 2014).



unlikely possibility. Their participation in the propaganda machine, whether intentional or not, was almost unavoidable due to the atmosphere of total war at the time; the military controlled the message and censored the facts so the war correspondents had to be part of that message and submit to censorship at the risk of being perceived as defeatist or insubordinate and consequently being prevented from reporting in the war zones. Indeed, during the Phoney War, some war correspondents delved into what could be considered outright attempts at morale raising, if only due to a lack of hard news. Frank Gillard and Richard Dimbleby of the BBC, for example, conducted cheery quiz shows featuring soldiers just to fill airtime and keep the fighting forces in the public mind. Things eventually changed, both for the war correspondents and the news consumers. Addison writes:

After the initial phase of ‘phoney war’, there ensued between May 1940 and November 1942 a long and increasingly bleak period when the news was all of evacuations, retreats and disasters, and the overriding obsession was military events. Then, suddenly, the long tunnel of defeat was at an end. The Eighth Army defeated Rommel at El Alamein and Anglo-American troops invaded north-west Africa. Churchill ordered the church bells to be rung throughout the land in celebration of the long-awaited turn of the tide.<sup>51</sup>

The war correspondents subsequently contributed to the public morale, as with Gillard and Dimbleby making purposefully positive broadcasts with the troops, or when the national mood was shaped simply by reporting facts that were either depressing or uplifting to the people at home. It could therefore be said that the correspondents were, to some extent, both journalists and propagandists due to the wartime environment.

Yet the Second World War correspondents were different in ways that contribute to our understanding of modern war reportage. The most important and obvious of these was the separation of correspondents into two general types: print and radio. Despite the shared experience of working in the field under the same conditions, there were contrasts between the two mediums due to the manner in which they recorded and delivered their

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<sup>51</sup> Addison, p. 17.

stories that were hallmarks of the new media environment. Furthermore, in terms of reporting technology and technique, these correspondents straddled the past and the future: while telegrams, letters and even carrier pigeons were being used to deliver the news of the war back to Britain by all correspondents, radio reporters began utilising specific developments in recording and communication including mobile recorders and transmitter trucks. This changed the way that the public received and interpreted the war, thereby making this People's War a unique experience, even if the people's correspondents were men of much the same stock as in previous campaigns.

## **What Made a Correspondent?**

It could be said that war correspondents are both born and made, through innate qualities they possess as well as prior experience and at times specific instruction. This chapter is about the process through which Second World War correspondents were chosen for their roles in the field, including the qualities editors and managers were looking for, but also the types of backgrounds and experience from which they were taken. This included utilizing the background and talents of veteran reporters who had covered previous conflicts; throwing young and experienced, but not yet combat schooled, journalists into war zones and letting them learn on the job; or, in some instances, providing training to reporters to prepare them for their new roles. In all cases, there had to be a mixture of knowledge, capability and resolve that caught the eye of seasoned editors before a reporter was deployed as a war correspondent. The process of selection was far from arbitrary and the men running the news outlets knew the type of reporter who would best fit the demanding role for which they were being recruited, a job of the type and scope never seen before even in combat journalism. Following that, the focus is on the type of training that war correspondents received before being deployed to the frontline with the British armed forces. In the cases of press organisations, the training appears to have been far less formal, if there at all. Meanwhile, the BBC also sent reporters into the field based on experience and aptitude but as the war progressed developed a rigorous, set programme for its potential war correspondents whom it intended to deploy to the Second Front in 1944.

### **Historical Perspective**

Second World War battlefield journalism became a unique job that the correspondents developed to meet with changes in the scope of the conflict, updated censorship rules and new technology, but it was not created in a vacuum; the journalists' style and system of war reporting evolved from the efforts of earlier correspondents. A brief consideration of the careers and legacies of some of the journalists who covered

significant prior conflicts will act as an important historical framework that shall help provide a greater understanding of the correspondents in the Second World War.

The early attempts at first-hand reporting of wars had inherent difficulties. Henry Crabb Robinson, a lawyer, became a special correspondent for *The Times* and sent back letters beginning in 1807 about the Peninsular War. He continued to write these dispatches for the next two years from Spain, although he relied more on local newspaper accounts than his own observations, failing even to mention the mortal wounding of the British commander, Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore, at the Battle of Corunna. Other newspapers attempted to deploy war correspondents, as with the *Morning Chronicle* and a Mr. Finnerty in 1809, and the *Morning Post* and its reporter C.L. Gruneisen in 1837, but these efforts were in vain; Finnerty was caught posing as a ship captain's private secretary and removed before the fleet set sail, while Spanish authorities deported Gruneisen during the Carlist War.<sup>52</sup>

Irishman William Howard Russell might be dubbed the father of modern European war correspondents. Newspapers in the nineteenth century relied primarily on letters from soldiers serving on the various battlefronts, but Russell's reports from the Crimean War were, according to author and journalist Phillip Knightley, "the beginning of an organised effort to report a war to the civilian population at home using the services of a civilian reporter." His dispatches were also the result of ingenuity, resourcefulness and determination that came to define the craft.<sup>53</sup> *The Times* chose Russell to cover the Crimean War of 1853-1856 following his work providing stories on the bruising political scene in Dublin, and he went on to become one of the most influential and well-known news writers of his day, covering conflicts on four continents. Russell at first thought the job of a war correspondent to be an odd one as he observed the action in the Crimea and gathered stories of the fighting through interviews

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<sup>52</sup> Robert J. Wilkinson-Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent: Victorian war correspondents and their campaigns* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), pp. 20-21, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2003), p. 2; see also Mitchel P. Roth, *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 265-267.

with those who made it back alive from the frontline. He wrote: “It could scarcely be recognised or legitimate business for any man to ride in front of the army in order that he might be able to write an account of a battle for a newspaper.” Yet the public eagerly read his accounts of the combat and Russell became a household name, as well as somewhat of a crusader on behalf of the troops with the aid of supporting editorials on the front page of *The Times*. Knightley notes: “As the Russian winter [of 1854] set in, Russell grew caustic in his criticism of the suffering the soldiers had to endure. His dispatches dwelt on the pitiful condition of the troops and the command’s lack of concern.” He was eventually credited with exposing the poor conditions under which the British soldiers in the field had to operate – including inept and neglectful leadership, a dearth of supplies and inadequate medical treatment – and his honest and often critical reports caused an outcry that forced corrective action back in Britain. Knightley writes: “Once the public had been fully aroused to the state of the army in the Crimea, reaction was rapid. The government, at first worried only in case recruiting might be affected, soon had to face an angry *Times* demanding that the army’s medical services be reformed, a move that eventually took Florence Nightingale, a nurse of professional skill, to the war.”<sup>54</sup> In short, Russell embodied the phrase “power of the press” by using the direct connection between his newspaper and the British public to enact real social reform. Russell wrote in his 1858 book, *The British Expedition to the Crimea*, of how newspapers enabled positive change for the soldiers and helped maintain the spirits of the public, although he did not take personal credit:

The press, faithful to its mission and its duties, threw a full light on the scene which was passing full three thousand miles away from our shores, and sustained the heart of the nation by counsels of tenderness, hope, and succour... the press upheld the Ministry in its efforts to remedy the effects of an unwise and unreasoning parsimony, prepare the public mind for the subversion of an effete and corrupt system, encouraged people in the moment of depression, excited them by recitals of the deeds of their countrymen, elevated the condition and self-respect of the soldiery, and with all the force and fire of Tyrtæus,

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<sup>54</sup> Knightley, pp. 2-12. Edwin Lawrence Godkin of the *London Daily News* also made important contributions to this effort with his dispatches about the infantrymen.

and with immeasurably greater power and happier results... denounced the system and the men responsible for great disasters and the loss of valiant lives – “told the truth and feared not” – carried, as it were, the people of England to the battle field.<sup>55</sup>

With these words, and through his own work, Russell set the bar very high for those who followed him in the vocation of war reporting, especially in the two world wars. From the beginning of the First World War, the British government and military authorities showed a great degree of antipathy toward journalists and attempted to control the flow of war news via stringent official censorship, official communiqués written by army personnel, and press conferences that were consistently, although not always truthfully, optimistic. There were also arrests of reporters who ventured into the field without permission. It was a difficult time to become a war correspondent; of course, that did not prevent numerous men from trying. Philip Gibbs – one of the more traditional variety of reporter chosen to cover the fighting because he was already a veteran war correspondent, and who became a celebrity reporter as one of only five correspondents officially sanctioned by the British Expeditionary Force in France – wrote of those who queued up at Britain’s newspaper Mecca, Fleet Street, to become battlefield reporters:

There was a procession of literary adventurers up the steps of the buildings in the Street of Adventure – all those men who get lost somewhere between one war and another and come out with claims of ancient service on the battlefields of Europe when the smell of blood is scented from afar; and scores of new men of sporting instincts and jaunty confidence, eager to be ‘in the middle of things’, willing to go out on any terms so long as they could see a ‘bit of fun’, ready to take all risks. Special correspondents, press photographers, the youngest reporters on the staff, sub-editors emerging from little dark rooms with a new excitement in eyes that had grown tired with proof correcting, passed each other on the stairs and asked for their Chance. It was a chance of seeing the greatest drama in life with real properties, real corpses, real blood, real horrors with a devilish thrill in them. It was not to be missed by any self-respecting journalist to whom all life is a

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<sup>55</sup> William Howard Russell, *The British Expedition to the Crimea* (London: Routledge, 1858), pp. 2-3.

stage play which he describes and criticises from a free seat in the front of the house.<sup>56</sup>

Geoffrey Pyke exemplified this adventuring spirit possessed by many of the would-be and actual correspondents of the time, as well as those who have since joined what Russell called a “luckless tribe”. In the first chapter of his book, *To Ruhleben – and Back: A Great Adventure in Three Phases*, Pyke explains how in 1914 he was determined to be part of the news corps covering the Great War and believed his best chance was to go where the British newspapers would not already have reporters: Berlin. A former correspondent for Reuters in Copenhagen, he spoke German and convinced the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* that there should be a correspondent telling the story of life behind enemy lines. Pyke admitted he knew it would be extremely dangerous but, rather naively, believed the Germans were unlikely to expect such a brazen move by an English journalist and that, by being “really careful and really wily”, he could pull it off. He lasted six days in the German capital before being arrested as a spy. He spent months in jail and was then sent to Ruhleben internment camp, west of Berlin. Pyke eventually escaped, however, and in July 1915 sent his sensational story to the *Chronicle* from Holland, to which he had walked from Germany, and it became front-page news; his 1916 book went on to become a wartime bestseller.<sup>57</sup>

Charles à Court Repington, scion of a wealthy family who attended Eton and Sandhurst before a distinguished military career, resigned his army commission as a lieutenant-colonel after a relationship with the wife of Sir William Garstin became public in 1901; he was put on “parole” and declared he would never see Lady Mary Garstin again, but went back on his word and was forced out of the service. He turned to journalism and went on to become a war correspondent for *The Times*, using his extensive contacts within the military as sources. “...it was his account in *The Times* of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 that earned him almost instant international

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<sup>56</sup> Philip Gibbs, *The Soul of the War* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, originally published 1918), pp. 6-7; see also Knightley, p. 92; Roth, pp. 118-119.

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Pyke, *To Ruhleben – and Back: A Great Adventure in Three Phases* (London: Constable and Company, 1916), pp. 1-6; see also Knightley, p. 94.

recognition as an outstanding military commentator.” In 1911 he was appointed editor of the British army’s general staff quarterly publication, *Army Review*, which brought him condemnation from some who accused him of losing his independence and becoming a mouthpiece for the government, although he had long been a critic of politicians and ministers regardless of party and spoke openly about his belief in the threat to Britain posed by Germany. “More clearly than most other commentators in the press, on the brink of war in 1914, he foresaw the likely unfortunate consequences of inconsistent pre-war diplomacy and strategic planning.”<sup>58</sup> During the First World War, at a time when most journalists were denied access to the battle zones, Repington was invited to the front line by the British commander-in-chief in France, Sir John French. Afterward Repington, named only as “Our Military Correspondent”, provided a dispatch to *The Times* that was published on 14 May 1915 in which he stated a shortage of shells had resulted in failure during British attacks in Fromelles and Richebourg earlier that week: “The attacks were well planned and valiantly conducted. The infantry did splendidly, but the conditions were too hard. The want of an unlimited supply of high explosive was a fatal bar to our success.”<sup>59</sup> *The Times* also printed a leader article that added a moral and political slant to the reporting of its military correspondent in which the paper stated, “This is a war of artillery, and more and more it is coming to depend upon the supplies of ammunition... British soldiers died in vain on the Aubers Ridge on Sunday because more shells were needed. The Government, who have so seriously failed to organize adequately our national resources, must bear their share of the grave responsibility.”<sup>60</sup> The following day the newspaper published stories quoting munition makers in both Leeds and Glasgow proclaiming their readiness to produce the shells needed, including telegrams from the West of Scotland Armaments Committee to Sir John French and Lord Provost Dunlop of Glasgow, the latter of which read in part: “We, the representatives of the employers and working men on Clyde Armaments Committee,

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<sup>58</sup> A.J.A. Morris, ‘Repington, Charles À Court (1858–1925)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35728>> (accessed 30 April 2014).

<sup>59</sup> “Need For Shells”, *The Times*, 14 May 1915.

<sup>60</sup> “Shells and the Great Battle”, *The Times*, 14 May 1915.



wish you to know that we thoroughly realize the situation, and that with the help of the Government departments concerned, who are working in cordial cooperation, our gallant comrades serving under you shall lack for nothing which the Clyde can produce.” The article written by a reporter in Leeds stated, “The general feeling aroused in Leeds by the statement of *The Times* military Correspondent regarding the need for explosive shells at the front is that not a moment should be lost in increasing the output.”<sup>61</sup> Historian Peter Fraser says that the “myth” of the Repington dispatch became so large that it was believed to have helped in bringing about a sea change in Westminster. He notes, “The public’s response was supposed at the time to have been the main cause of the fall of Asquith’s Liberal government. ‘Never before perhaps in the history of the world’ recounts a historian of journalism ‘have sixteen words in a newspaper produced such epoch-making results.’” Fraser himself believes the effect of the story was overblown in light of the real circumstances: “There had been no secrecy about the shortage of shells before Repington’s statement.”<sup>62</sup> Regardless of whether the problem was already known, it was still an example of a war correspondent’s dispatch from the front sparking a major stir in British society regarding the welfare of the troops, not unlike that of the reaction to Russell’s reportage.

C.E.W. Bean had already written three books when he was chosen in 1914 to be the official news observer for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) that was heading to fight on the Western Front before being diverted to Gallipoli. An Oxford-educated lawyer who wrote occasional articles for the *Sydney Evening News*, Bean gave up the law to work as a journalist full time in 1908. He wrote about Australian industry and culture while travelling around New South Wales, as well as reporting on the visit of the American Great White Fleet, expanding his articles into the books he wrote between 1909 and 1911. When the First World War broke out he had never covered any conflicts, but still won a narrow vote among his colleagues in the Australian Journalists Association to be the press representative with the troops and have his stories distributed

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<sup>61</sup> “Need For Shells”, *The Times*, 15 May 1915; “In A Few Weeks’ Time”, *The Times*, 15 May 1915.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Fraser, “The British ‘Shells Scandal’ of 1915”, *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (April 1983), pp. 69-70.

to participating newspapers. He went on to cover the AIF fighting not only at Gallipoli, where he was one of three journalists to witness the beach landings, but in France as well.<sup>63</sup> Bean was distinguished by being strict to a personal creed that journalists should be fully informed of the military's actions but not criticise the military strategy, which meant he fit well into the government censorship of correspondents while going against the precedent set by some of his predecessors with a campaigning bent.

George Lowther Steer, who had previously covered the Abyssinian war, reported on the Spanish Civil War for *The Times*. His biographer wrote:

Steer thought the public considered journalism 'a rapid assembly of inaccurate statements, best forgotten'. They did not know 'the sweat and the discomfort nor the low and unembellished places where the facts are best sought', nor did they understand 'how atmosphere is drafted by running from the highest to the humblest, and being no less or more than the equal of each.'<sup>64</sup>

This was on display in the dispatch for which he became best known: describing the bombing of Guernica and revealing the Luftwaffe's involvement. Steer wrote in his lead paragraph on 27 April 1937, "Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday afternoon by insurgent air raiders." Stating, undoubtedly sardonically, that the bomber tactics "may be of interest to students of the new military science [of air warfare]", he described how two types of German aircraft bombed the town centre, which had no military or industrial targets, and German fighters strafed the defenceless civilian population: "At 2 am today when I visited the town the whole of it was a horrible sight, flaming from end to end. The reflection of the flames could be seen in the clouds of smoke above the mountains from 10 miles away. Throughout the night houses were falling until the streets became long heaps of impenetrable debris." Steer's reporting angered the Nazis

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<sup>63</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Gallipoli Correspondent: The frontline diary of C.E.W. Bean*, ed. Kevin Fewster (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 9-11; see also Roth, pp. 24-25.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram From Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 158.

so much that the Gestapo put him on a special wanted list of people to be arrested after the planned invasion of Britain, as well as prompting Hitler to cancel an interview with the Berlin correspondent of *The Times*. Steer's story had another direct result that still resonates today: his account inspired Pablo Picasso to take up the subject for his famous Guernica painting, a twelve-foot-high and 25-foot-long condemnation of war, considered one of the great artistic and political works of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> Steer's account could be considered a culmination of the models of three of the war correspondents who came before him: like the reporting of C.E.W. Bean, it reported the hard, bare truth of what he had seen without sensationalism; it also brought to light a major event of the war that inflamed the public with just one story in the same way Charles Repington's single dispatch had ignited a call to action among the British citizenry; and at the same time it was also one of the best examples of war reporting serving as public and human advocacy in much the same way William Howard Russell's stories brought to light the mistreatment of British soldiers in the Crimea.

The Spanish Civil War was closest on the timeline to the Second World War and thus some of the faces were the same in the pool of journalists as those in the Second World War. It was also the first time when radio reporting, which would become so important during the Second World War, was used to cover a conflict directly from the battle zones. John Reith, the first Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation beginning in 1927 after its creation by a royal charter, was initially the General Manager of the Corporation's precursor, the British Broadcasting Company, founded in 1922. He articulated in 1924 the historic impact he believed radio would have on British society and its access to information, his words seeming even more prophetic when considered in terms of the extraordinary change the medium would bring specifically to the reporting of war news:

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<sup>65</sup> For the original Guernica *Times* story, see George Steer, "The Tragedy of Guernica: Town Destroyed in Air Attack", *The Times*, 27 April 1937, published online as "Bombing of Guernica: original Times report from 1937", *Times Online*, 26 April 2006 <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article709301.ece>> (accessed 22 September 2009); Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Constable, 2009), pp. 322-328; Rankin, pp. 2-4, 172-173; Roth, pp. 299-300.

Till the advent of this universal and extraordinary cheap medium of communication a very large proportion of the people were shut off from first-hand knowledge of the events which make history. They did not share in the interests and diversions of those with fortune's twin gifts – leisure and money. They could not gain access to the great men of the day, and these men could deliver their messages to a limited number only. Today all this has changed.<sup>66</sup>

Richard Dimbleby became, in many ways, the symbol of that change for the BBC. He gained experience reporting on various domestic stories around Britain for newspapers beginning in the early 1930s and then for the BBC from 1937. In early 1939 the BBC news department broke through initial managerial reluctance to cover the politically charged Spanish Civil War, giving Dimbleby his first chance at what would become his primary vocation for the next six years. Dimbleby deployed as an “observer” to the Pyrenees, where he was the first radio reporter to record the sounds of a live battle – gunfire cracking and shells exploding in the distance in the background noise of his report – and where he related stories of thousands of exhausted and starving Spanish refugees streaming into France, bloodied Republican soldiers piling their weapons at the border checkpoint. In his broadcast he narrated the scene:

Since early today... there have been crowds, masses, lines of wretched, torn and tattered soldiers going by, throwing down their guns, their rifles and their pistols at the guards on the frontier... There are machine guns by the dozen stacked up just behind me – I'm sorry I'm pushing my way past the *Garde Mobile* in order that I can get well onto the frontier line: he didn't like it very much... Now here comes another procession of lorries. I'm going to stop for a moment and let you hear it go by. The first one is a Russian lorry piled high with soldiers... The second carries a heavy gun... and behind it is another lorry with two soldiers in it, four or five sheep and a cow piled up in the back of the lorry. This would be almost comic if it weren't such an appalling tragedy to watch down here...<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005), pp. 177-178.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 86.

A *Daily Mail* critic commented that Dimbleby's Spanish Civil War reports were "inextricably linked with the growth of radio news." His son and biographer, Jonathan, wrote of this time in Spain, "It produced reporting from him of a kind that had never been heard before on radio."<sup>68</sup> He would achieve even greater journalistic feats and acclaim in the next conflict and will receive frequent mention throughout this study.

Another reporter chosen to cover the Spanish Civil War, who also went on to fame for very different reasons, was Harold Adrian Russell (Kim) Philby. He had already worked as a journalist since the mid-1930s on a magazine entitled *Review of Reviews*, the journal *Anglo-Russian Trade Gazette*, and as a freelancer for the *Evening Standard* and a German magazine, *Geopolitics*. *The Times* appointed Philby its temporary correspondent in Spain beginning on 24 May 1937. Meanwhile, he had been working for the Soviet Union gathering intelligence since 1934 and all these jobs were meant to establish his credentials as either politically neutral or a rightist supporter, and the ruse nearly came at a very high price in Spain: he was the only survivor of – ironically – a Republican artillery attack that killed three other correspondents.<sup>69</sup>

These were some of the men who laid the groundwork for the correspondents who covered the Second World War, during which the infrastructure of modern war reporting truly took shape. The war correspondents of the Second World War were a special breed in the fact that they were a very select group who made great sacrifices. In *The People's War*, Angus Calder writes: "By the end of 1943, well over a third of the nation's nine thousand journalists were in the forces, and a substantial proportion of the rest were engaged on non-journalistic work.... The position of war correspondents was rather different. There were over a hundred of these in theatres of action at the end of 1943. Their papers had to receive War Office permission to send them out, and they were then

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>69</sup> News International Archive (hereafter TNL Archive), *The Times*, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, overview note; Preston, pp. 191-195; see also Roth, p. 236; Nigel Clive, "Philby, Harold Adrian Russell [Kim] (1912–1988)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40699>> (accessed 25 August 2009).

given a uniform with a distinctive insignia which permitted them to move freely. Fifty such men, from Britain and the Empire, were killed or wounded in action. Much of the reporting was excellent, and Alan Moorehead's accounts of the desert war were republished, with acclaim, twenty-five years later." However, Calder also notes the difficulty in covering such a far-reaching war with a select few: "But the best men could not be everywhere at once. Where it was impossible to give equal facilities to all accredited war correspondents, one or more would be selected by rota. In that way, a *Daily Herald* reporter came to cover the 1942 raid on Dieppe for the whole London press."<sup>70</sup> For this reason alone – that individual reporters might have to cover cataclysmic events for huge audiences and therefore carried an enormous burden of professional responsibility – the selection and training of the correspondents was extremely important to the media outlets even before the reporters deployed to the war theatres.

### **The New Correspondents**

Reporters in the Second World War had different reasons for going to the combat zones, although it should be noted that they were all offered the posts without coercion from employers, and in their published memoirs and internal memoranda they unanimously expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity. Some might have been moved by the pure journalistic urge to cover what would undoubtedly be the biggest story of the century, while also an opportunity to enhance their careers.<sup>71</sup> Others might have

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<sup>70</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 505.

<sup>71</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre (hereafter BBC WAC), Standing to Vaughan-Thomas and MacPherson, "War Correspondents' List", 6 November 1942, R28/280/1. A 6 November 1942 memorandum from BBC Director of Outside Broadcasts Michael Standing informed Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Stewart MacPherson they had been nominated as war correspondents: "I hope I'm right in presuming that you would volunteer for any hazardous enterprise that might be involved! It looks as though there's a respectable chance of one at any rate being chosen to accompany the first contingents, but don't have your hopes (or fears!) raised unduly." A handwritten note by Vaughan-Thomas says, "Delighted!" Another by MacPherson says, "We live in hope".

regarded it as a chance to indulge their taste for adventure. As the renowned newspaper writer, H.L. Mencken, confessed: “I find myself more and more convinced that I had more fun doing news reporting than in any other enterprise. It is really the life of kings.”<sup>72</sup> A number no doubt believed they were performing a duty for their country, and could contribute to the side of “good”. In this vein, Richard Dimpleby perceived the war correspondent’s role as “a link between the men fighting at the front and the men and women working in the factories and at home throughout the Empire.” He added, “It is useless to ask for greater effort from the factory workers unless they have a direct connection with their husbands, sons and sweethearts abroad... only the war correspondent could bridge the gap between them.”<sup>73</sup>

The war correspondents to be discussed came from varying backgrounds – ranging from a future viscount to men who worked their way up through the reporting ranks, although it should be noted that even those who rose from the lower positions of print publications to become war correspondents were generally from the educated middle classes. Their experiences were quite varied – Denis Johnston was a playwright who became a war correspondent at age forty; Guy Byam attended the Sorbonne and was fluent in French and proficient in German and Spanish; Alaric Jacob was born in Edinburgh, spent part of his childhood in India and the Middle East, was a boyhood friend of Kim Philby, and had already become a playwright and novelist before entering the ranks of journalism; Christopher Lumby graduated from Cambridge and initially became a teacher; Alan Moorehead worked for the *Melbourne Herald* during his student years and remained with the paper after earning a law degree; Robert Cooper, John Snagge and Stewart MacPherson all previously covered sporting events. The correspondents came from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada, Australia and South Africa. Regardless of their backgrounds, and whether they took on the assignments for duty or career or adventure, a phalanx of journalists donned British war

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<sup>72</sup> Terry Teachout, *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> Dimpleby, p. 163.

correspondent uniforms after being offered the task of covering the Allied fighting forces during the Second World War.

While war correspondents relied largely on their experience and training, it seems that the work of these reporters was not entirely a mechanical endeavour: natural talent and instincts were considered to have a part in the success of correspondents. Reporters had to have innate qualities and powers of perception – what is sometimes referred to in journalistic jargon as a “nose for news” – in order to achieve success in the battle zones. An article in the 1945 *BBC Handbook* summarized the traits of a successful war correspondent that were intended to describe radio reporters, but could be applied to all types of war correspondents. These attributes, the article notes, were not easily defined:

Such first-hand reporting requires particular qualities in the observer: not necessarily the ability to speak easily, or even pleasantly – some of the best war-commentators have voices and even personalities that are anything but endearing – it is mainly a gift of understanding which of the small, significant details making up the scene before him will be within the imagination of his audience, so that they do not need to be told; and which are strange, and can only be shared by his help with the people at home.<sup>74</sup>

The successful war journalist was thus more than just a capable writer or in possession of a well-spoken voice; he was someone who could convey the unseen and unknown, which would set the scenes for readers and listeners. These intuitive skills could not always be taught, yet they were something that made the reporter suitable for the front. They were intangible qualities with which some were blessed and others were not; these could make the difference between whether a journalist became a war correspondent or not.

The issue of what made a correspondent breaks down into two major components: selection and training. While there were many similarities, the print press and the BBC were two different animals in terms of how they covered the war and subsequently selected and trained their staff. Selection was the process by which the managers and

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<sup>74</sup> Arnot Robertson, “Listening to War Reports: What Do You Feel?” *BBC Handbook 1945* (London: BBC, 1945), p. 17.



editors of news organisations chose the staff members who would comprise their war reporting teams. At newspapers this was a small number of men, while at Reuters and the BBC it could be a large pool of correspondents. The work of the frontline reporters was very likely considered the most crucial endeavour of the war for these organisations and the jobs often fell to the most experienced journalists on staff. Previous war reporting was considered an extremely useful credential, although not a strict requirement. Factors such as physical fitness and stamina also played a role due to the rigours of the war zones. There were exceptions to these rules, of course, but the combination of experience and physical fitness was important in the selection of most war correspondents, as will be shown. And, as mentioned above, there were those elusive qualities that most certainly played a part in the selection of correspondents by editors such as Walton Cole of Reuters, who possessed a legendary ability to spot talent.

Regardless of the varied experience levels and intrinsic talents of those who were ultimately selected, specific training was invariably useful due to the very specific nature and circumstances of war reporting. Details of military conventions and operations, censorship regulations, the mechanics of transmitting stories back to Britain, survival techniques in harsh terrain, and other practical matters of the war zone were aspects of the job that could be taught. Nevertheless, for the most part newspapers and the Reuters wire service preferred to send their best people without any formal efforts at training and, by necessity, left their reporters to learn on the job. On the other hand, the BBC was a much greater practitioner of correspondent training during the Second World War; because large-scale radio coverage of wars was a new phenomenon at the time, the Corporation wanted to make sure its personnel were fully prepared. It thus and conducted an extensive training programme prior to the Normandy landings.

### **Selection**

The process of selecting which reporters would be sent to cover wars was never an exact science. W.F. Deedes explained in his 2003 book, *At War With Waugh* – recounting his reporting experiences alongside Evelyn Waugh during the Abyssinian

war, which spawned Waugh's famous novel, *Scoop*<sup>75</sup> – that the editor of the *Morning Post* called him into his office in summer 1935 and asked Deedes to cover the African nation's impending conflict with Italy. "Anxious to seem equal to the occasion, I nodded eagerly, but felt unable to contribute much to the conversation because at the age of twenty-two I had never travelled beyond Switzerland, had never been a war correspondent and knew nothing about Abyssinia." Deedes accepted the offer to become a correspondent, but he understood the paper considered him a "good candidate" for war coverage not necessarily for his journalism skills, but rather for "being young, unmarried, without dependants and easily insurable."<sup>76</sup>

When the German army invaded Poland in September 1939, news outlets quickly came to understand that the coverage of this new war necessitated the appointment of a larger cohort of reporters than those who had recently covered Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War. Reminiscent of the men who wanted to become war correspondents in the First World War, whom Philip Gibbs described as "literary adventurers" and "new men of sporting instincts and jaunty confidence"<sup>77</sup>, the pool of press reporters grew exponentially with the size and scope of the conflict as they vied to cover what was undoubtedly the biggest news story since the advent of the modern media.

Over the course of the war, the selection criteria were honed based on lessons learned in the field, such as the temperament and fortitude needed, not only to survive, but to thrive while producing accurate and compelling news accounts of the shifting war. Journalistic experience was an important consideration when selecting correspondents; it is safe to say that no news organisation sent a "rookie" reporter into the cauldron of battlefield reporting, especially with so many seasoned but still relatively young journalists ready to become war correspondents. Men in their mid-twenties and early thirties who had already built up solid reporting experience were more desirable than, for example, a younger man who might keep up better with the troops but had little

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<sup>75</sup> For a short biography of Waugh, see Roth, p. 339.

<sup>76</sup> W.F. Deedes, *At War With Waugh: The Real Story of Scoop* (London: Pan Books, 2003), pp. 3-4.

<sup>77</sup> Philip Gibbs, *The Soul of the War* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, originally published 1918), p. 6.

reporting experience, or a man in his mid-forties who had reported on Whitehall and other important news beats for years, but did not have the stamina for the job. Indeed, by the time of the writing of a 1944 letter to the Foreign Office, *Times* Foreign News Editor Ralph Deakin had surmised that young, intelligent reporters were the best sorts to cover the war: “As I am sure you know, older men do not last long as War Correspondents in these arduous times, and we are anxious to appoint young men who are steady, experienced and wise.”<sup>78</sup>

Yet at the beginning of the war *The Times* adopted a policy of using senior reporters who were already overseas and then supplementing their ranks with newcomers of the type described by Deakin, but who were already on the staff of *The Times* and therefore not a totally unknown quotient. Iverach McDonald wrote of the *Times*'s strategy: “As no one knew what was likely to happen when war was imminent in 1939, it was decided to keep most of the main staff correspondents abroad at their posts and recruit war correspondents from among the promising younger men either in Printing House Square or in secondary posts abroad.”<sup>79</sup> A good example of this was the coverage of events in Poland. Reginald Oliver Gilling Urch had been stationed previously in Russia but then moved to Riga, Latvia, where he remained for years covering Russian affairs as *The Times* would not submit its correspondent to direct Soviet censorship. In 1938 he moved to Warsaw and worked from the Polish city, but went on holiday in the summer of 1939. *The Times* sent as his replacement a young reporter named Patrick Maitland, who had to cover the Russian invasion of Poland. He, in turn, was forced by the movements of German forces to move to Belgrade until 1941 and then to Lisbon. Urch in the meantime had moved on to Finland, reporting on the Winter War in tandem with *Manchester Guardian* staff writer Evelyn Montague, whose reporting *The Times* used in a cooperative agreement between the sister papers.<sup>80</sup> Other examples of correspondents *The Times* took from within its existing ranks for war

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<sup>78</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Deakin to Roberts, 23 February 1944.

<sup>79</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, vol. V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

coverage included Arthur Narracott, who reported from a besieged France. Aubrey Jones, a future government minister, and Archibald Gibson both covered German movements from neutral Rotterdam. South African Jerome Caminada reported from Belgium, although his status as a journalist was not respected when he was captured by the Germans and sent to a camp on the Polish border, from which he escaped: “For two years, sometimes on the run, sometimes again a prisoner, and for a time at large in Budapest, he made a continuously hazardous journey to freedom through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania.” *The Times* also poached reporters from the paper’s parliamentary reporting staff to work as war correspondents, including Philip Ure and W.J. Prince, and others from various departments such as deputy night news editor Eric Phillips and racing reporter R.C. Lyle. Other re-assignments of veteran reporters included Robert Cooper, who was brought back after years in India and Burma to be a war correspondent in France during the Phoney War and later headed the coverage of D-Day through VE-Day; James Holburn, who had previously covered Berlin, Russia and the Middle East; and Christopher Lumby, who had also covered the Middle East and was once the chief correspondent in Rome and became one of *The Times*’s most prominent war correspondents.<sup>81</sup> These were the sort of flowing, makeshift arrangements the newspaper used in ensuring its coverage of the war, making use of all its available correspondent resources, both old and new.

With the need to receive official accreditation from the government to gain access to the war zones, the important choice of who would be war correspondents was left to newspaper editors and administrators and, in the case of the first official correspondents sent abroad initially, in the hands of an umbrella media concern: the Newspaper Proprietors Association (NPA). The NPA announced on 20 September 1939 that it planned to send an “official eye-witness” to France with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and provide pool copy for distribution to association members. The fee to the publications would be set by the NPA, probably not more than three or four pounds per week, and the stories would be available simultaneously through Reuters and the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-79, 90; see also “Obituary: Mr. Christopher Lumby, A Notable Correspondent of ‘The Times’”, *The Times (London)*, 4 November 1946, p. 7.

Ministry of Information (MoI). In another mailing to its members the next day, NPA head, Bernard Alton explained that the prior evening there had been a meeting attended by representatives of *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *News Chronicle*, *Daily Sketch*, and *Westminster Press*. The group decided one of the four correspondent positions with the armed forces would go to a news agency and the ensuing vote ended with Nicolas Bodington of Reuters being nominated. The other three correspondents chosen by ballot from six nominations were H.G. Cardoza of the *Daily Mail*, F.G.H. Salusbury of the *Daily Herald*, and Archie de Bear of the *Daily Sketch*. The other papers agreed the reports from these correspondents would be distributed among all of them and they would then issue the stories to an additional three groupings of twenty-one newspapers.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this agreement to pool resources with the NPA, *The Times* still made its own plans; an internal memorandum of 1 September 1939 put Kim Philby forward as the best candidate to accompany the BEF, since the War Office informed the paper it could have only one correspondent deployed across the channel. A second memorandum on 4 September confirmed the appointment and Philby became *The Times* BEF correspondent on 9 October 1939. This selection was likely based on the strong reporting Philby had done on General Francisco Franco's nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War. He reported from France until June 1940 when the Germans occupied the country, but after returning to Britain he left the paper to join the Foreign Office on 1 July 1940.<sup>83</sup> *The Times* attempted to regain his services in late February 1944 when Foreign Editor Ralph Deakin, recognising Philby's notable performances in Spain and France, wrote to the Foreign Office to inform it that the paper needed to deploy two new correspondents and "we know no one who seems better fitted for one of these two appointments than Philby." Deakin had spoken with Philby, who deferred the decision to his government superiors. "With Philby's consent, therefore, I write to you to ask whether his release

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<sup>82</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Bernard Alton bulk letter, 21 September 1939; see also Bernard Alton, "British war correspondents with the French forces in the field", 21 September 1939.

<sup>83</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, overview note; see also 1 September and 4 September 1939, memoranda from R.D. to the Editor.

may be considered.” Frank Roberts of the Foreign Office replied that Philby was not working directly for them at the time, but “he is of particular interest to us... [W]e should be bound to recommend most strongly against his removal from his present job.” Roberts added that, “his present work is so important and he performs it with such exceptional ability that I am afraid that his departure would be a real loss to us.”<sup>84</sup>

In addition to Philby, another early war correspondent for *The Times* was Robert Wright Cooper. He was an excellent example of someone who worked his way up through the ranks and eventually garnered the journalistic experience to become a war reporter. He joined *The Times* in 1925 as a typist in London, taking up the same job in Paris in 1928 before moving to the sporting staff as a sub-editor in December 1931. In October 1939 the paper appointed him a correspondent attached to the French Army, although he was forced to leave the country when the Germans occupied it. He continued in war reporting duties with the British Home Forces until 1942, when he went on to India and Burma. He then returned to cover the British Army’s operations in Normandy and remained with the force through its campaign in Holland before proceeding to Paris to report from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) – the central nervous system of the Allied armies in Europe under the control of General Dwight D. Eisenhower – until the end of the war, when he became a special correspondent at the Nuremberg trials.<sup>85</sup>

As can be seen from these two examples, experience and the ability to function under the difficult conditions of the war zone were important criteria for selecting and retaining a newspaper reporter in the field. *The Times*’ drive to retrieve Philby from the Foreign Office demonstrates the crucial role his experience played in successful war reporting. Cooper’s years in the profession, beginning on the lowest rungs of the newspaper hierarchy and then continuing his work reporting from various countries, further demonstrates how important experience was to a war correspondent.

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<sup>84</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Deakin to Roberts, 23 February 1944; Roberts to Deakin, 1 March 1944.

<sup>85</sup> TNL Archive, Cooper, R.W. – Managerial File (1924-1958), Staff Card.

The role of personal judgments about an emerging reporter's abilities was also in evidence. When Walton A. Cole, the joint news manager for the famed British wire service, Reuters, responded on 11 March 1943 to Doon Campbell's letter requesting a position with the wire service, he replied, "There is an opening for you in Reuters. It is for you to decide whether the potential opportunity [it] offers to someone like yourself, who in your own words 'is prepared to tackle any job and go anywhere,' exceeds the current security and comfortable remuneration of Edinburgh." Cole saw promise in Campbell, adding, "I have no doubt that you will not regret the change should you decide to make it, and further, that you will make a career for yourself in Reuters and become one of the first-flight men in the team we are building up." The assessment may have seemed overly optimistic, but it was based on an already successful young career.<sup>86</sup> Archibald Doon Campbell, who was born without a left hand and forearm, did not have a burning passion for journalism when he began. He simply thought it sounded better than other occupations: "Unlike colleagues who joined newspapers with a sense of vocation, who sought excitement and adventure, who stumbled in or were pushed, I escaped into journalism. I had no ambition or motivation to do anything, lacked aptitude and qualification, but the prospect of being fitted into a safe slot pen-pushing by day and swotting at night to climb an insurance ladder was an anathema."<sup>87</sup> He began with minor reporting roles on weekly papers in Scotland, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* and the *West Lothian Courier*, and got his first war story using the quick-witted resourcefulness that became a hallmark of his career. When German aircraft were reported over the Forth Bridge on 20 October 1939, he rushed to the structure between Edinburgh and Fife like many other journalists. His more experienced colleagues from bigger papers stayed at the scene waiting to see if there was another sighting, but were unable to use telephones in the immediate vicinity of the alert due to wartime regulations. Campbell, however, hopped on his bicycle and rode to a nearby town where there was a working phone and contacted the daily papers in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Rather than wait for their own

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<sup>86</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Campbell, 1/9145242, Cole to Campbell, 11 March 1943; A. Doon Campbell, *Magic Mistress: A 30-year affair with Reuters* (Norwich, England: Tagman Press, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell, p. 9.

reporters, they took his account and paid him as a freelancer. “So I made a month’s money in an afternoon... saw my first live war coverage in the daily papers and, more important, strengthened my contact with those other papers, especially the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*.” By 1941 he had gained a full-time position on the *Evening Dispatch* and made a name for himself there through assertiveness and long hours. He was subsequently introduced to Cole, a former *Evening Dispatch* staffer, who was familiar with Campbell’s work. On 9 March 1943 he wrote to Cole, informing the Reuters editor: “I am totally exempt from call-up [due to his missing hand], have no domestic ties, am prepared to tackle any job, go anywhere.” He was so dedicated to the concept of going anywhere to work that after receiving Cole’s job offer, he had his soft teeth, which caused him frequent toothaches, removed and replaced with a full set of dentures so he would never have to search for a dentist in a remote location.<sup>88</sup> Campbell began as a trainee sub-editor on the night shift at Reuters on 3 May 1943, where he did not immediately shine. One night after his second attempt at writing a brief article about the death of Chinese National Government President Lin Sen, one of the editors asked him, “Campbell, did anyone ever teach you anything about journalism?” Despite this and other hiccups, he gained the confidence of his editors and became what Philip Gibbs had called one of those “sub-editors emerging from little dark rooms... and asked for their Chance”. In September 1943 a German shell killed Reuters correspondent Stewart Sale in Italy and the management called on Campbell to take his place. Cole told him: “We don’t expect much from you, but try to be competitive with communiqués and briefings.” By late November of that year he was deployed to Algiers as an accredited war correspondent. In a letter home Campbell called it, “a terrific break.” His subsequent career as a war correspondent included covering the battle of Monte Cassino in Italy; landing in Normandy on D-Day; crossing the Rhine inside a glider; and being present at the liberation of Brussels, the fall of Hamburg, and the surrender of German forces to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-17; see also Roth, p. 53.

<sup>89</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Campbell, 1/914524, JGE, Campbell career overview note, March 1996; Campbell, pp. 1-2, 21-22, 30-33.



In 1943, Reuters began recruiting new correspondents for the expected second front, including journalists from abroad, and this further illustrates the role of talent spotting in recruitment that was evident in the rise of Campbell. Cole interviewed over forty candidates during a trip to North America and came back with Canadians Marshall Yarrow and Charles Lynch.<sup>90</sup> Lynch went on to become a famed political reporter; in his autobiography, he explained that Cole was in Canada to shore up the reputation of Reuters, which “had been dragged through the propaganda mud and it was widely assumed that Reuters was an arm of the British government, which to all intents and purposes it was.” He stated: “[Cole] set about hiring some Canadians to serve as war correspondents to replace those of the old school who had been killed, maimed, or were incapable of churning out the kind of stuff he felt would shake the cobwebs out of place.”<sup>91</sup> Lynch, who had covered Canadian local and national news beginning as a teenager at the *Saint John Citizen*, the *Halifax Herald*, *Canadian Press*, and *British United Press*, at which he worked his way up to bureau manager in Toronto, first met Cole in a hotel dining room. He recalled Cole “proclaiming that he was assembling the greatest staff of correspondents ever dispatched to the battlefields of the world. We would not only write history, we would make it; and when the war was over, the world would be ours.” That statement, and the promise of \$50 a week to cover the Canadian troops fighting in Europe, convinced Lynch to join the team. “Thus it was that I became the only draft dodger who wound up landing in Normandy at H-hour on D-Day.”<sup>92</sup>

Unlike Cole’s strategy at Reuters, the BBC’s recruitment of war correspondents came largely from within its existing ranks, most likely because while a talented newspaper reporter could continue reporting and writing in a very similar fashion for a wire service, radio reporters needed experience in the broadcast medium before they could be deployed. Also, while newspaper and wire service stories were often topped with the anonymous byline, “From Our Own Correspondent”, or simply, “Reuters”, the BBC’s war correspondents came to be regarded by the listening public almost as trusted

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Lynch, *You Can’t Print That!: Memoirs of a Political Voyeur* (Edmonton, Canada: Hurtig Publishers, 1983), pp. 45-46.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 17, 21, 25, 32, 37, 46.

acquaintances: “men we [the listeners] gradually came to know, men who somehow gained a place among those we think of as personal friends.”<sup>93</sup> Clearly, the Corporation required reporters who were expected to perform above the level of others. Richard Dimbleby and Edward Ward were the BBC’s first frontline broadcasters beginning in 1939: Dimbleby in Spain and then with the BEF; Ward in Finland and then with the BEF. The pair, both heralded for their dispatches, set the standard for the BBC war correspondents who followed them.

Ward began working as a BBC announcer in January 1938 and then became a reporter whom *The Independent* newspaper, in his May 1993 obituary, called “one of the very best of the BBC’s war correspondents”. He was lauded for his reporting of the Winter War, his first combat coverage, and then for breaking the news on 12 March 1940 of the peace agreement between Finland and the Soviet Union that ended the conflict. He was also the first in radio history to record a broadcast from a front line.<sup>94</sup> Ward described in a 1989 interview how he came to be hired by the BBC; a friend referred him to a Professor Lloyd-James who “picked a book at random and it happened to be an Agatha Christie” and asked him to read from it, but was not impressed at first because Ward seemed to be over-acting. Ward tried again, simply reading the text, and the professor said “that’s more like it” and recommended him to the BBC and he was taken on in 1938 as an announcer. In 1939 he was offered a position in the news department and immediately asked if he would go to Finland to cover the Winter War with Russia. Ward explained:

Of course it was a terrible gamble on his [Overseas Controller J.B. Clark] part, because there had never been a radio war correspondent before. I mean there was Murrow, Dimbleby interviewing people in farm houses and so on, in France, with not a shot fired in anger, and so Clark hadn’t the slightest idea what I would do, and I had no idea what

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<sup>93</sup> Donald Boyd and Desmond Hawkins (eds.), *War Report: A Record of Dispatches Broadcast by the BBC’s War Correspondents with the Allied Expeditionary Force 6 June 1944 – 5 May 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> “Obituary: Edward Ward”, *The Independent*, 10 May 1993, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-edward-ward-2322029.html>> (accessed 16 May 2012).

I would do either. But I thought this is a chance not to be missed. So I went out.<sup>95</sup>

A Glasgow *Evening Citizen* article commented that Dimpleby's excellent reporting from the beginning of the Second World War seemed to be the product of some intangible quality: "Probably a faculty like this is inborn and unaccountable. You can do something with any cub reporter but no amount of teaching and experience will turn the wrong sort of man into the right sort of reporter."<sup>96</sup> Even Fleet Street acknowledged as much when *The Star* wrote of Dimpleby, following his deployment to Cairo in April 1940: "The radio war correspondent – a new skilled and dangerous profession – has come into being.... The voice of a man who may have risked his life a few hours earlier, and who has, in any event, undergone severe physical and emotional strain, conveys more than he may intend."<sup>97</sup>

The "unaccountable" qualities required did not put off BBC managers, who set out to select men they considered the "right" sort of correspondents. By the spring of 1940, the BBC had four "observers": Dimpleby with the BEF in France and then the Middle East; Ward covering the Winter War in Finland and then in Belgium and France; Charles Gardner with the RAF in France; and Bernard Stubbs as Dimpleby's replacement with the BEF.<sup>98</sup> The Corporation, however, made changes to its line-up of correspondents as the war progressed and its personnel requirements developed. This included the decision to recall Dimpleby from the Middle East after he fell out of favour with the News Editor, A.P. Ryan, in late 1940 and the subsequent decision to keep him on as a "co-ordinator" in Cairo supervising regional coverage, while Ward took over the reporting duties from the desert frontline.<sup>99</sup> The 1945 edition of the *BBC Handbook* explained: "The addition of Ward to the Middle East [in early 1941], where previously Dimpleby had walked

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<sup>95</sup> "Ward, Edward Henry Harold (IWM Interview)", Imperial War Museums, 9 February 1989, <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80010390>> (accessed 30 June 2014).

<sup>96</sup> As quoted in Dimpleby, p. 182.

<sup>97</sup> Boyd and Hawkins, pp. 9-10, 17; *The Star* as quoted in Dimpleby, p. 102.

<sup>98</sup> Dimpleby, p. 102.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-119.

alone, indicated the type of reporter the BBC sought for the remainder of the war. He was supposed to be an able team player rather than a personality, someone who would do the job well without eclipsing it.”<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby writes:

His [Ward’s] manner and style were quite different from Dimbleby’s. He was colloquial, he was lighter, and he would know his place. He would make no attempt to broadcast on matters of what he himself sardonically would call “high strategy”; nor would he try to step beyond the formal bounds of the relationship between Army and correspondent; neither seeking nor expecting special consideration, he would be content to record the details of battle and the “colour” of war. He would certainly not regard himself as the voice of the BBC in the Middle East.<sup>101</sup>

While the BBC employed experienced combat reporters in the early years of the war, there were not enough of them to provide the desired coverage of the impending second front in the west, prompting the Corporation to seek recruits internally and, on limited occasions, from other broadcasters.<sup>102</sup> In an internal memorandum written in early December 1941, the Corporation’s Director-General queried, “supposing that the raids upon the coast of France and all that were to become an increasing feature of the war, what arrangements have we to ensure that such raids would be promptly reported by eye-witnesses, whether fighting men or correspondents?”<sup>103</sup> A was thus despatched to the War Office in January 1942 requesting the presence of a BBC reporter on a forthcoming operation, something that had not yet been allowed, in order to provide a first-hand account rather than copy from another news organisation, such as Reuters: “The B.B.C. are most anxious to be represented by one of their own men on the next combined operation in which war correspondents are allowed to take part.... The advantage of handling these stories on the air through the voice of an eye-witness as

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<sup>100</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1945* (London: BBC, 1945), p. 13.

<sup>101</sup> Dimbleby, pp. 116-117.

<sup>102</sup> Boyd and Hawkins, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup> BBC WAC, R13/432/1, Director-General to C.(N.C), “War Observers”, 5 December 1941.

opposed to having the announcer read the Reuter or other general message is, I think you will agree, obvious.”<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, in April 1942, a report by A.P. Ryan lamented the paucity of good frontline observers and showed that managers were actively hunting for news correspondents and considering where they might be found, while keeping in mind that not just anyone could fill the role:

One of the most likely fields seems to me the inside news staffs of the Overseas and European Divisions, both of which have brought in experienced writers. This, of course, lays me open to the question: – What about the Home news staff? I would have anyone out of that who was competent, but we have tried all the likelies on sorties and other miscellaneous jobs, and there is no winner among them. The combination of qualities wanted is not easy to find in one man. He must be able to broadcast, to get on with the Services, including the high-ups, on whose good-will he is considerably dependent, and to keep his feet in the rough-and-tumble of outside news gathering.<sup>105</sup>

Ryan argued that to exploit the full journalistic potential of the second front, “we’ll need to work to a carefully prepared plan”, and recommended adding new war correspondents, putting forth the names of Raymond Glendenning, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Stewart MacPherson as “all good and experienced broadcasters trained to ex tempore commentary and eager to tackle the job”.<sup>106</sup> By December 1942 the BBC staffing goal was to gather “a corps of radio war correspondents strong enough in numbers and quality to aim at covering adequately all major battles on land and sea, and the picturesque incidents of each campaign; air operations; the general picture from G.H.Q.; and interesting activities at bases and behind the lines.” The plan was for twenty-one correspondents, including five in Mediterranean and south European bases, sixteen in western Europe “from Norway to the Pyrenees”, and two held at home in reserve, with no plans for Pacific correspondents.

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<sup>104</sup> BBC WAC, R13/432/1, A.P. Ryan to Major-General the Hon. E.F. Lawson, 8 January 1942.

<sup>105</sup> BBC WAC, R13/432/1, A.P. Ryan, C.(N.C.) to Cecil Graves, (D.G.), “BBC News Observers”, 3 April 1942.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

The Corporation was on the hunt for “new men” from within its own ranks and elsewhere, especially those who could add “much needed distinction” to the effort: “We must aim at acquiring some bigger guns, and not content ourselves with all-around average competence.”<sup>107</sup> An analysis of the proposed staff additions indicates a recognition by BBC editors and managers that the Corporation needed to further develop its war reporting team, but not just in sheer size. They could not simply throw more bodies into the mix. They needed to grow the experience and skill level that the overall group possessed; in other words, “rookies” need not apply. The BBC thus modified its list of war correspondents for second front coverage several times as new men became available, such as the late additions of Colin Wills and Denis Johnston.<sup>108</sup> Johnston was selected as the second reporter behind Gillard in Italy following his stint in North Africa; although he was a senior reporter to Gillard and in another circumstance would have not had to take direction from Gillard, the BBC managers were clearly seeking to strengthen their war coverage with veteran broadcasters and Johnston saw the assignment as one important enough to take regardless of hierarchy.

Correspondents were not the only employees sent to the front; the recording and transmission technicians were essential teammates for correspondents and presented a unique set of issues for the BBC. The engineering division faced a staffing dilemma at the start of the war when the armed forces drafted many of its male employees aged nineteen to twenty-three: “Faced with these losses of experienced pre-war engineers, and of junior engineers just when they were becoming really useful, the BBC had to cast its net wider in recruiting staff,” according to BBC engineer and historian Edward Pawley. Training female operators was partly the solution, although only for use in Britain and

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<sup>107</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942.

<sup>108</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, “BBC News Correspondents”, 1 July 1944; A list compiled three weeks after D-Day shows the final roster and the service branch or headquarters to which each man was assigned. For earlier lists indicating the ongoing development of the staff see the following: BBC WAC R28/280/1, Boyd, “Disposition of War Correspondents”, 9 December 1942; BBC WAC R28/280/3, De Lotbiniere, “Proposed Scheme for Front Line Reporting”, 11 April 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/3, Moore to Ryan, “Second Front Reporting”, 14 May 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/4, “Suggested War Reporting Unit Teams”, 27 October 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/4, “List of Teams as Agreed 19th November”.

not in the case of war reporting.<sup>109</sup> A November 1942 report put the number of technical staff needed to go abroad at fourteen, including supervisors and assistants, five young engineers with varied experience, two recording engineers and two mechanics. The desired qualities of these staff members were also laid out: “They would be carefully selected in relation to their technical experience, capabilities for rough and ready working, and age. As far as possible it would be desirable to nominate men under 40, but this may not be possible in every case.” Significantly for both the BBC and the government, the report also asked, “Should the personnel become War Correspondents, or are they to go as civilians?”<sup>110</sup>

The War Office wanted engineering and other technical staff to remain civilians and opposed the provision of an honorary rank and the official accreditation bestowed upon reporters. Until December 1943, it refused to accredit sixteen transmitting engineers the BBC wished to send into the field. All technical personnel were, however, eventually designated “engineer correspondents”.<sup>111</sup> They were officially ranked captains, like the reporters, although their equivalent pay grade as government employees of the BBC only entitled them to the salaries of lieutenants. In this matter of a captaincy there was little choice because “the engineers had found out that the Army themselves gave accredited war correspondents notional rank of Captain and they did not, therefore, see why they should go for less. There was no doubt that many of the engineers would have refused to go unless this concession had been granted.”<sup>112</sup> This was only fair, as the engineers would share the same hardships and dangers in the field

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<sup>109</sup> Edward Pawley, *BBC Engineering 1922–1972* (London: BBC Publications, 1972), pp. 299–300; James W. Godfrey, “The History of BBC Sound Recording”, *Journal of the British Sound Recording Association* 6, no. 1 (1959), p. 10.

<sup>110</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, “Broadcasting Facilities in the Field Preliminary Report”, 18 November 1942; “Broadcasting Facilities in the Field: Preliminary Survey of Technical Equipment and Personnel Required”, 9 December 1942.

<sup>111</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/4, Marshall, “D.G.’s Meeting with A.G. and D.P.R. War Office”, 18 December 1943; Pawley, p. 294; see also BBC WAC R28/280/4, G.J.B. Allport, “D.G.’s Interview with A.G.”, 17 December 1943.

<sup>112</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/6, “Schedule of BBC War Correspondents”, 10 August 1944. There was a single engineer graded a second lieutenant based on his WRU-lowest salary of £400, BBC WAC R28/280/5, L. Macrae to S.A.O., “Subject: J.T. Stocking”, 4 July 1944.

as their colleagues holding the microphones. If an engineer was wounded or worse, the correspondent could not simply write home and ask for a replacement, so reporters also learned how to operate and maintain the recording equipment.<sup>113</sup>

## **Training**

When it came to training, it seems the press were inclined to deploy reporters who were their most experienced or whom they believed were fit and competent enough to handle the war correspondent assignments, without formal instruction. Doon Campbell recalled, “Although not fully trained, I was felt to be adequate for the declining story in Italy.” He was not, however, speaking of training in the art of war journalism, but rather proficiency in the Reuters technique of writing and filing stories.<sup>114</sup> For its part, *The Times* seemed confident in using those already working as foreign correspondents, as well as bringing up younger reporters from their ranks in Britain. As with Campbell, however, even a senior reporter like Kim Philby was seen to be in need of help honing certain journalistic skills, rather than his abilities as a war correspondent. In a 9 March 1939 letter to one of the paper’s correspondents in Spain, Deakin wrote: “Philby, promising as he is, has not had the journalistic experience which would teach him to overcome certain transmission difficulties. It seems desirable that he should spend some more time in this office reasonably soon, learning the tricks of the trade.”<sup>115</sup>

The BBC, however, appears to have undertaken an extensive programme of training for its war correspondents. There were two basic types of BBC war correspondents in terms of training in the Second World War: the “trial-by-fire” variety such as Richard Dimbleby, Charles Gardner, and Frank Gillard, who had already been in the field; and the second group that followed and received formal training before deploying. There had been radio training for some of the senior men; in 1937 Denis Johnston attended a three-month broadcasting course in London that included future war correspondent Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and John Snagge, who was best known as an

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<sup>113</sup> Boyd and Hawkins, p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Campbell, p. 30.

<sup>115</sup> McDonald, pp. 76-77.



announcer in London.<sup>116</sup> For the first correspondents, though, much of their training came through on-the-job experience during the Blitzkrieg, the Phoney War, or the North African campaign, rather than any formal instruction. The 1941 *BBC Handbook*, for example, explains that the BBC's two news observers in France in 1940, Dimpleby and Gardner, learned lessons in dealing with the military when they met "a whole crop of restrictions of which they had not dreamed when they went out." Johnston, meanwhile, had his first opportunity for war reporting in 1941 when he broadcast from the scenes of Luftwaffe bombings in Belfast and Dublin; a year later, at age forty and without any military training, he arrived in Cairo to replace Edward Ward and was on the front line at El Alamein two weeks later.<sup>117</sup> Yet these "ready or not" experiences taught them quickly and aided those who came after them.

From his post in Algiers in February 1943, Robert Dunnnett sent to the BBC a long memorandum of war reporting advice advocating that for two months before deployment potential correspondents should "do nothing else but study their parts and make their contacts and orientate their minds" because they would face innumerable obstacles; with this preparation "they will at least be as fully equipped to deal with them as is humanly possible." He added a note of caution about the nature of war reporting: "It is not good enough just to know how to broadcast or how to make a recording or write a script.

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<sup>116</sup> Bernard Adams, *Denis Johnston: A Life* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2002). p. 170; Snagge read the BBC's official announcement of D-Day: "This is London. London calling in the Home Overseas and European Services and through United Nations Radio Mediterranean, and this is John Snagge speaking. Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force have just issued Communique No. 1. Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France..." Richard Havers, *Here Is The News: The BBC and the Second World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2007), p. 254; see also William Grierson, Mark Jones, and Humphrey Walwyn (prods.), *D-Day Despatches: Original Recordings from the BBC Sound Archives June 1944*, BBC Radio Collection, BBC Audiobooks Ltd., 2004.

<sup>117</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1941* (London: BBC, 1941), pp. 99-100; Adams, pp. 214-216, 219, 221; see also BBC WAC R28/280/3, "Denis Johnston", 5 April 1943.

Every BBC man reporting a campaign should be part of the pattern of it before it begins and a force within it thereafter to tell its exploits roundly to the world.”<sup>118</sup>

Over time the BBC greatly improved the training it provided for its war correspondents and began planning specifics of future coverage of the much-anticipated second front in Western Europe as early as August 1942.<sup>119</sup> By December of that year, the BBC sought to put its prospective war reporting staff, both correspondents and engineers, through “combined training of the most thorough kind, in which active service conditions would, as nearly as possible, be reproduced.” This meant training manoeuvres with real military units using all the equipment the journalists would employ in the field, such as recording lorries and transmitters.<sup>120</sup>

One of the most important developments in this capacity was Operation Spartan. Compared to print publications, the BBC was the newest player in war journalism and still needed to prove – to the military leadership, Whitehall and itself – that it had a group of journalists and the organisational capacity to cover large-scale military operations as they happened. The chance came in March 1943 when the army allowed two teams of BBC reporters and engineers to take part in a military training exercise involving British troops, some of whom masqueraded as the German enemy, entitled Operation Spartan. This exercise along the Thames involved three British army corps advancing along an eighty-mile front, approximately from London to Oxford, over the course of six days. The mock battle manoeuvres enabled the BBC to test its equipment, techniques and staff; News Editor Donald Boyd commented that it allowed the Corporation’s management “to see what sort of a hand they [correspondents] make of an

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<sup>118</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Dunnett, “Broadcasting and Future Military Campaigns”, 16 February 1943.

<sup>119</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Standing, “War Reporting by O.B. Commentators”, 13 August 1942.

<sup>120</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, “Report to Controller (News) on Radio War Correspondence and News Services from the Fighting Fronts”, 8 December 1942.

active war situation of this kind. It should give us additional knowledge of their abilities in war conditions to help us in deciding upon coverage of a second front.”<sup>121</sup>

The BBC correspondents arrived at Paddington Station on 5 March wearing uniforms with steel helmets and respirators, carrying eating utensils and return tickets to Oxford. They were told to bring bedding and “be prepared to live rough”, although the Army undermined the realism by offering to provide hotel accommodations if requested and if possible. The Corporation chose two teams of six, including reporters and engineers, with the stated goal to operate as close to “the real thing” in order “to satisfy ourselves and also convince the Army authorities that we can run things without being a nuisance to them...”<sup>122</sup> Censorship rules for this “full dress rehearsal” included, as they would in a real battle zone, prohibition on mentioning specific military information: numbers of troops; the names of formations, airfields, or senior officers; the capacities of defence systems or bridges; and the effectiveness of decoys or deception techniques. The BBC advised its transmission stations in Oxford, Cambridge, Reading, Gloucester, and Birmingham to anticipate the sudden arrival of correspondents.<sup>123</sup>

The BBC correspondents filed more than ninety Spartan dispatches, which are interesting both for the obvious seriousness the journalists placed on their mock reports and as an imagined version of what might have happened had Britain been invaded. Vaughan-Thomas reported from Reading’s Caversham Bridge after its “demolition” by Germans; Stewart MacPherson observed the passing of a Crusader tank “with the chummy name of Ally Pally”; a broadcasting assistant, T. Vizard, interviewed a pair of locals who played along and described improved treatment and food rations since the

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<sup>121</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, “Broadcasting ‘Exercise’ by B.B.C. Teams with ‘British’ and ‘German’ Armies in the Field (Exercise Spartan) – 5th-10th March, 1943”, 15 March 1943; Boyd, “Army Manoeuvres: End of February”, 4 February 1943; Ryan, “BBC Reporting of Second Front”, 8 February 1943.

<sup>122</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, War Office to BBC, 1 March 1943; Foot to Teams, 1 March 1943.

<sup>123</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, “Censorship Rules for Exercise ‘Spartan’”, 5 March 1943; Woods, “News Commentaries”, 3 March 1943; see also Porter, “News Commentaries”, 5 March 1943.

“Germans” left and British forces arrived. “They’re both English-speaking luckily,” he said of the two Henley-on-Thames residents.<sup>124</sup>

Macdonald Hastings focused on the BBC when he reported on the exercise for the June 1944 issue of *Picture Post* magazine. He explained that while the soldiers taking part must have considered it another “dull little exercise”, Spartan (which he did not call by name) was covered by the entire pre-invasion team of BBC reporters, writers and engineers, and “was word-reported and sound-recorded more fully than any of the great battles of the war.” Hastings noted that the exercise helped the Corporation choose its final War Reporting Unit for Normandy and put the BBC personnel through a myriad of trials.<sup>125</sup> He reported:

The B.B.C. men were tested under all kinds of conditions. They broadcast dummy dispatches. They put headlines on imaginary news. They worked out ways of getting recording vans over obstacles, tested out their equipment’s maximum performance, found out new methods of recording the sound effects of the war. They also attended lectures on military affairs, got used to working together as a team, and put in a stern course of physical training under the eye of an army instructor.<sup>126</sup>

The article was accompanied by photographs of some of the correspondents who took part, along with captions containing biographical and work history on each of them. Howard Marshall, Frank Gillard, Robert Barr, Pierre LeFevre, Stewart MacPherson, Colin Wills, Stanley Maxted, Richard North, Chester Wilmot, Richard Dimpleby, and Robert Dunnett, who was also the subject of the photograph that adorned the magazine’s cover, were all shown gathering the news of the campaign in the English countryside.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Vaughan-Thomas, “Caversham Bridge, Reading”, 7 March 1943; Reynolds, “...broadcasting from Eastern...”, n.d.; MacPherson, “Commentary on Tanks Moving Up”, 7 March 1943; Vizard, “Interview With Housewife and Shop Keeper in Henley”, 8 March 1943.

<sup>125</sup> MacDonald Hastings, “How the B.B.C. Covers the Invasion”, *Picture Post*, 17 June 1944, Vol. 23. No. 12, p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

The Spartan exercise, however, was not limited to BBC personnel. Peter Stursberg of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, on his first assignment after gaining war correspondent accreditation, recalled being driven from London to a location outside Oxford for a military briefing with approximately fifty other Canadian, British and American reporters. Stursberg explained the logistics of the operation included mixed British and Canadian forces versus “the enemy”, with the RAF taking part as air support for ground units. The area in which they conducted the manoeuvres along the Thames was divided into fictional territories: “Eastland”, the enemy-held territory that included London; “Southland”, a pro-Axis area occupied by the British; and “Westland”, a neutral territory. The reporters, according to Stursberg, debated which fake territory represented which real area of continental Europe. Perhaps just as important to the correspondents as the interaction with the armed forces was the taste of life in the field that they experienced.<sup>128</sup> Stursberg recalled:

We correspondents stayed at either corps or divisional headquarters at night, but we did not sleep indoors. We were lucky if we got a tent, and usually we set up our camp-beds under the trees and formed our vehicles into a square round us to prevent the wind blowing on us. The weather was fine, but it was cold, for Spartan took place at the end of February and the beginning of March. We would wake up in the morning with our sleeping-bags white with hoar-frost. We would be cold by the time we pulled on our boots, and we would have breakfast of boiled bacon and hard tack and tea before we ever thought of washing even our teeth.<sup>129</sup>

Stursberg also caught a glimpse of the challenges he and other correspondents would face while attempting to report a fast-flowing war:

I began to realize the difficulties in covering a modern army on the move. We were anxious to see some of the tank battles which were expected to develop, but we never did see them. Nobody could tell us definitely where the fighting was taking place. Not even the generals

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<sup>128</sup> Peter Stursberg, *Journey Into Victory: Up the Alaska Highway and to Sicily and Italy* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1944), pp. 56-59.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

could give us any pinpoint reference, as the front was so fluid that information was out of date before it was received.<sup>130</sup>

This problem of a continually shifting theatre had already proved to be a significant hindrance in the real battle zones and would continue to hamper reporters long after Operation Spartan was completed.

Following the exercise, there were evaluations submitted to BBC managers by reporters, editors, and technicians, which provide interesting reading on how well prepared the radio journalists were for their parts in the upcoming coverage of the second front. Boyd, for example, praised the engineers for good sound quality and quick transmissions. Conversely, he critiqued the Spartan reporters on various points: they did not provide enough background information on the war or use their “powers of observation” to the fullest in describing scenes; were at times overly dramatic and included material that should have been censored; and improperly labelled recording discs.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, part of the training with the home forces was meant to cover “Tactical experiment and planning” with mobile recording equipment. The head of engineering found that Operation Spartan had been a valuable lesson on dubbing and censoring in the field and the effectiveness of recording equipment; but a portable film recorder failed to pass muster.<sup>132</sup> These technical aspects will be further analysed in a later chapter.

Dimbleby also produced a long memorandum on the “many problems” encountered during the Spartan exercise.<sup>133</sup> He warned against deploying personnel, especially engineers, unprepared to adopt a military demeanour: “At present they do not seem to realise that by donning the uniform, the correspondent is assuming automatically the status and most of the privileges of an officer, a status for which any soldier or

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>131</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Barr, “Exercise Spartan: Features Report”, 15 March 1943.

<sup>132</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942; BBC WAC R28/280/2, Pulling, “Spartan Exercise – March 1943”, 20 March 1943.

<sup>133</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Dimbleby to Ryan, “Report on Spartan Exercise”, 15 March 1943.

officer-cadet must work and train.” He contended that it was not enough to be friendly with officers; to be taken into their confidence the BBC personnel had to show “military discipline and bearing.” Dimpleby singled out the engineer with whom he was paired during Spartan as an example. The young technician had worn his cap “at a rakish angle” and kept a cigarette constantly dangling from his lip even while talking to a general, whom he did not salute and had hailed by calling, “I say.” He also “addressed private soldiers, military policemen and sentries, as ‘old boy’.” The BBC’s most experienced war correspondent warned that to do the job properly, both reporters and engineers “simply must fit ourselves into the landscape and conduct ourselves in accordance with the rank whose privileges we enjoy.”<sup>134</sup> BBC Director of Outside Broadcasts Michael Standing agreed with Dimpleby that Spartan proved WRU personnel should be educated in military ways before deployment on “the real job”. He stated in a memorandum:

It was pretty clear that those lacking military knowledge were apt to flounder for fear of making errors and also were often unable to appreciate the full significance of local developments. It is imperative, therefore, that anyone accompanying the Army on actual operations should be thoroughly versed in his subject. If necessary, personnel should be released from some of their present duties to acquire this background.<sup>135</sup>

News Controller A.P. Ryan had already asked the War Office a month earlier for permission to send BBC personnel on other exercises, pointing out the benefit of having reporters with background knowledge and first-hand experience of the military’s “special technique”.<sup>136</sup> This became a reality following a presentation of Spartan recordings made to the Secretary of State for War and senior officers. General Bernard Paget, Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, agreed to attach two BBC teams to army units, one British and one Canadian, in order “to train our people in general military

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2 , “Broadcasting ‘Exercise’”, 15 March 1943.

<sup>136</sup> BBC WAC, R28/279, Ryan to F.C. Gillman, Combined Operations Headquarters, 4 February 194.

routine and practice; to give them a chance of really getting to know the modern British soldier".<sup>137</sup> The plan to train correspondents was defined in a meeting in March 1943 with a Major General Lawson, who agreed to assign each reporter to a battalion for a fortnight to undergo basic military education, including reading military texts and instruction in subjects such as field cooking.<sup>138</sup> WRU personnel were directed by editors and administrators to act with military bearing, remembering seemingly inconsequential things such as saluting: "When you get into the field remember that while you are not a soldier you are in uniform and working with soldiers. They will watch you carefully and upon the impression you make will depend to a considerable extent the facilities you are given for doing your job as a broadcaster."<sup>139</sup> The BBC's military training began in the late spring of 1943 and continued in various guises for a year. Tom Hickman details the nature of this initiation into military life:

In the following months a physical training instructor tuned them up for life in the front line. They were instructed in gunnery, signals, reconnaissance, aeroplane and tank recognition and map-reading. They went on assault courses and battle courses, crossed rivers on ropes, ducked under live ammunition, lived rough. Some were attached to regular Army units, finding themselves competing physically with men fifteen years their junior; Stewart MacPherson, for example... trained with the Grenadier Guards. 'The compelling objective was to become a member of the Unit,' he wrote.<sup>140</sup>

Besides undergoing physical training, correspondents studied topics relevant to their reporting assignments. A course at the School of Military Intelligence, Matlock, included lectures on battle order, German army organisation, and measures to protect

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<sup>137</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, "Playback. Mr. Foot's Room. 9.30 p.m."; "Playback of Army Manoeuvres Recordings"; de Lotbiniere to Whitehouse, "Front Line Reporting".

<sup>138</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, "Accommodation for Training Scheme", 6 March 1944.

<sup>139</sup> Engineers were excluded from certain training activities. BBC WAC R28/280/2, "Front Line Reporting", 31 March 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/3, "Notes on the B.B.C.'s War Reporting Unit", 20 July 1943; "Note of Meeting in Mr. Foot's Room at the B.B.C. on March 31st", 1 April 1943.

<sup>140</sup> Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), p. 167.



military secrets while in public or a prisoner of war. Field press censorship was also covered; the correspondents were not to consider censorship an impediment, but “another art to be studied,” a way of making sure information that could aid the enemy did not reach the airwaves. According to a BBC internal report, one of the Matlock lectures “was illustrated by a dramatic piece in which a German Intelligence Officer was seen in his Information Room – tuned in to the BBC 9 o’clock News!” Additionally, a week-long course at the Ministry of Information detailed how material was censored, the army personnel who would work with reporters, defence notices that dictated the censorship regulations, and equipment on the army’s “secret list.”<sup>141</sup> Correspondents were also advised on the Geneva Convention and told to provide only name and profession if captured.<sup>142</sup>

Even before this military instruction, the BBC had begun providing correspondents with updated broadcast training. This included specific ways of formatting, labelling, and handling recording discs; submitting scripts and the types of stories desired for each BBC branch; preferred techniques for interviewing, commentary, and sound effects; the importance of proper pronunciation of foreign names; methods of conveying work back to London; and even how to conduct audience research for the BBC’s European Division. They were also ordered to prevent equipment from falling into enemy hands: “Members of the team must know the quickest way to destroy a recording truck.”<sup>143</sup> In the same vein, Standing suggested in early 1943 the creation of a “broadcasting battle school” under which reporters, commentators, feature writers, and recording engineers could be trained to adapt these specialties to “fighting conditions” and acquire an understanding of each other’s work, as to be interchangeable in emergencies.<sup>144</sup> A cross-posting scheme was also established for the different

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<sup>141</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/3, De Lotbiniere to Ryan, “Intelligence Course at Matlock, May 19th–20th”, 21 May 1943; de Lotbiniere to Ryan, “Censorship Course at M.o.I., May 31st to June 5th”, 7 June 1943; Boyd and Hawkins, p. 19.

<sup>142</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/3, “Notes On The B.B.C.’s War Reporting Unit”, 20 July 1943. This report is an excellent summary of WRU goals, functions, and methods.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Standing to Nicolls, “Front Line Broadcasting”, 19 January 1943.

broadcasting specialties. This began with Dimbleby's reassignment in December 1942 from news to Outside Broadcasts. As Overseas Controller J.B. Clark explained in a letter to him: "This is an exchange of people between News Talks and O.B's, so that the expert technique of running commentaries can be shared by our people whom we may wish to send overseas, and at the same time, the O.B. men may become used to the particular problems of news reporting."<sup>145</sup>

The BBC recognized that "actuality" in war reports – which made a "very great impression on listeners"<sup>146</sup> – not only meant battle noises in the background but also vivid, accurate descriptions as the event unfolded, a method that was absent from studio news bulletins. Yet, as Clark indicated, news coverage had its own rules and pitfalls that needed to be understood. One of the first and most memorable examples of the melding of the two techniques had already been displayed in Charles Gardner's July 1940 description of an aerial dogfight over "Hellfire Corner" in Kent:

There's one coming down in flames—there, somebody's hit a German—and he's coming down—there's a long streak—he's coming down completely out of control—a long streak of smoke – ah, the man's bailed out by parachute—the pilot's bailed out by parachute—he's a Junkers 87 and he's going to slap into the sea and there he goes—SMASH... Oh boy, I've never seen anything so good as this—the RAF fighters have really got those boys taped.<sup>147</sup>

The recording was criticised by some members of the public who accused Gardner of sounding as if he was commenting on a live sports match rather than the violent clash of RAF and German aircraft, but for others it was a realistic taste of the war that encapsulated their own feelings toward the marauding Luftwaffe. In defending Gardner's excited reporting of the dogfight over the channel, Frank Gillard articulated the progressive attitude of the BBC: "There was no agreed technique for reporting this

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<sup>145</sup> BBC WAC, R28/280/1, Clark to Dimbleby, 3 December 1942.

<sup>146</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/2, Snagge to Nicolls, "Front Line Broadcasting", 5 February 1943.

<sup>147</sup> Knightley, p. 255.

kind of conflict.”<sup>148</sup> For the Corporation, Gardner’s broadcast was a zestful personal style that would characterise the remainder of its reporting on the conflict. This was the “expert technique” Clark and the BBC wanted war correspondents to master.

Less than a month before D-Day, Ryan sent a memorandum to BBC correspondents and engineers, essentially providing their final training lesson. The news head reminded them of key points such as avoiding embellishment, since servicemen would know truth from tales; keeping material timely and without need of extensive editing; and favouring voices – of troops and liberated citizens – over sound effects. He warned, “Field service is no picnic”, and then offered an estimation of the upcoming assignment, which could have been sent to all war correspondents, broadcast or print:

There will be times when you get bored and depressed because you feel you are not in the picture. You will find yourself temporarily in a backwater and hear some of your colleagues have been in the thick of it, but by and large you handful of men have been chosen to undertake the most important assignment so far known to broadcasting. Good luck.<sup>149</sup>

Clearly the task of covering the Second World War began even before the correspondents were deployed to the battle theatres in Europe and North Africa. Without the significant vetting done by the media organisations in order to choose the right sort of reporters, as well as the experience that had already been accrued by veteran journalists or the training undertaken by many of those who had never covered a battleground, the reporting of the war would not have been as effective and, therefore, of far less use to the public whose access to information about the progress of the conflict played a crucial part in holding the nation together.

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<sup>148</sup> Hickman, p. 150.

<sup>149</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, Ryan to Maxted, 8 May 1944.

## Supporting the Correspondent

Having selected and in some cases formally trained their field reporters, news organisations needed to then ensure they were providing the support that the correspondents required to properly do their jobs, and that required money. Journalist John Boylan explained in 1945 how the wartime news industry involved such fierce competition that the concept of news without cost “created Homeric laughter in a world asked to regard free speech as something like free air.”<sup>150</sup> Boylan stated: “Speech was not free. It was one of the most valuable commodities in a war economy. Throughout the world anxious people at home waited in suspense for word from the various fields of battle.”<sup>151</sup> Getting the word from the battle zones to millions of eager readers and listeners therefore was big business and a major concern for media organisations was how to finance their war correspondents in terms of salaries, insurance, and other institutional and personal expenses. It also cost both the employers and their correspondents numerous headaches. Field expenses caused arguments between the journalists seeking more resources and their managers who wanted to keep costs down, and disagreements over salaries were recurrent among correspondents in both press and broadcast outlets. The news organisations also had to take into consideration the payment of life insurance policies for the correspondents they sent into such dangerous circumstances. These expenses did not come cheap, especially considering the corporations had to fund each correspondent individually and the payments had to be made on a recurring basis, either annually or on some other set schedule. Timely arrangements had to be made with the insurance companies and, in the case of a reporter being killed, the organisations had to help facilitate payments to the families, making this both a costly and time-consuming endeavour. Finally, the organisations had to provide monetary support for correspondents who fell into enemy hands. This included

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<sup>150</sup> John Boylan, “And Now Nothing Will Be Restrained From Them”, *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (December 1945), p. 261.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

payments made to the War Office in order for it to compensate foreign governments to maintain journalists while they were held in Prisoner of War camps.

These were all circumstances specific to media companies with reporters covering the British and Dominion forces and set them apart from other industries and professions. Therefore, in order to provide context to the salaries and expenses of news organisations, it is first important to consider the occupational framework of Britain as a whole during the years prior to as well as during the Second World War.

### **The People's Pay**

It might be considered helpful to not only provide wartime salaries but also to convert them into current values to offer greater understanding to the modern reader who might be unfamiliar with the worth of money in the first half of the twentieth century, when salaries were much lower than present day. Yet that poses difficulties considering the differing circumstances that can be taken into account such as inflation, the fluctuating value of industries in the overall economy, and various other issues. There are websites that convert the value of money in the past to modern rates, but these conversions do not take into account all factors, or they use combinations of factors that do not necessarily make an accurate comparison, and each conversion could be misleading. For example, when using the website MeasuringWorth.com, an attempt to convert £100 in 1940 to its value in 2013 calculates that the “relative value” is between £4,747 and £22,050. The website states that this may not be the best answer and that there is more than one conversion factor to be considered: “The best measure of the relative value over time depends on if you are interested in comparing the cost or value of a Commodity, Income or Wealth, or a Project.”<sup>152</sup> Using the British National Archives online Currency Converter brings up direct conversions of currency rates from year to year throughout history but cannot be considered to employ all the requisite factors to make comparisons of salaries. Therefore, as this chapter analyses both the

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<sup>152</sup> MeasuringWorth.com, “Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present”, <<http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare>> (accessed 29 March 2014).

salaries of the war correspondents and the capital spent on funding the correspondents with insurance and other necessities, using these conversions to modern money is impractical. The figures presented will subsequently remain within their historical levels rather than trying to make what might be an incorrect direct conversion to modern currency.

In his book, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-79*, Guy Routh examines the occupational classes of workers in Britain, but only for specific years due to his use of figures from the census, which was conducted once per decade and then not carried out at all in 1941 due to the war. Routh finds that the number of “professional” class workers – business owners and managers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, scientists and writers – were as follows (rounded to the nearest thousand) in the years prior to the Second World War: 1911 – 560,000; 1921 – 680,000; 1931 – 728,000. He writes that this was not, however, a large segment of the entire working population. “The professionals, though their proportion has more than doubled, remain quite a small minority of the whole, their growth having been exceeded by that of the clerks.” The numbers of British clerical workers were as follows: 1911 – 887,000; 1921 – 1,300,000; 1931 – 1,465,000. Still, both of these groups were dwarfed by the size of the occupational class of manual workers: 1911 – 18,347,000; 1921 – 19,333,000; 1931 – 21,029,000.<sup>153</sup> The number of workers in the professional sub-category of writers, which included journalists, did not make any significant dent in the overall working pool: 1911 – 15,000; 1921 – 14,000; 1931 – 21,000; even by 1951 that number had only increased to 26,000.<sup>154</sup> Yet presumably because there were far fewer of them and their work was specialized and considered significant and influential in society, journalists were paid better than clerks and manual labourers.

In trying to measure pay rates by occupational class, Routh explains there are problems that arise due to the economic conditions of the different times:

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<sup>153</sup> Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-79* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1980), pp. 5-7.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Here we are subject to two restraints: one concerning the limitations of the available information, the other the instability of the pay structure.... The years 1921 and 1951 were both periods of violent economic change, one the aftermath of the First World War, the other the middle of the Korean War; and 1931 was a year of falling prices, rising unemployment and deepening depression. But there were periods of comparative stability from 1906 to 1914, 1923 to 1928, and 1934 to 1938.<sup>155</sup>

According to Routh, the average annual earnings for those in the “higher professional” class, in which he includes writers, were as follows: 1913-14 – £328; 1922-24 – £582; 1935-36 – £634. It should be kept in mind that this grouping of the highest professionals includes business owners and upper managers who undoubtedly had higher earnings than journalists; in fact, Routh calculates that the “lower professional” class earned markedly smaller yearly average salaries: 1913-14 – £155; 1922-24 – £320; 1935-36 – £308.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, a determination of the average salary of a journalist depends on whether they are considered higher or lower professionals; as will be shown further on, their status often depended on factors such as experience, perceived importance to the organisation and the medium in which they worked, and these could change over the lifespan of a journalist’s career. Still, a comparison can be made with the salaries of clerks, foremen and manual labourers – those considered below professionals in Routh’s designated occupational classes – over the same period of years. Foremen were paid the following average annual salaries: 1913-14 – £123; 1922-24 – £268; 1935-36 – £273. Meanwhile, clerical workers earned an annual average salary that was somewhat lower: 1913-14 – £99; 1922-24 – £182; 1935-36 – £192. (These pay scales for foremen and clerks account for male workers, while female employees in similar positions earned approximately half of what males were paid, although it could be somewhat less or more than half depending on the category and year.) The pay for manual labourers continues to drop down the national scale. For a “skilled” labourer, the average annual salaries were: 1913-14 – £44; 1922-24 – £87; 1935-36 – £86. Taking into account “unskilled” labourers, the average drops further:

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

1913-14 – £28; 1922-24 – £73; 1935-36 – £73.<sup>157</sup> According to economic historian Sidney Pollard's work, *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967*, in the years immediately before the Second World War, the working class saw a markedly enhanced financial situation; he writes, "Most estimates put the increase in real weekly wages between the pre-war years and 1937-8 at between 20% and 33%, while the working day was shorter by about one hour." Pollard notes that once the war began the economic situation for the workers further improved while it became worse for those who had wealth:

The maintenance or increase of real wages at a time when measures of profit limitation were in force... and when heavy burdens of taxation reduced the real incomes of the rich, implied for the second [sic] World War, as it did in the first, a substantial redistribution of incomes in favour of wage-earners. The tax burden of the war on wage-earners was estimated at only 13-17% in the later years of the war, compared with 35-44% on non-wage-earners.<sup>158</sup>

In his 1968 book, *Britain's Economic Growth 1920-1966*, A.J. Youngson, an Edinburgh University political economist, examines the value specifically of those working in agriculture and in the engineering fields that produced munitions and other materials integral to the war. He writes, "The labour force in agriculture rose from 711,000 in 1939 to 887,000 in 1945. The labour force in engineering... and in chemicals (including explosives) rose from 3.1 [million] to a peak of 5.2 [million] in 1943."<sup>159</sup> While Routh's aforementioned "higher professionals" might have received greater salaries, Youngson contends that the war years greatly increased the number of workers in what Routh might consider the "lower" fields of agriculture and engineering, as well as the general worth of their product: "By the end of the war, the value of net agricultural output at constant prices was about 35 per cent higher than in 1939...."

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>158</sup> Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967*, second edition (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.), pp. 291, 344.

<sup>159</sup> A.J. Youngson, *Britain's Economic Growth 1920-1966*, second edition (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968), p. 146.



Farmers, moreover, became prosperous. The spur to increased production was higher profit.” Youngson explains that farming in the 1930s was simply a matter of covering costs, but during the war the demand for their foodstuffs and the increased mechanization of the industry led to the government being more generous with the set prices. While not providing any specific figures about the money that agricultural workers were paid, he clearly indicates it was an improvement over the pre-war years: “Farmers discovered that farming for the nation to government order was a profitable proposition.” Regarding the specific industry of fuel, Youngson writes that there was also a boon in production and profits: “...in 1944 the Ministry of Fuel carried through an extensive overhaul of the entire wage structure in the mines; and the miners, who in 1942 had been in the lower half of the earnings league, reached 1945 with a level or earnings among the highest in the country.”<sup>160</sup>

During the Second World War the contribution of these workers – especially labourers in factories, on farms, or within other entities producing essential goods both for the military and the civilian population – would have been seen as invaluable to the economy and the effort to achieve victory. Yet despite there being a great many more workers outside of the “professional” class, when taking into account the overall British job market, journalists were clearly still considered worthy of higher pay. War correspondents, in addition to being a select breed among their fellow journalists, were even more rarefied in society; just by deploying to a war theatre, their salaries usually increased above those of their colleagues with similar experience and certainly more than their fellow citizens in working class employment. In the case of veteran reporters, this could be hundreds of pounds more annually than those of clerical workers and labourers, which was a significant gap for that time period and especially while the nation was suffering financial austerity.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp. 143, 152.

## Media Pay

Historically the British press suffered ups and downs in its collective bottom line, but since the late 19th century the industry had progressively increased profits and could afford to treat its workers well in comparison with other business sectors. Donald Read explains that Reuters had a history of being generous providers for its employees, although certain standards were expected to be met not only in their work, but in their demeanour and behaviour: "...in 1914 they numbered about 150 [employees] in London. Conditions of service were quite good for the period. But staff were not expected to grumble, and no trade unions functioned within Reuters." He adds that salaries were comfortable, with a senior sub-editor at the start of the First World War receiving approximately £400 per annum, while a "specialist reporter" could earn as much as £700 per year.<sup>161</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War marked the beginning of lean years for Britain as a whole, but the media organisations did not suffer as much as others; in fact, quite the opposite. *The Times*, for instance, saw an increase in its profits during the war. Iverach McDonald explains:

The company had more money as the war went on. By the time it ended [General Manager Christopher] Kent could look back on five years of commercial success both with *The Times* itself and with the company as a whole. The paper had made a loss of £17,992 in 1940, the first year's loss in the paper's history. But then profits rose: 1941 – £76,123, 1942 – £309,364, 1943 – £357,557, 1944 – £403,107, 1945 – £428,498. That was for the paper alone. For the company that owned the newspaper – The Times Publishing Company Limited – the profits were not so large; they rose from £45,000 in 1941 to £141,000 in 1945. Nonetheless the results were satisfactory amid all the dangers and upheavals of war."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters 1849-1989* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 73.

<sup>162</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, vol. V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), p. 68.

In fact, the overall situation improved for the entire press industry, despite the paper rationing that shrunk publications and helped the BBC become more of a force in the overall media landscape with its increased audience. McDonald recounts how *The Times* was not the only newspaper to enjoy commercial success during the war years:

So did most other newspapers. It is true that the cost of newsprint went on rising, but the increase was offset by the fewer numbers of pages printed and, in the case of *The Times*, by the cut in circulation. Staffs were smaller than before the war. Sales promotion was no longer a costly affair. Though the income on the advertising side was reduced so was the expenditure. The war which brought many appalling problems greatly simplified others. In fact several newspapers which had almost exhausted themselves in the fierce competition between the wars found respite from such out-and-out rivalry during the war.<sup>163</sup>

Despite this increased financial security during the war, there were still numerous disputes between the correspondents and their employers regarding money, both in the press and the burgeoning BBC.

### *Correspondent Salaries*

Even though war reporting constituted a special circumstance for any media organisation hoping to be involved in coverage of the greatest news story of the century, they were all still businesses holding tightly onto the purse strings. Subsequently, reporters and management engaging in disagreements over salaries was not uncommon. However, all war correspondents – both seasoned foreign reporters and those who were elevated from the ranks – received pay increases for stepping onto the battlefield. The companies also frequently increased the salaries of most reporters as the war progressed and the correspondents became more adept at their jobs and gained greater access to the newsmakers.

The war was a boon to reporters who had no previous experience covering foreign nations or conflicts. Their salaries as combat reporters increased at a far more rapid pace than if they had stayed in Britain in less hazardous and strenuous situations. Two good

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

examples would be Doon Campbell and George Henry Gerald Norman. Following work on the *News Chronicle* in France, *The Star* of Johannesburg, and the *Natal Daily News*, also in South Africa, Norman came to *The Times* on a trial period in January 1939 and did not receive a weekly salary of £5 until March. Continuing the trial until May, he was hired as a foreign desk sub-editor for another six-month trial period at £8.8 (eight pounds, eight shillings)<sup>164</sup> per week. On New Year's Day 1940, now as a full-time staffer, his salary increased to £9.9 weekly, or £514 yearly. He waited until February 1941 for his next rise, to £10.10 weekly, amounting to £525 yearly, but then things took off. He gained a pay rise to £600 per year in September 1941. A year later, his salary jumped again upon his appointment as a war correspondent in Egypt with a salary of £750 per annum, with an extra £2 daily for subsistence once he reached Cairo on 2 November. While he did not see another salary increase during the course of the war, he received a lump payment of £100 in 1943 and another in 1944. He transferred to Paris in March 1945 and kept the same salary with a daily expenses increase to £3.10.<sup>165</sup> Reuters raised Doon Campbell's salary when he was deployed in November 1943 to Allied headquarters in Algiers from £350 pre-war to £500 yearly, with expenses of £1.50 per day. He also received a one-time allowance of £75 to purchase kit, such as a war correspondent's uniform and other necessary field supplies. During the war his yearly salary rose to £650 and then on 1 April 1945 peaked at £750.<sup>166</sup>

Many veteran reporters had their already hefty pay cheques padded by fieldwork, as the news organisations had a policy of providing much higher salaries to the best

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<sup>164</sup> Before 1971, the UK monetary system used pounds, shillings and pence as the standard units of currency (although there were also coins smaller than a penny such as farthings and halfpence in use as well, for a time). One shilling was designated as 1s and twenty shillings equalled one pound. One penny was designated as 1d and multiple pennies were called pence, with twelve pence equalling one shilling and 240 pence equalling one pound. Therefore, Norman's weekly salary written as £8.8 indicated eight pounds and eight shillings. Had his salary included an additional eight pence, it would read as £8.8.8 or £8.8s.8d, both of which are formats that will appear later in the chapter.

<sup>165</sup> TNL Archive, George Henry Gerald Norman – Managerial File 1 (1939-1949), *The Times*, Norman, Gerald, overview note.

<sup>166</sup> A. Doon Campbell, *Magic Mistress: A 30-year affair with Reuters* (Norwich, England: Tagman Press, 2000), p. 31; Reuters Archive Record, Campbell, 1/9145242, Carter to Campbell, 29 March 1945; Walters to Alton, 15 May 1945.

people covering the war. However, even this did not always satisfy some of the correspondents.

Christopher Dittmar Rawson Lumby was one of those senior reporters whose solid financial position was improved by the Second World War, although he still found reason to express discontent. He joined *The Times* in February 1914 in its Paris office at a salary of £4 per week, £208 annually, which was increased to £6 weekly, £312 per annum, the following year. By June 1919 his pay had been raised to £900 per year when he took over coverage of Warsaw. In the years between 1925 and 1931, Lumby worked for the newspaper in various locations around Europe including Greece, Romania, and Belgrade in Serbia, where his annual salary was £1,000 plus £100 yearly expenses. As shown by the national occupational pay figures discussed earlier in the chapter, for the time period this was well above the averages of those working in most other vocations. In 1931 he took up a post in Cairo in what must have been a very sweet deal for a journalist: £1,000 salary, £250 expenses plus additional expenses if needed, and paid travel back to England every other year. In October 1937 he was posted to Rome at £1,000 salary per annum plus an annual £300 cost of living allowance on top of £100 yearly expenses. He worked in Rotterdam on an equivalent financial package from September 1939 to June 1940, after which he deployed to Cairo for war reporting on the same salary plus £250 annual expenses and another £2 daily when working outside the city; the expenses were increased to £60 monthly in October 1940 to cover everything in and out of Cairo. He returned to London, making a salary, reduced from his overseas work, of £1,250, until November 1943 when he left for Tangiers and later Rome, both on similar salaries to his previous foreign postings, although in Rome *The Times* also paid for his office and a third of his flat rental.<sup>167</sup>

Lumby should have been happy in light of his rather extravagant pay package compared to other journalists, and the majority of those employed in Britain, but that was not always the case. In a 14 April 1943 letter to *The Times* Manager Christopher S. Kent, Lumby expressed mixed emotions about his latest bonus: “Many thanks for your

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<sup>167</sup> TNL Archive, C.D.R. Lumby Management File (1) 1913-1931, *The Times*, Lumby, C.D.R., overview note.

letter of the 12th inst. I am very grateful to the pper [sic] for making me a special grant of £250 in recognition of my work abroad during the war. I should, however, have greatly preferred that the appreciation should express itself in an increase in my salary.” He pointed out that he had not received a pay rise since he went to Cairo in 1931, although he had “been deemed worthy since then to fill the posts of Chief Correspondent in Rome and Berlin, both of which are considerably more important than Cairo.” He wrote that Ralph Deakin, the paper’s foreign news editor, had recently characterized him as “almost the senior member of the corps of ‘Times’ foreign correspondents, and a man from whose experience and judgment the paper hopes to profit.” Despite this, Lumby alleged, “I am still not considered to deserve a rise, although the cost of living has increased at least by 25% since the outbreak of war.” He noted that grants and subsistence allowances only compensated in part for a low salary and that sterling would not regain its same purchasing power, based on the experience of the previous world war, and that his pension would be based on pre-war pounds. Keeping his salary at its present level was an “injustice”, Lumby wrote, adding that he was sending copies of the letter to the newspaper’s chairman and editor. A reply letter two weeks later from Kent confirmed Lumby’s salary would increase by £250.<sup>168</sup>

P.D.S. Ure also experienced the policy at *The Times* of receiving “special payments”, rather than salary increases, despite being promised a yearly rise as long as he was in a war theatre. Appointed to the Parliamentary reporting staff in November 1928 at £525 yearly, he transferred to the news reporting staff in 1935 but by 1936 still only made £11.11 weekly, amounting to £577 per year. In December 1941 he got an increase to £650 per annum, which went up to £750 when he became a war correspondent on 25 October 1942. Two days before his appointment he received a memorandum from manager Kent saying, “From the time you leave, and while acting as War Correspondent, we will increase your salary by the rate of £100 (One Hundred Pounds) per annum. When you return and resume your ordinary duties this increase will cease, but the whole matter of your salary shall be reconsidered.” That did not happen.

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<sup>168</sup> TNL Archive, C.D.R. Lumby Management File (2) 1932-1946, *The Times*, Lumby to Kent, 14 April 1943; Manager to Lumby, 28 April 1943.

Internal records show that Ure received a yearly special payment of £100 in May 1943, another of £200 in July 1944, payments of £100 each in January and May 1945, and finally a £200 payment in September 1945. The paper's records indicate that he returned to work at its headquarters in Publishing House Square on 1 December 1945 at a salary of £750, the same as it had been when he began as a war correspondent.<sup>169</sup>

Combat correspondents on *The Times* were not the only ones complaining about their earnings during the war; their colleagues in London working as domestic reporters and sub-editors handed the managers a letter in July 1941 stating they were unhappy taking salaries below those of their equals at other publications. The letter read in part:

We know that we are the lowest paid Editorial staff in London daily journalism. We believe that, with few exceptions, our salaries would be no more than commensurate with the services we render if the present rates were raised by at least one-third.... It can hardly be in the interests of the greatest newspaper in the world that many members of its staff should be dissatisfied because their remunerations falls below the Fleet Street level.<sup>170</sup>

With this in mind, the ongoing complaints by some war correspondents in the field about their salaries and expense accounts – which were undoubtedly higher than the earnings of those in London who were checking their copy – would have been an insult if those underpaid sub-editors had learned of it, although it is unlikely the details of the disputes were ever known outside of the discussions between the correspondents and management.

There were similar disputes on the broadcasting side of the news. Guy Byam and Kent Stevenson of the BBC were each in frequent clashes with the Corporation over their salaries, although both received increases in pay upon becoming war correspondents.

Prior to joining the BBC, Guy Frederick Byam-Corstiaens was a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, from which he was discharged after cordite from a

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<sup>169</sup> TNL Archive, Ure, Phillip Dumbar Seymour – Managerial File (1928-1964), *The Times*, Ure P.D.S., 5.9.1896; Manager to Ure, 23 October 1942.

<sup>170</sup> McDonald, p. 65.

high explosive shell blinded him in one eye. Byam was educated in France, including the Sorbonne, and was fluent in French and proficient in German and Spanish. In October 1942 the Corporation took him on as a temporary sub-editor in the French section, but Byam – he dropped the second half of his surname for work – began his arguments over money before even before he started. The Corporation offered him £8 weekly plus a cost-of-living bonus amounting to £368 annually; Byam said he would not accept less than the £380 he made in his previous job as an aeronautics research engineer. He took the job, however, and in January 1943 was made a production assistant. In late April his salary increased to £420 per year, although by June he had not signed his contract, complaining to management that this was not enough to “pay his way”; he signed after European Establishment division head Gordon Yates insisted he was at the right salary for the job. Following his first overseas reporting trip with the Royal Navy to Canada, which resulted in a minor disagreement with the accounting office over expenses (in this case Byam does not appear to have been unreasonable), he was back to complaining about his salary in a letter to Yates dated 12 October 1943, in which he claimed the Corporation had not fulfilled its promise to readdress his pay after three months and that he was doing a yeoman’s amount of labour during work weeks averaging fifty-five to sixty-five hours. In a memorandum of 16 November detailing their subsequent meeting, Yates explained that Byam did not take the news well when told there were no valid reasons why he should receive a special salary: “He then said that if there were no likelihood of any increase in salary he would have to reconsider his whole position as he found it impossible to live on the money he was getting owing to his personal commitments.” Byam stayed on, but this was not the last time he threatened to quit over money.<sup>171</sup> In November 1943, Byam received a salary rise from £420 to £460. Yet in January 1944 he was angling for another bump in pay upon his expected transfer to the

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<sup>171</sup> BBC WAC, Byam-Corstiaens, G.F. – L1/78/1, European Interview Board, 8 Oct. 1942; J. Lammin, “Record of Interview with G. Byam-Corstiaens”, 20 Oct. 1942; Lammin to Byam-Corstiaens, 21 Oct. 1942; Yates to Byam-Corstiaens, 8 Jan. 1943; Yates, “Record of Interview with Byam-Corstiaens”, 18 June 1943; L. Fricker, “Facilities Visit: H.G. Venebles and G.F. Byam-Corstiaens”, 24 Sept. 1943; Byam-Corstiaens to Yates, 12 Oct. 1943; Yates, “Record of Interview with Byam-Corstiaens”, 16 Nov. 1943.



War Reporting Unit. Then in February, he complained about being moved to a monthly pay scheme. Internal correspondence indicates that each time Byam received an increase he still found himself “living from hand to mouth”. An 18 February memorandum from Yates explained:

[Byam stated that] he was extremely badly paid for the important work that he was doing for the Corporation and with suitable dramatic gestures informed me that if an improvement in his salary position could not be made he would be forced to hand in his resignation and go and seek his fortune elsewhere – which he thought he could easily do by writing articles for the Press.<sup>172</sup>

Byam once again threatened to quit in late April, explaining to H.J. Dunkerley, the director of European Organisation, that his BBC work severely interfered with his obligations to the Home Guard; Dunkerley arranged for Byam to be relieved of Home Guard duty. In the first week of May 1944 the BBC granted him a “special salary” of £750 per year in recognition of his upcoming transfer to the WRU, although only while he was a war correspondent and without the usual £100 bonus given to combat reporters. That same day the news manager sent a memorandum to the salaries accountant that read in part, “I should be glad if you would inform Byam-Corstiaens of what is going to be done for him, so that he does not inflict any more of his forceful telephone conversations upon me!”<sup>173</sup> Byam had clearly decided to make use of his preferential status at the BBC and a tactic of browbeating and threatening to quit in order to gain numerous increases in pay beyond what he might have earned even with the increased salary correspondents received upon entering a war zone.

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<sup>172</sup> BBC WAC, Byam-Corstiaens, G.F. – L1/78/1, Yates, “Mr. G. Byam-Corstiaens – his transfer to monthly pay”, 18 Feb. 1944.

<sup>173</sup> BBC WAC, Byam-Corstiaens, G.F. – L1/78/1, European Establishment Officer, Guy Frederick Byam-Corstiaens pay increment sheet, 5 Nov. 1943; Byam to Eur.E.O., 7 Jan. 1944; Yates to Byam-Corstiaens, 18 Feb. 1944; Yates, “Mr. G. Byam-Corstiaens – his transfer to monthly pay”, 18 Feb. 1944; A.O. (News), “War Reporters on Active Service: European Services Division”, 3 May 1944; Dunkerley to Lt. G.C. Hutchinson, 26 April 1944.

The BBC hired Hugh Francis Kent Stevenson at the beginning of April 1941 as a broadcast presentation and production assistant with an annual salary of £465. Within a year he was in a confrontation with his boss, Empire Presentation Manager Tom W. Chalmers, which was evident in Stevenson's letter of 4 April 1942 in which he stated, "It's safe to say I will not be returning to your Department." He claimed it was due to doctor's orders regarding an unspecified ailment, but the letter made it plain he was angered by various events and would not return to the same job: "If there's no room for me elsewhere in the Corporation please let me know, and I'll get busy with my own plans for the future." Chalmers wrote an internal memorandum on 7 April stating in part, "I really think we can dispense with Mr. Stevenson's services. We are carrying on quite happily without him at the moment." Yet on 9 September 1942, the BBC offered Stevenson a new contract in the Overseas Services Division with a salary of £764, retroactive to 5 July. Even then, he still had minor dust-ups with the Corporation, such as debating whether or not he owed four pounds for meals the accountants said they had advanced him.<sup>174</sup> However, the BBC apparently looked beyond internal strife in favour of talent, which seemed to be the case with most of the correspondents it selected to help with war coverage. A memorandum in April 1943 acknowledged that Stevenson could be difficult, but his abilities were worth the trouble:

Kent Stevenson is not an easy person to fit in and he has had a somewhat chequered BBC career, but I think he is fixed up better now than previously, and he seems to be happy in his work. He is a first-rate broadcaster and a good writer and producer of interviews.... In view of his great ability as a broadcaster it is worth putting up with the administrative and personal friction that is apt to follow him around, and in any case this friction has become less acute of late.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> BBC WAC, Stevenson, Hugh Francis Kent – L1/403/1, Overseas Establishment Officer to Stevens, 1 April 1941; Stevens to Chalmers, 4 April 1942; Chalmers, "Further Fantastic Correspondence", 7 April 1942; Turnell to Stevenson, 9 Sept. 1942; Hunt, "Personal Expenses: Mr. Kent Stevenson", 4 Jan. 1943.

<sup>175</sup> BBC WAC, Stevenson, Hugh Francis Kent – L1/403/1, Gorham, "Programme Contract Staff: Annual Report", 9 April 1943.

By June of that year, Stevenson had requested another pay rise, and the programme contracts director, W.L. Streeton, advised the Corporation against it as Stevenson was already being paid above his grade and “does not appear to be undertaking a greater quantity of work, nor probably more responsibility, than was envisaged when his Programme Contract was arranged.” Still, in September a letter from Stevenson to Sir Guy Williams, the Overseas Services establishment officer, requested more than the new salary he was offered in June because he was maintaining separate homes for himself and his wife, who had moved to Canada at the start of the war: “The salary offer of £800 is slightly less than equal to the 15 guineas<sup>176</sup> per week for which I asked last May and in June 1942.... I would appreciate this salary being agreed to by you now.” In early October, Stevenson signed a contract for £800 and a £28 annual cost of living bonus. Later that month he was told he would be engaged full time as a member of the War Reporting Unit, which eventually occurred in February 1944. While he was clearly informed there was to be no change in his salary, Stevenson in April 1944 once again requested an increase, this time when he wrote to News Administrative Officer G.J.B. Allport: “I am asking your recommendation for this request that my salary be set at the maximum for my grade. If I am not now worth that to the Corporation, I never shall be. I believe I am.” He said almost four years of separation from his wife had become “intolerable” and asked to borrow the amount of the salary increase, stating, “It is my turn to act, and without further delay.” In June the BBC turned down the request, but informed him that he was eligible for an extra £100 per annum while working as a war reporter, an increase that had become a company policy for members of the WRU (with the exception of the hectoring Byam). Later that month Stevenson was reported missing in action.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> 1 guinea equals 1 pound and 1 shilling, or 21 shillings. Therefore 15 guineas equals 15 pounds and 15 shillings, or 315 shillings.

<sup>177</sup> BBC WAC, Stevenson, Hugh Francis Kent – L1/403/1, Streeton to Williams, “Mr. Kent Stevenson: Programme Contract”, 9 June 1943; Stevenson to Williams, 23 Sept. 1943; Williams to Stevenson, 5 October 1943; Allport to Stevenson, 16 Dec. 1943; Stevenson to O.N.T.E., 22 April 1944; Administrative Officer (News) to Stevenson, 7 June 1944; Allport, “Expense Sheet: H.F. Kent Stevenson”, 9 August 1944.

While some correspondents complained about their salaries, an almost equally troublesome concern for the news organisations was maintaining correspondents in the field, which was a major outlay in the overall cost of covering the war and also a source of frequent disagreements between reporters and managers.

### *Correspondent Field Expenses*

Despite being given leave to travel and follow events with more freedom than other reporters, the war correspondents were still kept in check by the accountants back home. This resulted in frustrated letters and telegrams sent to their head offices in which correspondents complained of misunderstandings by the managers and moneymen in Britain about the unique circumstances in which they worked, especially in the need for expanded expense accounts.

In order to make expense payments once the war began, correspondents were issued “advance books”, which were like chequebooks and could be used to obtain up to £100 at one time from army field cashiers. This enabled the media companies to provide monthly allowances and keep tabs on the reporters’ spending rather than just sending them into the field with large amounts of money. Most correspondent contracts stipulated not only their salaries but also the expense amounts they would be provided monthly or per annum. The various print organisations set up accounts through the Newspaper Proprietors Association and filled the accounts on a regular, pre-determined basis or when needed through payment directly to the NPA. To fill the BBC’s advance books, Allport requested a “War Correspondents Expense Fund” of £5,000 yearly, which was under the meticulous purview of the accounting department.<sup>178</sup> Reuters also kept a close watch on its expense capital; upon Doon Campbell’s return to London in May

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<sup>178</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/3, “Supplementary Estimate – Front Line Broadcasting (Reporting)”, 17 April 1943; De Lotbiniere, “Attached ‘Terms of Service’ for Members of War Reporting Unit”, 19 July 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/4, “War Correspondent’s Advance Book”, 2 December 1943. For a list of the pay grade and salary of every WRU member see BBC WAC R28/280/6, “Schedule of BBC War Correspondents”, 10 August 1944; BBC WAC R28/280/2, Allport, “Front Line Broadcasting and Financing of War Correspondents”, 4 March 1943.

1945, the company sent a letter to the NPA asking for a refund of the £79.18 in unexpended funds he had been given for expenses.<sup>179</sup>

During his coverage of the British Expeditionary Force for *The Times* beginning in October 1939, Kim Philby's advance book had a £50 monthly expense allowance that provided for withdrawals of up to £14 in any given week. This was not paid in a lump sum, however, as *The Times* set up Philby's account with NPA using a cheque for £168 to cover the first twelve weeks of expenses paid through the army's field cashier, while the amount of allocations was later raised to a maximum of £20 per withdrawal and £56 monthly.<sup>180</sup> Yet Philby still experienced trouble with the accountants. In one exchange of letters he explained that he had billed the newspaper for more than one hotel room at a time because he needed to maintain a room in "the good town of X" where the correspondents were billeted (presumably Arras, where BEF headquarters was located) while also travelling to the French front, Royal Air Force headquarters, the main hospital base, and Paris. He explained that he, like other correspondents, did not receive any military discounts or access to the army's mess hall; rather, they were made to pay normal prices and "live on the same basis as any other visitor to these parts." The cost of a hotel room included extras such as central heating, tips to servants, laundry and cleaners, while meals were a separate expense. He added that trying to form professional relationships with military personnel required socialising: "the cost of living is made higher by the necessity, at fairly frequent intervals, of returning hospitality received, and of establishing new contacts."<sup>181</sup>

The theme of requiring additional funds to socialise and entertain in order to cultivate sources comes up in the correspondence between various reporters and their managers. Yet this was nothing new to the Second World War, there was a precedent for

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<sup>179</sup> Campbell, p. 31; Reuters Archive Record, Campbell, 1/9145242, Carter to Campbell, 29 March 1945; Walters to Alton, 15 May 1945.

<sup>180</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Silverwood to Philby, BEF GHQ, 4 December 1939; Silverwood to Alton of NPA, 4 December 1939.

<sup>181</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Letter from Philby to Silverwood sent from Directorate of Public Relations, BEF GHQ, 27 November 1940.

this sort of interaction. In his 1911 book, *Notes of a War Correspondent*, Richard Harding Davis says that while covering a war (he does not say which) for an English newspaper the officers initially expected it to last only six weeks and subsequently “regarded it in the light of a picnic.” He writes, “the mess contractor grew rich furnishing, not only champagne, which in campaigns in fever countries has saved the life of many a good man, but cases of even port and burgundy, which never greatly helped any one.” Davis and the other correspondents were expected to “travel in state” by having on hand a number of luxury items to offer anyone of importance who visited them: “If, when a man halted at your tent, you could not stand him whiskey and sparklet soda, Egyptian cigarettes, compressed soup, canned meats, and marmalade, your paper was suspected of trying to do it ‘on the cheap,’ and not only of being mean, but, as this was a popular war, unpatriotic.” He explains that not being able to provide this sort of hospitality had a direct impact on the work of reporters: “Those who did not, found the staff and censor less easy of access, and the means of obtaining information more difficult.”<sup>182</sup>

While correspondents protested that it was a necessity of the job, they also did not hold back when attempting to get their employers to loosen the purse strings to fund extras that made life in the field more palatable. Many of the correspondents in the Second World War, while willing to live rough in the desert or elsewhere when the situation required, also attempted to maintain a certain level of comfortable existence above that of the foot soldiers upon whom they reported. Philby said he had a military batman in his hotel, at a price set by the War Office. He also filed a report to *The Times* over kit he lost in the retreat from Amiens on 19 May 1940, for which he hoped to be reimbursed. Listed items included large (good condition) and small (worn) leather suitcases, leather compact dressing case (good condition), pig-skin portfolio (good condition), leather stud box, camelhair overcoat (two years’ wear), lounge suit (purchased summer 1938), shirts, ties, socks, links, studs, hat, pig-skin gloves, a pair of shoes, dressing-gown (worn), two pairs of pyjamas, a pair of glasses, Royal noiseless

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<sup>182</sup> Richard Harding Davis, *Notes of a War Correspondent* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), pp. 242-243.

portable typewriter (good condition), Parker pen and pencil in case (new), Dunhill cigarette lighter (new, but needing repair), Dunhill pipe and pouch (six years old “but all the better for it”), miscellaneous underwear, slippers, scarves, toilet accessories, thermos flasks, maps, map case, pullovers, and waders. He explained the costs he gave for each item were only accurate for seven items while the rest were estimated on the basis of the Army and Navy Stores catalogue. His reimbursement request tallied £100.16; *The Times* gave him £70.<sup>183</sup>

Philby’s trouble with expenses was similar to those of his co-worker, R.W. Cooper, who received a special allowance of £40 per month, on top of his £12.12 weekly salary, when he was appointed correspondent covering the French Army in October 1939. After stints back in London and in India following the Nazi capture of France, he returned to Europe in March 1945 and worked in the Paris office of *The Times*. As with Philby, Cooper was unhappy with his expense allotment during the war, primarily because it did not provide enough to fraternise with the sources he needed for his stories. In a 22 February 1945 letter to Publishing House Square, Cooper and fellow correspondent G.H.G. Norman complained that “the nominal allowance of £2 a day barely meets subsistence charges even in the favoured conditions in which uniformed war correspondents are living, and... we strongly recommend to your consideration the sum of £3.10 as being fair and reasonable.” They explained that the exchange rate of 200 francs (fcs) to the pound “bears no relation to the inflated level of French prices.” Staying at the Scribe Hotel, where many correspondents billeted, 30fcs per day covered the bare minimum for food and lodging without any extras, such as a 220fcs bottle of wine or a 40fcs glass of fruit juice. The price for a two-person dinner was nearly £5, “and though neither of us would wish to involve the Company in unreasonable expense we feel that you will agree that our work both in the political and military fields incurs an unavoidable measure of entertaining.” They received a bump up to £3.10 daily subsistence allowance, with the stipulation it would be for a maximum of three

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<sup>183</sup> TNL Archive, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby – Managerial File, *The Times*, Letter from Philby to Silverwood sent from Directorate of Public Relations, BEF GHQ, 27 November 1940; Memorandum to Silverwood from unknown, 7 June 1940.

months.<sup>184</sup> This mention of “the favoured conditions in which uniformed war correspondents are living” with bottles of wine purchased on the company tab to entertain bureaucrats belies the image of hard-scrabble reporters enduring rough surroundings that most people had and likely still have, although that is not wrong either. As will be shown further on in the dissertation, the correspondents had both a life of relative privilege and one of hardship and danger, depending on the location and circumstances.

Dimbleby of the BBC complained about his salary as well as his expenses, despite the fact he made increasingly more as his career progressed and he became more valuable to the broadcasting organisation. He began work at the Corporation in mid-September 1936 as a Topical Talks Assistant on £350 per year and his salary steadily increased: £460 in 1937, £485 in 1938, and £525 and £542 in 1939 when he covered the Spanish Civil War and then the BEF in France. As the war advanced, he received more money: £582 in 1940, £622 in 1941, £662 in 1942, and £702 in 1943.<sup>185</sup> Even while his salary increased, Dimbleby’s expense money was a point of repeated contention between the correspondent and his managers.

Dimbleby’s disputes over expenses were similar to those of *The Times* men, especially in his protests of needing to entertain or attend events as a way of gaining access to newsmakers. Yet Dimbleby spent money far beyond the expectations of BBC administrators and clashed with London over the issue several times. The arguments arose over the BBC’s penchant for appearing to spend lavishly on its guests, while its correspondents were expected to be parsimonious. Jonathan Dimbleby tells of how his father and Charles Gardner, who also went on to fame as a BBC war reporter, received instructions to entertain speakers on the News Talks programme, if only in a meagre fashion. He writes, “The BBC maintained a room and a drinks cupboard to help them – though it was a firm (if unwritten) rule that a guest should only be offered one drink before a programme, and nothing afterwards.” In doing so, Dimbleby and Gardner were

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<sup>184</sup> TNL Archive, Staff Card, R.W. Cooper – Managerial File (1924-1958), *The Times*, Cooper and G.H.G. Norman to C.S. Kent, 22 February 1945.

<sup>185</sup> BBC WAC, Dimbleby – L1.131.1, BBC personnel document, ‘Richard Dimbleby’, 12 January 1946.



also required to mark the new, lower level of liquor on a label affixed to the bottle with their name and date after each distribution.<sup>186</sup> In the years before the war, Dimbleby apparently took it upon himself to wage an administrative battle against the penny-pinching management by making sure his guests and sources, as well as himself and his colleagues, were well taken care of on the company bill. His son explains, “Dimbleby had tastes and aspirations which sent a shudder through the Administration and a frisson of delight through less courageous colleagues.” Gardner recalled that Dimbleby led him in numerous assaults upon the all-powerful Administration: “‘they’ challenged the need to buy a pint of beer for someone who had helped us. Fighting ‘them’ became the joy of our lives.” Gardner remembered his colleague “ringing all the bells in sight in one splendid hotel and ordering a manicure, drinks in the room, and expensive sandwiches.”<sup>187</sup> While Gardner and others may have perceived these actions as a small rebellion by Dimbleby, a continued analysis of his actions leans toward the conclusion that in terms of benefits and creature comforts, he wanted to be part of the world inhabited by his high-placed sources rather than just an outside observer.

In early 1940 while with the BEF, Dimbleby took a trip to Paris to smooth over a problem regarding BBC transmissions with the French authorities; his British army escort was an aristocrat who owned a country estate and the pair placated the French officials with what Dimbleby described as “a little expensive entertaining” while they lodged at the Ritz. Later in the Middle East, he answered one of the frequent complaints from the accounting department by protesting, “I must live as normal a life as possible, and therefore I must buy glasses of orangeade in this infernal climate, cigarettes, and occasional books.”<sup>188</sup> In a memorandum to other managers dated 21 April 1944 – the year in which Dimbleby’s annual salary reached £1,000 – news administrator Allport explained he had looked back at Dimbleby’s expenses and calculated that its star

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<sup>186</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 100.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* Richard Dimbleby accompanied George VI on his 1939 tour of Canada and afterward met the accountants’ complaints over his £94 in “incidental” expenses with a note saying, “Do you expect me to account for every half penny when I am with my King?”

<sup>188</sup> Dimbleby, pp. 100-101, 109.

reporter owed the Corporation £291 due to overspending: “There is little doubt that Dimbleby was both extravagant and careless with his accounts, and the total amount expended, approximately £4,500 by him alone in just over two years exclusive of all salary, is obviously extremely high and far away in excess of anything that we allow for war correspondents at the present time.” It was Allport, however, who in a November 1943 memorandum had approved some of Dimbleby’s most extravagant Middle East expenses, including a car, a houseboat and servants who tended it, and suits for travel to Turkey where he could not wear a uniform.<sup>189</sup>

Yet financing a war reporter, or groups of them, was much more than salaries and subsidising expenditures in the war zone. Corporate expenses for sending correspondents into the field were high. The BBC, for example, estimated that establishing its War Reporting Unit for coverage of D-Day and beyond would require a total capital cost, including vehicles and equipment, of nearly £32,000 annually, plus an annual revenue cost of £41,000 that covered the salaries and subsistence payments correspondents liked to haggle over, but also bureaucratic support expenses such as life insurance.<sup>190</sup>

### **Life Insurance and Captured Correspondents**

Speaking at a memorial service in London for three war correspondents killed in Italy in 1943, the Rev. A.J. MacDonald summed up the ultimate sacrifice made by many frontline reporters, and the reasons they took that risk: “They died for truth. They were martyrs of truth. They died to get a true account of battle in the cause of true and sound

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<sup>189</sup> BBC WAC, Dimbleby - L1.131.1, G.J.B. Allport, ‘Richard Dimbleby’, 21 April 1944; ‘Allport to Dimbleby’, 24 August 1944; Allport, ‘R. Dimbleby’, 4 November 1943.

<sup>190</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/3, “Supplementary Estimate – Front Line Broadcasting (Reporting)”, 17 April 1943; De Lotbiniere, “Attached ‘Terms of Service’ for Members of War Reporting Unit”, 19 July 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/4, “War Correspondent’s Advance Book”, 2 December 1943. For a list of the pay grade and salary of every WRU member see BBC WAC R28/280/6, “Schedule of BBC War Correspondents”, 10 August 1944; BBC WAC R28/280/2, Allport, “Front Line Broadcasting and Financing of War Correspondents”, 4 March 1943.

journalism.”<sup>191</sup> His words also indicated why, beyond reasons of simple humanity, their employers were willing to put such a high financial premium on their lives. It was understood, even before the first correspondent shipped out to cover the Second World War, this would be a dangerous – perhaps deadly – endeavour. And of course it was, even more so than in the closest preceding conflicts including the First World War, the Abyssinian War, and the Spanish Civil War, where reporters were warned to stay at a safe distance from the actual fighting and not embed with troops inside the kill zones, as they were in the Second World War and most conflicts since then. Subsequently, one of the tasks of these employers was regularly updating the life insurance policies of their reporters.

### *Correspondent Life Insurance*

BBC War Reporting Unit head Howard Marshall wrote about the need for drafting additional team members as potential replacements for those already assigned to field duty because “I think we must anticipate a certain number of casualties.” The BBC established a blanket policy for what happened to correspondents’ salaries if a staff member was missing but presumed killed: these payments were considered insurance on their lives and would continue for up to a year to dependant families, while the salaries of single men would continue to accumulate in a fund while awaiting confirmation of their deaths. A memorandum of May 1944 laid out specific payments: in the case of death there would be a £200 widow’s gratuity, a £150 widow’s pension, £36 allowance per child under 18 and £60 pension for a motherless child under 18.<sup>192</sup> The only cases that invoked the presumed-killed policy were those of the aforementioned Kent Stevenson and Guy Byam, who both went down with their airplanes during bombing

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<sup>191</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Stewart Sale background file, 1/914638, “Fleet Street’s Tribute to the Three War Correspondents”, *The Newspaper World*, 16 October 1943.

<sup>192</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, “North-Western Front Representation”, 3 May 1944; BBC WAC R28/280/6, “Procedure in the Case of Staff Missing, Believed Killed, Presumed Killed, or Killed”, 3 August 1944; BBC WAC, Byam-Corstiaens, G.F. – L1/78/1, Administrative Officer (News) to Byam Corstiaens, 15 May 1944.

raids over Germany, in June 1944 and February 1945, respectively.<sup>193</sup> Although both men were married, neither of their personnel files includes details of any pay-outs to family following their deaths. Byam's file contains only an undated, handwritten note with the addresses of his wife and mother, followed by internal memoranda in October 1951 and May 1953 with information about his dates of service and his death.<sup>194</sup> The last memorandum in Stevenson's folder, dated 9 August 1944, is from Allport to a BBC accountant regarding the mislabelling of a Stevenson expense record, which totalled £2.5. Allport wrote, "The expense sheet covering his June mess bills, which was prepared on the 25th July in respect of H.F. Kent Stevenson, who, as you know, has been reported missing, was coded to 05020. This should have been shown as 05051." Immediately before that the file contains a 9 June notice about his salary being increased to £900, stating that the rise "will cease upon his return to this country or when he ceases to act as War Correspondent in the field."<sup>195</sup>

Reuters insured the lives of its correspondents on an individual basis, meaning each case had to be handled separately rather than with a blanket payment of the same amount for each staff member killed. The company suffered the deaths of thirteen employees during the war. Most were staff members who had joined or been drafted into the armed forces. Yet five were war correspondents: Alexander Massy Anderson, Royal Navy correspondent who drowned in the Mediterranean when a U-boat torpedoed his ship near Alexandria, Egypt, on 15 December 1941; Kenneth Selby-Walker, Far East general manager presumed drowned off Sumatra, Indonesia, when a torpedo sunk the boat on which he and other journalists were fleeing from advancing Japanese forces in March 1942; Kenneth Stonehouse, Washington, D.C. correspondent, who returned to Europe to become a war correspondent but was shot down while on a flight from Lisbon

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<sup>193</sup> Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), p. 180.

<sup>194</sup> BBC WAC, Byam-Corstiaens, G.F. – L1/78/1, G.M. Lewis to B.C. Lowe, "Guy Byam", 1 October 1951; B.J. Grylls to P.B. Mumford, "The Late Mr. Guy F. Byam-Corstiaens, 13 May 1953.

<sup>195</sup> BBC WAC, Stevenson, Hugh Francis Kent – L1/403/1, Administrative Officer (News) to Programme Accountant, "Expense Sheet: H.F. Kent Stevenson", 9 August 1944; Administrative Officer (News) to Mr. K. Stevenson, 9 June 1944.

to London on 2 June 1943; Stewart Sale, killed by a shell near Naples, Italy, on 28 September 1943; and William Stringer, killed by a shell near Chartres, France, on 17 August 1944.<sup>196</sup> Anderson and Sale are interesting case studies in how Reuters treated the families of employees lost in the course of their duties, which differed in each instance. The dealings with the relatives of both these correspondents exhibit the lengths to which the company was willing to go to provide financial care, as well as the limits.

Alexander “Jock” Massy Anderson worked for the Eastern Telegraph Company in Alexandria and Suez until joining Reuters in 1929. He was the chief of the Alexandria bureau in Egypt for eleven years and then with the onset of hostilities he became a naval war correspondent covering the eastern Mediterranean. He lost his life at the age of 37 while reporting from the British navy cruiser *HMS Galatea* in December 1941.<sup>197</sup> Anderson left a wife and a daughter behind and Reuters did what it could to help. H.B. Carter, the corporate secretary from 1932 to 1959, wrote condolences to Anderson’s

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<sup>196</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN993, 1/014243, “Reuter War Casualties”, n.d.; see also biographical data compiled in LN993, 1/014243; Read, pp. 229-230; “Kenneth Selby-Walker”, *The Baron* (Reuters employee website), <<http://www.thebaron.info/kennethselbywalker.html>> (accessed 12 November 2010); “Kenneth Stonehouse”, *The Baron*, <<http://www.thebaron.info/kennethstonehouse.html>> (accessed 14 November 2010). Reuters Tokyo chief correspondent Jimmy Cox died on 29 July 1940 but was not considered a casualty of war; he fell from a third-floor window during questioning at Japanese secret police headquarters, which was ruled a suicide due to the pressure of being interrogated for fifty-five hours on suspicion of spying, Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters 1849-1989* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 228-229.

<sup>197</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN778, 1/954601, “Reuters Correspondents Who Died Covering Conflicts – Alexander Massy Anderson”. Anderson earned praise for heroically and selflessly tending to wounded sailors on the *HMS Illustrious*, a British aircraft carrier that suffered a devastating, seven-hour attack by German airplanes on 10 January 1941. His luck was not the same when the *Galatea* was attacked eleven months later. Larry Allen, a colleague from the Associated Press who was on the *Galatea* with Anderson the night it was torpedoed, described the last known moments of his friend: “We had hardly started to run when the first torpedo burst into the ship... Anderson had reached the starboard railing a little to the right of me. I heard him shout. I never saw him again.” In a later memorandum, Allen wrote of Anderson, “He did not know the meaning of fear. He always got his story standing in the open on a warship’s bridge... He took all the risks, often more than the men who fought. Yet his only weapon was his typewriter.” Reuters Archive Record, LNA3, 1/898030/1, Larry Allen, “Torpedoes chased us along deck of Galatea”, *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 10 January 1942.

widow, Dorothy, and noted the company's board had passed a resolution of sympathy and expressed "how much we all regret the death of so able and courageous a member of our staff." The previous day, Reuters decided to give Anderson's wife £20 per month and his mother £50 per month for a period covering the 1st of December until the end of March.<sup>198</sup> Anderson left all of his savings, estimated at £600, to his 7-year-old daughter, Juliet. According to a correspondence in January 1942 to Reuters London from Martin Herlihy, one of Anderson's co-workers in Egypt, his mother and brother were named as the executors of his estate because he had "an unfortunate matrimonial experience" that was headed for divorce. He suggested that, due to the widow's "mental condition", young Juliet should be put in the care of her grandmother and that Reuters become "de facto guardians of the child" by providing her with £150 per year until she was 21 years old, a sum based on the company having insured Anderson's life for £2,000. Herlihy proposed Anderson's wife should receive one year of his salary, or the equivalent of three years' salary at £20 per month. Somewhat coldly, Herlihy wrote, "...we suggest that after a suitable payment the burden of caring for her should be undertaken by her parents as it would have been if she had never married or had been divorced or if her husband had died of illness."<sup>199</sup> Anderson's widow and Reuters then became embroiled

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<sup>198</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LNA3, 1/898030/1, H.B. Carter to Mrs. D.G. Massy Anderson, 31 December 1941; "Reuter to Herlihy Reuter Cairo, copy of telegram from London dated 30.12.41". For more information on Carter see Read, pp. 150-151.

<sup>199</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LNA3, 1/898030/1, Herlihy to Reuters, 21 January 1942. Herlihy wrote: "He married a Miss Allen who, it is generally held locally, should never have been allowed by her family to marry in view of her mental weakness. She became insane shortly after the marriage and was for some time in an asylum where he was paying £20 (or £22) a month for her maintenance." Herlihy went on to explain that he and Desmond Tighe, a fellow correspondent in Egypt, feared the widow's family were untrustworthy – having demanded Anderson continue the maintenance payments even after they brought her home from the asylum – and advised against the company making a lump-sum life insurance payment into his estate: "Mr. Tighe found in Mr. Anderson's papers a number of letters from the Allens which he describes as vitriolic and it seems probable that they will try to get hold of the child in order to spite Mrs. Anderson." He added that Mrs. Anderson, or someone purporting to be her, had already written to the British consulate about getting a lawyer to discuss guardianship of Juliet. Herlihy also expressed misgivings about Anderson's brother, Kenneth, calling him "completely irresponsible."

in an argument when she wrote to them in late May 1942 asking questions regarding the size of her husband's salary and any allowances or additional monies he received as a correspondent, as well as the amount of insurance money left for her daughter. Company secretary Carter simply responded that she would have to ask the executors of the will.<sup>200</sup>

Stewart Sale hailed from Luton, England, but his final resting place was a cemetery near Naples. He joined Reuters as a sub-editor in October 1942 after receiving an offer of £900 per year. This high sum was undoubtedly predicated upon his previous work as a reporter and editor for three local newspapers and then reporting for the *Sunday News*, the Press Association and the *Daily Telegraph*. At Reuters he moved quickly into the ranks of war reporters; the company requested a military deferment and war correspondent credentials for Sale even before he began work. His first combat assignment came in January 1943, when he was one of a group of correspondents from various organisations who flew in a Royal Air Force Lancaster on a bombing raid over Berlin, a one-time mission for which the company insured his life for £60. A letter from company Secretary Carter to insurers Cox, Tyrie & Co. Ltd. stated that their investment returned home safely. At the end of July, Reuters rushed Sale to Algiers after another correspondent fell ill; the need was pressing enough that Joint News Manager Walton Cole wrote to the Ministry of Information on 29 July asking, "If you could get Sale out by the weekend it would be of great assistance to us." Armed with his advance book from the NPA, allowing him to draw £50 per month from the army field cashier, and his life now insured for £2,000, he was soon in Africa and then Italy writing copy. Yet his

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<sup>200</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LNA3, 1/898030/1, Dorothy Anderson to the General Manager, 26 May 1942; Carter to Lowe, 28 May 1942; Carter to D. Anderson, 1 June 1942; Brighthouse, Jones & Co. to Reuters, 27 July 1942; Bircham & Co. to Brighthouse, Jones & Co., 31 July 1942. Carter wrote in a memorandum to one of his managers, "We may tell you privately that Mrs. Anderson is a difficult person and mentally unstable" and to refer her to the executors in response to any questions. This stonewalling led Mrs. Anderson to engage an attorney, who wrote to Reuters at the end of July repeating the request for the salary and other financial information, saying, "Mrs. Anderson is very concerned about the financial position in which she has been left", even citing "our client's rights under the Inheritance (Family Provisions) Act." Through their own law firm, Reuters again responded that Mrs. Anderson would have to consult the will executors.

dispatches would not last past 28 September.<sup>201</sup> Sale was with three other correspondents following the American Fifth Army into Scafati, approximately fifteen miles southeast of Naples. Everyone believed the town had been cleared of Germans. “Things looked absolutely safe,” recalled Frank Gillard of the BBC, who was also trailing the Fifth. Yet correspondent Basil Gingell of the British Exchange Telegraph agency, one of those in the group with Sale, explained that things changed quickly:

I had left my jeep and had walked down the road with three friends. We stood in a knot by a street corner watching the assembly of the armour when there was a blinding flash and a terrific explosion shook the ground. I was flung a great distance and buried by falling debris. When I was able to look round I saw that my companions were dead.

The tank shell that landed among them instantly killed Sale, Alexander B. Austin of the *Daily Herald*, and William J. Mundy of the *News Chronicle* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The trio were buried quietly in Italy, but a memorial service held for them at St. Dunstan-in-the-West church in London, which had been damaged by German bombs but was still considered the “newspapermen’s church” due to its location on Fleet Street, drew hundreds of mourners from the domestic and overseas press, the British government and the armed services.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN778, 1/954601, “Reuters Correspondents Who Died Covering Conflicts – Stewart Sale”; Reuters Archive Record, Stewart Sale background file, 1/914638, “Staff Appointments – Stewart George Sale, 10 Sept. 1942; Carter to Sale, 16 Sept. 1942; Carter to Thompson, 23 Sept. 1942; Herlihy to Edgeworth-Johnstone, 19 Oct. 1942; Carter to Tyrie, 12 Jan. 1943; Carter to Tyrie, 18 Jan. 1943; ‘Reporters “Pranged” Berlin With R.A.F.’, *World’s Press News*, 21 Jan. 1943; Cole to Brebner, 29 July 1943; Walters to Alton, 29 July 1943.

<sup>202</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Stewart Sale background file, 1/914638, “From Basil Gingell”, n.d.; “John Snagge in the 6 o’clock news”, 30 Sept. 1943; “Mem. to WAC”, 30 Sept. 1943; Reuters Archive Record, LN778, 1/954601, “Reuters Correspondents Who Died Covering Conflicts – Stewart Sale”; Reuters Archive Record, Stewart Sale background file, 1/914638, “Fleet Street’s Tribute to the Three War Correspondents”, *The Newspaper World*, 16 October 1943. See also “The Press: The Road to Naples”, *Time*, 11 October 1943, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,774690,00.html>> (accessed 11 July 2010).



In October 1943 Reuters arranged with the Imperial Life Assurance Company of Canada to posthumously increase – for unspecified reasons – Sale’s life insurance policy of £2,000 to £2,500, which purchased annuities for the education and maintenance of his two children, aged 12 and 7, until they were each 18 years old. The annuities were to provide £315 annually to each child for six years, while in the final five years of the younger child’s annuity the amount would decrease to £157 annually. Additionally, Reuters granted Sale’s wife, Madge, a pension of £200 annually for five years beginning October 1943, to be drawn from its Officers’ Pension Fund. The Reuters chief of the audit and accounts department was also deputized as an agent of the company in the matter, a move he said would save the company money, although he inexplicably took a one percent commission on the £2,500 annuity for the children. The entire endeavour, including payment of taxes and an investment of the return in savings bonds, brought the net sum of the policy to £2,600. The insurance payments for the children were to be made through Mrs. Sale, although in a sign of corporate caution – or mistrust – the head accountant suggested the board of directors require her to provide receipts: “We should then be able to assess at the end of each year how much out of the total paid to Mrs. Sale had been applied specifically on education and clothing purchases and, in consequence, how much remained for general and holiday maintenance.” Despite that apparent wariness, the relationship never seemed to have soured; Madge Sale’s pension was renewed at five-year intervals and in 1958 even increased to £250 per year. Additionally, letters from Reuters to Mrs. Sale in late 1963 and 1964 informed her of the company’s decision in both of those years to provide her with cheques for £50 “to make a contribution towards your Christmas expenses.” She died in October 1972.<sup>203</sup>

It is interesting to note the similarities, but more so the differences, in the way these two families – the Andersons and Sales – were compensated and treated by Reuters. Did the Sales enjoy what appear to be better dealings with the company because

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<sup>203</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Stewart Sale background file, 1/914638, Carter to Tyrie, 1 Oct. 1943; Clarke of Imperial Life to Walters of Reuters, 13 Oct. 1943; “From the Chief of the Audit and Accounts Department”, 18 Oct. 1943; Judah to Mrs. Sale, 6 Dec. 1963; Jones to Mrs. Sale, 19 November 1964; Buffey to Judah, 19 March 1971; “Staff Movement Form – Mrs. Madge Sale”; 6 Oct. 1972.

Stewart Sale was favoured over Alexander Massey Anderson? Was it a question of seniority? Did the families themselves create the circumstances for better or worse, or were these primarily business decisions with the personal element being secondary? The corporate documents do not provide a clear answer. Yet these cases show that Reuters could be both compassionate and humane, but also take a hard tact, with families of the correspondents who died in the line of duty.

### *Captured Correspondents*

While the death rates of correspondents were extremely low compared to the military personnel on whom they reported, there was also the danger of capture and imprisonment in the field, for which the government had to apply a broad policy and the individual companies had to make bureaucratic and financial considerations. Documents in The National Archives of the United Kingdom help explain government policy regarding captured war correspondents, which the news organisations were required to accept. A War Office memorandum from 1942 cites article 81 of the Prisoners of War Convention:

Persons who follow the armed forces without directly belonging thereto, such as correspondents, newspaper reporters, sutlers, or contractors, who fall into the hands of the enemy, and whom the latter think fit to detain shall be entitled to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they are in possession of an authorisation from the military authorities of the armed forces which they are following.<sup>204</sup>

Additionally, a letter from the Associated Press of Britain requests that the government arrange a prisoner exchange with the Italian government for the AP's Middle East correspondent, Godfrey H.P. Anderson, to be traded for one of three Italian

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<sup>204</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA), WO 32/10704 (POW accreditation 1941-45), A.A.G., "Article 81 of the Prisoners of War Convention provides", 16 February 1942.

correspondents being held in India.<sup>205</sup> The response from an unnamed official at the War Office, presumably Lt. Col. R. Edgeworth-Johnstone to whom the AP letter is addressed, clarifies the firm government policy regarding correspondents imprisoned by the enemy:

I assume that your correspondent Mr. Anderson was in possession of the requisite authority and was captured by Italian Forces in the course of the Libyan Campaign. On that assumption he will receive treatment from the Italian Authorities appropriate to a prisoner of war – as there are no proposals current for the exchange of individual prisoners of war – I regret that this exchange cannot at present be effected [sic]. If the three Italian correspondents at present detained in India on the outbreak of war are civilians they cannot of course be exchanged with Mr. Anderson. A press correspondent who is a prisoner of war under Article 81 of the Convention cannot be considered for repatriation on an exchange basis as a civilian.<sup>206</sup>

Another letter from the War Office to the South African authorities in London regarding their captured correspondents further elucidates the policy by noting that in the previous world war the government had been pressured to make similar exchanges by the relatives of internees, but that the military authorities always opposed them “as it seemed that those who had influence must be unduly favoured.” In the Second World War, the government continued to oppose exchanges, despite the fact it was difficult for some, especially family members, to accept that non-military prisoners could be held until the end of the war. The War Office letter to the South Africans further stated, “It must be remembered, however, that they have the benefit and safeguards of the Convention and so cannot fairly expect to be considered for exchange as civilians.”<sup>207</sup> This, as well as a continued dialogue with the AP regarding Anderson that held firm the line of not exchanging him, shows that the War Office maintained a strict policy of adhering to the tenets of the Prisoners of War Convention and gave no special favours to war correspondents. Edgeworth-Johnstone of the War Office summed this up succinctly

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<sup>205</sup> TNA, WO 32/10704, Oldfield to Edgeworth-Johnstone, 9 December 1941; Oldfield to Edgeworth-Johnstone, 23 January 1942. Vatican Radio broadcast a message from Anderson to his family saying he was being held in a camp at Sulmona, Italy.

<sup>206</sup> TNA, WO 32/10704, War Office to Oldfield, n.d.

<sup>207</sup> TNA, WO 32/10704, War Office to B.G. Fourie, 23 May 1942.

at the end of a 28 August 1942 letter to the Associated Press: “We have, however, always refused to negotiate outside the framework of the Convention, a policy which is abundantly justified by experience in the last War.”<sup>208</sup>

Reuters historian Donald Read writes that the company’s policy was to pay captured correspondents half of their normal salary while in captivity.<sup>209</sup> This is supported by a 28 May 1942 report to the Reuters corporate board that led with an item titled, “Members of staff in enemy hands”, which documented not only war correspondents who had been captured, but also the monetary arrangements the organisation made for them. The report explained that “generally speaking a reserve will be made monthly of half their salaries,” although it listed individual exceptions in which the reporter’s spouse was paid a specified amount during his captivity. “In addition,” the report noted, “in case we are called on by the Government to make provision for the maintenance of a prisoner with military rank, we reserve £23.6.8 a month, the total being £1,000 a year.” This concern over the government’s involvement stemmed from the fact that British war correspondents were given a military rank, although honorary, and wore British military uniform. The report explained: “In the case of Mr. A. P. Crosse, who had the rank of Captain, we are reserving £35 a month, from which we pay domestic obligations amounting to somewhat over £10 a month. Mr. Crosse’s salary was £600 a year.” It added that the Ministry of Information would “carry half the amount reserved or, as the case may be, disbursed” to correspondents listed in the report. The polite distinction between “reserved” and “disbursed” indicated the uncertainty over whether they would make it home.<sup>210</sup> By the end of 1944, the Reuters Prisoners of War Reserve Account had a credit balance of £7,993 and its debits against the corporation’s profit and loss account were approximately £4,800. Based on annual payments of £2,400 made to dependants and relatives of captured correspondents, and in light of what was estimated as a sufficient amount to “enable them to reshape their lives when they are freed”, management determined that no further payments would be made into the account after

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<sup>208</sup> TNA, WO 32/10704, Edgeworth-Johnstone to Oldfield, 28 August 1942.

<sup>209</sup> Read, p. 221.

<sup>210</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN993, 1/014243, “Monthly Report for the Board of Reuters by the Joint General Managers”, 28 May 1942.

1 January 1945. On that date, three Reuters correspondents – A.P. Crosse, J.J. Smyth and J.H.C. Talbot<sup>211</sup> – were still prisoners of war in Germany.<sup>212</sup>

A letter from the War Office to the BBC on 5 August 1942 explained that in the case of captured war correspondents the Italian government had agreed to treat them, and subsequently pay them, as officers. This was the policy under which Edward Ward was held for a large period of the war. Ward was the BBC's first newsman to be captured by the enemy. Along with his sound engineer, Bob Crawford, Ward went into the Libyan desert to cover the British army's attempt to take Tobruk for a second time. Despite repeatedly coming under enemy fire, they continued to make recordings through 23 November 1941. The pair was covering the battle of Sidi Rezegh and had stopped at the desert headquarters of the Fifth South African Brigade, which had been cut off from the British main force, when a South African Radio correspondent with whom they were travelling optimistically pointed to the horizon and announced the approach of tanks, believing they were British. Ward said, "Yes, it's the tanks all right, and they've got nice, big black crosses on them." He subsequently spent almost three-and-a-half years in

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<sup>211</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN993, 1/014243, "Mr. John Talbot", 31 May 1944; see also Walter R. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović, and the Allies, 1941–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 227; Stoyan Pribichevich, "Tito's Yugoslavia", *Time*, 22 May 1944, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,796611,00.html>> (accessed 20 October 2008); Roth, "Chetwyd-Talbot, John", p. 60. John Chetwyd-Talbot was perhaps the most notable capture of a Reuters journalist. In May 1944, the Germans apprehended Talbot, along with a pair of photographers, while he reported on Josip Tito's Partisans in Yugoslavia. A qualified paratrooper, he had already covered significant western battle theatres, including Operation Torch, when he became one of only two reporters – along with Stoyan Pribichevich of *Time* magazine – providing coverage of Tito's forces for the rest of the world media. He spent several months as a prisoner of war.

<sup>212</sup> Reuters Archive Record, LN993, 1/014243, "Monthly Report for the Board of Reuters by the General Manager", n.d. 1945. See also TNA, WO 32/10704, "Foreign Office to Berne", 21 April 1942; Norton to Moolman, 14 March 1942. Andrew Patrick Crosse was held in the same POW camp in Sulmona, Italy, as Godfrey Anderson of the British AP, the BBC's Ed Ward, and five correspondents from the South African Broadcasting Corporation and the South African Bureau of Information.

Italian and German POW camps.<sup>213</sup> After his capture, Ward became an example of how the BBC could be stern in its financial dealings with employees.

Under the policy of treating captured correspondents as officers, Ward was designated a captain and subsequently received from the Italians the monthly sum of £15.5.7., beginning when he transferred to an officers' camp, after originally being held in a facility for enlisted men. The first remittance was to cover the period of 1 May to 30 September 1942 and would total £76.7.11.; thereafter, he would receive £45.16.9. per quarter. This money was to be paid by the BBC to the War Office, which would then forward it to the Italians.<sup>214</sup> Ward's 1946 memoir, *Give Me Air*, describes his experiences during imprisonment, but does not include details of the BBC's financial arrangements for him during captivity. However, he remarked that the Italians told them POWs were "entitled to fixed rates of pay", and he humorously described how the funds were used: "With this money we were able to order a few 'comforts' from Brindisi. We were able to get some precious cigarettes. Junior officers were afforded the edifying spectacle of British colonels queuing up for half a dozen gaudy-coloured boiled sweets like children at a school treat."<sup>215</sup>

While Ward himself does not go into details about his war correspondent salary, his BBC personnel file provides information about the Corporation's financial dealings regarding the captured journalist.<sup>216</sup> At first the BBC was rather cold and bureaucratic

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<sup>213</sup> Hickman, pp. 153-154, 193; Edward Ward, *Give Me Air* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), pp. 7-12, 14, 174-175, 182, 184-185, 194-195, 242-244, 247-249; see also Leonard Miall, "Obituary: Edward Ward", *The Independent (London)*, 10 May 1993; "Viscount Bangor", *The Times (London)*, 10 May 1993.

<sup>214</sup> BBC WAC, L1/439/3 – Ward, Edward Henry H., War Office to Roberts, 5 August 1942.

<sup>215</sup> Ward, p. 25.

<sup>216</sup> BBC Written Archives policy proscribes the release of employee personnel files until s/he has been dead for at least thirty years and the Corporation has vetted the file. Under these rules, the file on Ward, who died 8 May 1993, was still confidential until September 2011 when the BBC vetted and released it for public research following a special request by Brian Hannon in December 2010. Included in the request were the personnel files of Denis Johnston (died 1984), Wynford Vaughan Thomas (died 1987), John Snagge (died 1996), Frank Gillard (died 1998) and Godfrey Talbot (died 2000), which were all vetted and released along with Ward's file.

toward him. A memorandum of 12 August 1942 from the salaries accountant listed Ward's monthly wage as £83.6.8., which had been fully paid to his bank through the end of July. Yet the accountant requested a repayment from the reporter, and did not want to consider him a "special case" because it would disturb the usual bookkeeping procedure, despite Ward and his recording engineer being in a rather special position as the only prisoners of war employed by the BBC. The accountant's note states:

It now appears that £15.5.7. should have been deducted from his pay for each of the months May, June, July, 1942 to cover the pay he receives from the Italian Authorities while he is a Prisoner of War. Consequently he owes the Corporation the sum of three times £15.5.7. which equals £45.16.9. Will you please let me know what arrangements are made for refunding this debt. For the month of August and until I receive information which affects his pay, the sum of £83.6.8. less £15.5.7. i.e. £68.1.1. will be paid into his bank account. I observe that the War Office suggests payments quarterly in advance, but it would help me very much if you could persuade the War Office to accept payment monthly in arrears.... This will enable me to make the remittances by the normal Salary Department processes instead of making a special case.<sup>217</sup>

The Corporation also wrote a letter to Ward's wife reminding her of the £15.5.7. deduction from the money placed into the family bank account each month and asked whether she could handle the additional deduction that was owed to the Corporation. A BBC official wrote, "Will you please let me know whether it will cause you undue financial hardship if for the month of August, in addition to the £15.5.7d. due for that month, we deduct the £45.16.9d. now owing." He informed her that this would only leave £2.5.4. to pay back. "If you cannot agree to such a large deduction from this month's salary, would you please let me know the maximum deduction which you can suffer each month in addition to the £15.5.7d."<sup>218</sup> The BBC "many times addressed

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<sup>217</sup> BBC WAC, L1/439/3 – Ward, Edward Henry H., Salaries Account to G.E.O., "E. H. H. Ward", 12 August 1942.

<sup>218</sup> BBC WAC, L1/439/3 – Ward, Edward Henry H., L. Macrae to Mrs. Ward, 14 August 1942; L. Macrae to Swepstones Solicitors, "The Hon. E.H.H. Ward", 1 October 1942. Due to a clerical error, the figure of £2.5.4. should have been stated as £22.4.4.

letters to her” without a reply, according to a 24 August memorandum, and on 26 August the BBC again wrote to Mrs. Ward to say that if they did not hear back from her by September 12, when the accounting office needed to clear its books, they would assume she was in agreement. The date came and went without word from her and the full £45.16.9. was deducted from Ward’s pay.<sup>219</sup> When they did receive a reply on 23 September it came through a solicitor, who wanted the terms of the payments and deductions explained, as it appeared Mrs. Ward did not understand the POW compensation system and why she had not been receiving her husband’s full salary. This was explained to her by the BBC in subsequent correspondence; in an apparent attempt to seem magnanimous, the letters pointed out that no income tax – usually taken directly from a correspondent’s pay – was being deducted.<sup>220</sup> Despite having been the subject of what could be considered a policy of corporate heartlessness in trying to recoup money from a captured correspondent, upon his liberation from a German POW camp in the final year of the war, Ward dutifully returned to work for the BBC, deploying again in time to cover the meeting of the American and Soviet armed forces at Torgau, Germany, in April 1945.<sup>221</sup>

The effort to fund war correspondents was indeed costly. Beyond the salaries paid, which some correspondents were vocal in complaining were insufficient or unworthy of their efforts and expertise, media companies needed to provide expense funds to maintain the journalists while they were reporting in the field. These expenses included the costs of food, lodging, kit such as uniforms and typewriters, and other necessities for doing the job and existing in a war zone; some reporters took advantage of this expense system, or stated that the funds were not enough to cover their requirements, which caused numerous disputes with their home offices. There was also the need to provide

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<sup>219</sup> BBC WAC, L1/439/3 – Ward, Edward Henry H., Miss Scherer to Mr. Macrae, 24 August 1942; L. Macrae to Mrs. Ward, 26 August 1942; L. Macrae to Salaries Accountant, “The Hon. E.H.H. Ward”, 12 September 1942.

<sup>220</sup> BBC WAC, L1/439/3 – Ward, Edward Henry H., Swepstones Solicitors to BBC Staff Administration Department, 23 September 1942; L. Macrae to Swepstones Solicitors, “The Hon. E.H.H. Ward”, 1 October 1942; L. Macrae to Swepstones Solicitors, “The Hon. E.H.H. Ward”, 13 October 1942.

<sup>221</sup> Ward, p. 217.



life insurance for men working in extremely hazardous conditions, as well as payments for those who were captured by the enemy and held in prisoner of war camps. It becomes clear, then, that covering the news of the Second World War was an expensive endeavour in many ways for the organisations involved. Speech was indeed not free.

Having surveyed issues peripheral to the actual field work of the war correspondents – including the British media environment of the time, the selection and training of the journalists to be deployed, their salaries compared with those of the general British public, and other monetary matters involved in supporting them during their assignments – it is now necessary to consider the methods of their work and other various aspects of their experiences inside the war theatres. This includes the hurdles they faced in writing and delivering their stories, whether in print or over the radio. One of these concerns had a significant impact on the content of their dispatches and was a daily issue to be faced: censorship.

## The Correspondent and Censorship

In Tom Stoppard's 1978 play, *Night and Day*, about foreign correspondents covering a fictional African war, a reporter recounts his interview with a rebel leader in which he says the newspaper is "an objective fact-gathering organisation." The rebel press officer demands to know if his paper is "objective-for or objective-against" the war.<sup>222</sup> This is a somewhat blunter version of the wary mind-set demonstrated by Allied censors in the Second World War. Despite the fact that all the correspondents covering the British and Dominion forces were "objective-for", some of the biggest stumbling blocks to reporters getting stories out to the public were the censorship policies set and the practices employed by the government in London, which subsequently resulted in heavy editing by military officials in the field; these can both be categorized as official censorship. Yet while the rigorous process frequently frustrated many correspondents, some embraced it as a necessary part of their patriotic duty, an attitude resulting in varying degrees of self-censorship. This often manifested itself in reporters omitting certain aspects of a story in anticipation of the changes the censor would make, although at times this was also done as a tactical manoeuvre to "scoop" the competition by getting stories out faster for publication or broadcast, rather than straightforward loyalty. Self-censorship also occurred in the newsrooms at home in the form of managers and editors who urged restraint in order to conform to government policies. The most serious degree of self-censorship, however, was framing a story through the selective use of facts, not only to placate the censors, but in order to shape the story so that it fit an agenda, otherwise known as propaganda; this was ostensibly to protect and promote the perceived best interests of the nation and came into play more frequently than the public knew, or perhaps wanted to know.

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<sup>222</sup> Tom Stoppard, "Night and Day", *Tom Stoppard: Plays Five* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 273.

## Official Censorship at Home

Journalist and historian Max Hastings wrote in 2011, “Only a few national leaders and commanders knew much about anything beyond their immediate line of sight. Civilians lived in a fog of propaganda and uncertainty, hardly less dense in Britain and the US than in Germany or the Soviet Union.”<sup>223</sup> While this was not a direct comment on censorship, it indicates how carefully controlled the flow of information was during the Second World War, even by the democratic nations. Censorship pressures and actions on the home front by the British government were ever present and rigid. Churchill admitted in the House of Commons in February 1944 that he had directed censors to be more austere with accounts of the fighting during the Italian campaign in the summer of 1943. “I myself sent the telegram asking for a stricter censorship on alarmist reports,” he said, specifically objecting to the use of vocabulary that made the British military’s position seem untenable. He claimed, “Such words as ‘desperate’ ought not to be used about a position in a battle when they are false. Still less should they be used if they were true.” The second part of his statement is a revealing insight to his attitude toward the media’s role in war. Asked, for the sake of comparison, about his own experiences as a military reporter in the Boer War, Churchill gave another nod of approval to heavy censorship: “I should not have been allowed in South Africa, where I was a war correspondent for some time, to say, for instance, that the position inside Ladysmith was desperate.” (This met with cheers from the assembled lawmakers.) Churchill agreed with the praise one of his Parliamentary colleagues gave to the British correspondents in the battle theatres of the Second World War and noted that the “liberty of the Press is of high consequence.”<sup>224</sup> Yet the Prime Minister also issued a warning about the possibility of slips by war correspondents, implying the continued need for a vigilant watch over them:

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<sup>223</sup> Max Hastings, “The Untold Second World War,” *BBC History Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 11 (Nov. 2011), p. 54.

<sup>224</sup> “Censorship of News: Prime Minister and War Correspondents”, *The Times*, 23 February 1944, p. 6; see also Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2003), p. 71.

I should like to say I think they have discharged their duties with very great discretion and this is particularly true of the men who are nearest to the enemy and in the same danger as the troops. There is a wish and desire among the newspaper correspondents to discharge their duty with discretion and to help the troops in every way. At the same time, accidents will happen in the best regulated families.<sup>225</sup>

These potential family accidents were the ostensible reason Whitehall insisted upon rigorous censorship measures from above; while the military handled war correspondents in the field, the government kept an eye on their employers at home.

Philip Taylor states in his book, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, that “Censorship and propaganda are really two different sides of the same medal: the manipulation of opinion”, and notes that the British government engaged in propaganda and censorship long before 1939-1945:

During the First World War, when positive means of persuasion – propaganda – was becoming an accepted feature of British wartime governmental responsibility, negative means – censorship – had already come of age. But what distinguishes the British government’s manipulation of opinion in the twentieth century from earlier periods, in peace and war, is not just the grafting of a positive propaganda machinery on to the already established censorship procedures. It is also the scale on which the official manipulation of opinion was conducted, the size and significance of the audience to be influenced and the means and media through which it operated. Never before had so much information been available to so many people with so many means open to them to express their point of view. Never before had their opinions counted for so much in the survival of the state or, conversely, in its destruction. Never before had there been such a need for governments of all kinds to devote themselves to the struggle for the hearts and minds of the politicised masses.<sup>226</sup>

Taylor states that the censorship apparatus established at the start of the Second World War experienced the same difficulties as had been encountered in the First World

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<sup>225</sup> Knightley, p. 71.

<sup>226</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 153.

War: “First, it was dominated by the War Office and the Admiralty, whose principal concern, not unnaturally, was to prevent the publication of any information which might prove valuable to the enemy. Initially, in both wars, this preoccupation bordered upon an obsession and resulted in a dearth of news that merely fostered counter-productive speculation and rumour.” The censorship office, officially called the Press Bureau at its start, became known as the “Suppress Bureau.” More errors were repeated at the outset of the second great war: “If one of the major mistakes of the First World War experience was to conduct the whole business of propaganda, censorship and intelligence from a variety of different buildings then the same mistake was about to be made in the opening phase of the Second World War.” Taylor argues that the relationship in the initial stages of the war between the press and the Ministry of Information, which had taken over censorship and propaganda duties, was a disaster: “The early months were difficult in that the various service departments attempted to keep the public unaware of what was going on in the foreign countries where British troops were deployed, which contributed to both a sense of frustration and a belief that nothing much was happening abroad.”<sup>227</sup>

In his 1979 monograph entitled, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*, Ian McLaine writes:

The war started tolerably well as far as the news and censorship divisions were concerned. The press were delighted with the facilities provided for them on the ground floor in Senate House, London University. Sir James Grigg of the War Office, in replying to a sharp rebuke for having allowed his department to make an announcement independently of the News Division, proffered an abject apology which promised well for the future authority of the Ministry. This pleasing state of affairs did not last long, however. After a few weeks the confusion and lack of uniformity which characterised censorship rulings made it imperative that the instructions issued to the censors should be more closely defined.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-154, 157, 159-160.

<sup>228</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 35-36.

MoI Director-General Cyril Radcliffe, who was recruited from the legal profession, decreed that Defence Regulation 3, which outlined censorship of information regarding national security, was concerned only with the prohibition of information that was of military value; MoI censors therefore would not concern themselves with opinion pieces, speculation or other material in the press that might undermine morale. “The press were assured that there would be no meddling by the Ministry of Information in the expression of opinion. Nor would there be any suppression of facts other than those which could be clearly shown to be of value to the enemy.” This obviously appeared at first to be a boon for the media outlets, however there was a loophole in this proclamation, as McLaine explains: “[T]he defence departments, suspicious of the new and untried ministry, had the final say as to whether a press message was or was not of potential military value.” This created a problem, as the military service branches, especially the Admiralty, were not keen on giving the press and radio much leeway. Churchill, then serving as First Lord of the Admiralty, stated that “it was for the Admiralty or other department to purvey to the Ministry the raw meat and vegetables and for the Ministry to cook and serve the dish to the public. If the Admiralty could have had their way they would prefer a policy of complete silence.”<sup>229</sup> Commenting on the same cooking metaphor by Churchill, Taylor writes: “Certainly, the MoI was only just beginning to learn its culinary skills but the Admiralty’s offerings did not even constitute famine relief and that which did get through to news-starved journalists was distributed by a censorship staff largely made up of ex-naval personnel.”<sup>230</sup> Angus Calder’s assessment agrees:

The Admiralty was especially furtive, and suppressed most naval news, except for the results of actions of the losses of ships, until long after it had ceased to be topical. So determined was the navy that the Germans should not know where its ships were that ignorant and nervous

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-154, 157, 159-160.

censors at various times deleted mentions of H.M.S. *Pinafore* and the *Marie Celeste* from press items.<sup>231</sup>

James Cooper was Alan Moorehead's assistant correspondent in Cairo. In a letter to *Daily Express* Editor Arthur Christiansen, Moorehead stated, "He's as keen as mustard to be sunk in a battleship so that he can write one of the war's great stories; I've got him accredited to the Navy in Alexandria." Christiansen later wrote in his memoirs, "Cooper's wish came true and he was duly sunk. But the Censors held his copy for three weeks in order to keep the Germans ignorant of the identity of his vessel... so that all poor Cooper got for his ducking was the anonymity of the spike."<sup>232</sup>

In the early months of the war, politicians, the press and others heaped criticism on the MoI, noting that it was overstaffed – 827 employees in its London headquarters and an additional 127 in regional offices, totalling 954 but disdainfully rounded up to 999 in political debates – many of whom were civil servants, academics and other non-specialists. McLaine writes that Norman Riley – author of a 1940 book critical of the MoI entitled, *999 And All That* – pondered why MoI was a "dumping ground" for unqualified staff members whose previous work had nothing to do with the press or propaganda, while Harold Nicholson, future Parliamentary Secretary, stated that the ministry "had been staffed with duds at the top and all the good people are in the most subordinate positions". *The Observer* opined that MoI staffing had been conducted with "stupefying absurdity", and the *New Statesman* wrote that nepotism was a key factor in hiring staff, subsequently producing a "scramble of socially favoured amateurs and privileged ignoramuses in the Ministry of Information". Despite the protestations of War Office interference with censorship, even top MoI officials had to admit the initial blunders of their entity: "[Head Censor] Admiral Thomson was in agreement with the journalists about the lack of uniformity in censorship rulings. The system could not cope with the volume of material submitted and in view of the fact that before the war neither

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<sup>231</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 506.

<sup>232</sup> As quoted in Dennis Griffiths (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press 1422-1992* (London: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 169.

instructors nor trainee censors ‘had any idea of the working of the press’ it is not surprising that their interpretation of the Defence Notices was unsatisfactory.”<sup>233</sup> In many cases throughout the early parts of the war, and indeed in less frequent but still plentiful instances throughout the latter years of the conflict, this “unsatisfactory” interpretation of the censorship regulations by their gatekeepers was proved true, occasionally in somewhat absurd examples. On 11 September 1939, Parisian radio announced the arrival of the BEF in France, “and, as the Germans could be presumed also to have heard the broadcast, the War Office agreed with the Ministry of Information that the ban on the story should be lifted.”<sup>234</sup> The British newspapers placed the report in their upcoming editions and began distributing copies to their vendors around the country. Yet shortly before the clock struck midnight, Secretary of State for War Leslie Hore-Belisha ordered the recall of the papers after deciding the reports provided more detail than the War Office wanted released. McLaine recounts the scenes that followed and the resulting embarrassment for the MoI and backward step in relations with journalists:

The Home Office called in the police, who occupied Fleet Street offices and confiscated copies of the early morning editions from trains and astonished motorists. At 2.55 a.m. on the morning of 12 September, after frantic efforts had been made to print new editions, the reimposed ban was lifted and the dazed editors permitted to retrieve the situation as best they could. This was the very stuff of farce and, quite naturally, the fury of the press was directed at the censorship authority responsible.<sup>235</sup>

The MoI privately argued that censorship was being usurped by the military authorities, but the press still considered the ministry culpable in the incident.<sup>236</sup> This story had a laughable quality that unfortunately would make its way into other incidents of disorganized, inconsistent, or simply irrational censorship throughout the war.

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<sup>233</sup> McLaine, pp. 37-39.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.



“Confused and frustrated, Lord Macmillan [the first minister of information during the war] could see only one way out of the impasse and that was to divest the Ministry of all its news and censorship functions by the creation of an independent press bureau,” wrote McLaine, adding that while this move appeared “drastic” it was an empty gesture that did not cure the fundamental problem, because “unless there was a shift of authority from the service ministries to the censors, the mere transference of news and censorship would achieve nothing.” Yet on 3 October 1939 the prime minister announced the creation of a Press and Censorship Bureau that would be run by Sir Walter Monckton with ultimate oversight by the home secretary; the bureau’s various departments would have both the power to censor incoming news as well as to disseminate their own stories, which of course would come from the War Office. McLaine called it “a famous victory for the service departments.” Perhaps surprisingly, given their past criticism of the MoI, the journalists themselves protested the launch of the new bureau; McLaine quotes a committee representing over two hundred journalists as saying, “our complaint has never been against the... Ministry but has been directed against the stranglehold of the news exercised by some of the Government Departments.”<sup>237</sup>

The Press and Censorship Bureau only lasted six months. Taylor postulates this was because it used the same outdated system as during the First World War in which censorship and propaganda were conducted separately, that the various military service departments still conducted their own censorship, and because it threatened the very existence of the MoI. In 1940 John Reith became the Minister of Information and Rear-Admiral George Thomson became chief censor for the UK and they set the MoI, and subsequently the mechanics of the ministry and its control over the operation of news censorship, on the path it would follow for the rest of the war. Although Reith only lasted from January to May 1940, when he went out with Chamberlain, Taylor explains, “It was in that month, however, that the MoI reabsorbed the Press and Censorship Bureau. Up until that point, it has to be said, censorship had been a farce.”<sup>238</sup> After May 1940 the MoI gained control over postal and telegraphic censorship, which had

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>238</sup> Taylor, p. 160.

previously been overseen by the War Office. In June 1941 Duff Cooper was forced out as head of MoI after demanding greater powers for his department and was replaced by Brendan Bracken, who operated what became a fairly smooth operation for the remainder of the war.<sup>239</sup> Bracken had “excellent press relations, a very close friendship with the Prime Minister, bustling confidence in tackling the Ministry’s adversaries, and a scorn for the exhortation of the British public.” By 1943 the MoI had grown to number 2,824 staff, three times as many as under previous ministers.<sup>240</sup> Yet this was not without its own problems, as McLaine explains:

In the recruitment of staff the cult of the amateur reached its apogee and the universities, the legal profession and the ranks of retired admirals were thoroughly scoured. While it was difficult to find at short notice experts in such nebulous fields as morale and propaganda, the possession of experience in, say, psychology and journalism seems almost to have been a positive disqualification for employment.<sup>241</sup>

It was also clear that the different military service departments still wielded an inordinate amount of power over censorship, which they used to their own varied means rather than the standards set by the Ministry of Information. The Admiralty balked at the rule allowing news that had already been published or broadcast abroad to be put through without clearance; stories were passed for some news outlets and not others; and stories that were already common knowledge and carried no security risks were nonetheless blocked. Cyril Radcliffe understood the frustration and stated, “It is not an answer to the Press to say ‘We censor this because the War Office wanted it out’.... But it is certain that neither now nor later in the war are the Press or the public going to be satisfied with something simply because some department or official in it thinks it necessary in the interests of the war.” McLaine writes, “So contemptuous of the censorship system did the press become that editors simply ignored rulings and risked

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> McLaine, p. 7.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

prosecution, safe in the assumption that the department concerned would not institute proceedings against them.”<sup>242</sup>

Siân Nicholas supports the argument that the MoI handling of censorship early in the war was often counterproductive, both in its relationship with the media and the reaction of the public. The information ministry announced it was “not always desirable” to publish military news even if it was positive, and along with the War Office and military service departments accused the BBC of broadcasting more news than necessary; the MoI claimed the BBC informed the enemy of the successful 14 October 1939 sinking of the HMS Royal Oak by a U-boat at Scapa Flow. The MoI and the service departments, at least in appearance, were working in the same direction in attempts to quash the release of information, although in a seemingly haphazard manner.<sup>243</sup> Nicholas writes:

The sheer inconsistency of official policy infuriated broadcasters and listeners alike. Some news was released within hours (for instance the British bombing raids on Sylt); more usually there were delays of weeks or months (or even years). On the orders of the Admiralty, the arrival in Britain of Canadian troops was not reported – but was then unexpectedly revealed in a broadcast by Churchill himself. In many instances the only version of events accessible to listeners was that of German radio; in such instances, the BBC argued, the damage to morale was particularly acute.<sup>244</sup>

By May 1940, a Mass-Observation poll reported that a full two-thirds of the public thought the news was suspect and by the middle of July only a tenth of the people had kind words for the press; the BBC’s stock rose at this time, though, with three quarters expressing more trust in the broadcaster than its print competitors. This was despite the fact that the press was waging its own campaign against the BBC, trying to undermine its credibility.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>243</sup> Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 192.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., pp. 196-197.

The system of media censorship in the British homeland worked much like the field censorship in the war zones, as will be seen in a following section. Information came in and, despite the fact it had already been passed by military censors at or near the frontline, the war correspondents' reports were vetted once again by those Taylor refers to as "Blue Pencil Warriors," referring to the writing implements they used to cross out material to be censored from newspaper stories or radio reports. "The essential point about it was that all quick (or 'hot') news in Britain was censored at the source of its arrival." Beyond this blue pencil system, the government's involvement was largely based on chiding newspapers when they wrote things unfavourable to those in power, especially in the form of opinion pieces, despite the fact that this practice had been prohibited early in the war by Cyril Radcliffe. The *Daily Worker* was suppressed altogether and forced to stop publication for eighteen months. Additionally, the Churchill government had an ongoing quarrel with the *Daily Mirror*, which was popular with the troops and rose in circulation from 1.75 million in 1939 to three million in the year after the war. The paper had made negative comments about Chamberlain prior to his departure in May 1940 and then, after continued written attacks on government policies, Churchill wrote to *Mirror* proprietor Cecil King on 25 January 1941 telling him that the paper was engendering "a spirit of hatred and malice against the government, which after all is not a party government but a National Government almost unanimously chosen which spirit surpasses anything I have ever seen in English journalism. One might have thought that in these hard times some hatred might be kept for the enemy." While Churchill leaned toward further control of the editorial output of the *Mirror*, his Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, and the MoI mitigated his desire for suppression by reasonably arguing that an attempt to censor a newspaper's opinions after its factual stories had already been censored was a step too far.<sup>246</sup> The row with the *Mirror* came to a head on 6 March 1942 when the paper ran what became the famous Philip Zec cartoon of a sailor on a raft, adrift in the ocean and covered in oil, with the

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<sup>246</sup> Taylor, pp. 160-163.

caption, “The price of petrol has been increased by one penny (official)”.<sup>247</sup> The prime minister and many in his cabinet were incensed that the newspaper was suggesting war profiteering conducted with government consent, leading Morrison to threaten use of a Defence Notice to suppress the paper and prompting an investigation by the War Office. With the support of the other Fleet Street institutions the *Mirror* weathered the political storm, but it was a shot across the bow of wartime journalism by the government.<sup>248</sup> In this sense, the government’s home censorship apparatus included the use of political pressure on media outlets by those in the highest reaches of government. Yet the actual line-by-line editing of material by office men with blue pencils was still ever present and the most direct form of censorship of news from the frontline.

British government censors were deployed throughout the news distribution system, including in the Reuters newsroom in London to check all incoming items from correspondents in the field – where they had undoubtedly already been censored by the military – before they were transmitted to domestic and international newspapers that subscribed to the wire service. Reuters tried to move things along quickly by initiating a system of issuing “flash” alerts over the wires that a story was in the hands of the censors and would be sent shortly. This became quicker as the war progressed; in 1941 a flash of only twenty words took nearly four minutes to pass from writer through censor to transmission.<sup>249</sup>

Ralph Deakin, foreign news editor for *The Times*, informed reporter Robert Cooper on 21 June 1944 that one of his stories had not made it into the paper, not because of anything he had done wrong, or even due to the field censors, but because of the additional censorship measures being employed at home: “Your Monday’s valuable Tilly dispatch arrived London 2315 hours but was delayed in official hands over four hours and missed all editions.” Cooper replied to his editor that reporters received a

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<sup>247</sup> For a visual representation of the Zec cartoon see Donald Zec, *Don’t Lose it Again! : The Life and Wartime Cartoons of Philip Zec* (London: Political Cartoon Society, 2005).

<sup>248</sup> Taylor, pp. 163-164.

<sup>249</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters 1849-1989* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 215.

briefing from the military at 5:30 pm and his stories were all written and sent by courier bags that left at 10 am and 2 pm. “I cannot control order in which this is censored in London, and all this delay must be at your end (occasionally the aircraft is cancelled for weather). Will now try to get this material censored here before going in bag, but difficulties are great.”<sup>250</sup>

The BBC complained that it encountered a wall of resistance at the MoI, especially in terms of different censorship rules and access to stories than the press, but the reality was that its continued offensive on the government’s willpower made strides in gaining concessions from Whitehall. News coverage of the August 1942 Dieppe Raid, Nicholas writes, was “one of the most blatant examples of disinformation of the entire war.”<sup>251</sup> The citizenry was told there were problems, but not the real extent of the failure. Yet, as Nicholas explains, the large audience who heard Frank Gillard’s eyewitness dispatches, estimated at 52.3 percent of listeners, enabled A.P. Ryan to claim the great public interest in the Dieppe reports proved that “for the sake of civilian morale” the BBC should be afforded expanded access to military operations: “In October 1942 the MOI and Service Departments agreed that ‘whenever the circumstances of the raid allow’, in further combined operations accredited war correspondents would be permitted to accompany the Forces. In the two years after Dunkirk, the reputation of the BBC soared. The British public now looked to the BBC rather than to newspapers for reliable news.”<sup>252</sup>

Even with this growing status, however, there were still heavy censorship measures with which to contend. Philip Taylor writes:

Propaganda may have been the sole purpose of the MoI, but it was not the sole function of the BBC. When Bracken arrived, the value of the

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<sup>250</sup> “Transcript messages from the front: Messages between Robert Cooper (War Correspondent) and Ralph Deakin (Foreign News Editor) sent during June 1944”, *Times Online*, 31 May 2004, <[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article426796.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article426796.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009).

<sup>251</sup> Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p. 204.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

BBC retaining a large measure of independence was widely accepted within the MoI, so much so that it often served as a shield for the Corporation when demands for greater government control periodically recurred.<sup>253</sup>

Yet he notes that the MoI still retained censorship control over the BBC, and quotes Head Censor Admiral George Thomson saying the widely accepted notion that the BBC was uncensored was “quite incorrect” because often the BBC relied on news agency reports that had already been censored. Taylor adds that there were four MoI censors at the BBC’s London headquarters, Broadcasting House, with “finger at the ready on the cut-out button in the event of an unwitting slip, having already advised speakers on the do’s and don’ts of their contributions in talks programmes.”<sup>254</sup> The BBC understood and accepted the need for close wartime censorship of its broadcasts. The issue was security and the 1943 *BBC Handbook* offered its employees a practical explanation of the Corporation’s view:

Nothing has been said so far about the Censor, but he is always with us – and rightly so. It is appalling to think what presents we might make to the enemy if everything we put out was not most rigidly ‘vetted’.... A casual reference, innocently included in a despatch, to this weapon or that movement of troops, might be a godsend to Rommel.<sup>255</sup>

Taboo topics included names, locations, and sizes of regiments; the whereabouts of cabinet or royal family members; and weather information that might aid Luftwaffe bombers.<sup>256</sup> Internal BBC documents stated that an October 1942 meeting between the government’s top censor and BBC officials had produced an agreement “that records would no doubt have to be censored in the field, and re-submitted to censorship on arrival in London” and “Chief Censor should make preliminary enquiries as to whether

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<sup>253</sup> Taylor, p. 171.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1943* (London: BBC, 1943), pp. 101-102.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.; Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), p. 26.

any use of transmitters by war correspondents in the field would be allowed (on censorship grounds)". Further indication the BBC understood the government's censorship stance came in a memorandum the same month explaining the MoI had advised "there would not be the slightest chance of the military authorities agreeing to any ad libbing by correspondents with pack transmitters", and again in a March 1943 BBC report expressing doubt "if we should ever be allowed to work 'live' without a script." By May 1944 the BBC sent a letter to the MoI articulating its planned procedures for complying with official censorship.<sup>257</sup> Before D-Day, however, the Corporation successfully loosened government restrictions, and probably more than some government officials wanted. As Nicholas explains:

[BBC News Controller A.P.] Ryan successfully pre-empted Cabinet attempts to tighten MOI control over the BBC, and many of the more onerous censorship activities quietly lapsed. By early 1944 the rule of completely checking back to the MOI had fallen into abeyance, and when things were referred it was for the purpose of verifying facts rather than submitting texts for approval.<sup>258</sup>

Despite one of its stated aims, to be the gatekeeper of wartime news by censoring anything deemed harmful to the state and helpful to the enemy, the chronicler of the Ministry of Information's history, Ian McLaine, deemed it to be an "anti-censorship agency". McLaine writes:

Freed from peacetime constraints, the government possessed the power to impose almost any kind and degree of censorship on the press.... Had the Ministry shared the Cabinet's dark suspicions of the press there is no doubt that freedom of expression would have been another casualty of war. On the contrary, the Ministry of Information refused to act as the catspaw of government suppression. In so doing, it earned

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<sup>257</sup> BBC WAC, R28/280/1, "Broadcasting Facilities in the Field", Supplementary Paper, 28 October 1942; Eckersley to A.C. (N), "Broadcasting Facilities in the Field", 29 October 1942; BBC WAC R28/280/2, "Broadcasting 'Exercise' by B.B.C. Teams with 'British' and 'German' Armies in the Field (Exercise Spartan) – 5th–10th March, 1943", 15 March 1944; BBC WAC R28/280/5, Frost to Warden, 16 May 1944.

<sup>258</sup> Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p. 198.



the admiration of journalists but at the same time brought a lot of trouble on its own head.<sup>259</sup>

It is not exactly clear from the memoirs of war correspondents whether the MoI earned their “admiration” over the course of the war, since their complaints were directed primarily at the military censors and leadership in general rather than specific agencies within the establishment. Clearly McLaine has the benefit of a historian’s retrospective judgment of the MoI and is considering factors outside of just the censorship that affected war correspondents, including the Ministry’s political situation and other responsibilities such as propaganda to bolster home front morale, but it is fair to say that the overall assessment of the censorship system by frontline reporters was not as glowing.

### **Official Censorship in the Field**

By the onset of the Second World War, censorship was still developing, but at the same time was nothing new to war correspondents. Therefore, there needs to be not only an examination of field censorship during the war, but also a brief look at the restrictions on war reporters employed in notable prior conflicts.

William Howard Russell endured what was likely the earliest example of modern field censorship during the Crimean War. The British commander in the Crimea, Lord Raglan, refused to speak with him and ordered his officers to do the same in response to stories critical of the army’s poor treatment of its foot soldiers that the reporter filed with *The Times*. Russell was also forced out of the military detachment’s camp and had to set up his own tent nearby. Raglan urged the government to charge Russell with breach of security and aiding the enemy. After Raglan died of dysentery in June 1855, his replacement, Sir William Codrington, issued on 25 February 1856 what Phillip Knightley calls the first order of official military censorship: “It forbade the publication of details of value to the enemy, authorised the ejection of a correspondent who, it was alleged, had published such details, and threatened future offenders with the same

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<sup>259</sup> McLaine, p. 277.

punishment.”<sup>260</sup> In his own book about his experiences in the conflict, *The British Expedition to the Crimea*, Russell explained that he knew the reports of troops suffering would be a great disappointment to his readers:

How astonished must have been the good people of England, sitting anxiously in their homes, day after day, expecting every morning to gladden their eyes with the sight of the announcement, in large type, of ‘Fall of Sebastopol,’ when they heard that their Guards – their *corps d’elite* – the pride of their hearts... had been so reduced by sickness, disease, and a depressing climate, that it was judged inexpedient to allow them to carry their own packs, or to permit them to march more than five miles a day, even though these packs were carried for them!<sup>261</sup>

Russell states, however, that even when information about the poor state of British troops was reported in newspapers among cries of anger and danger to the campaign, the Russian emperor did not take heed. “Some people were absurd enough to say, with all possible gravity, that they would not be at all surprised if the whole expedition against Sebastopol were to be abandoned in consequence of articles in the English newspapers.” Russell added that the Czar could obtain far more valuable information from his London spies and even from the debates in Parliament than he could from a newspaper article, “...so unintelligible to him were the operations of a free press and free speech.”<sup>262</sup> The rules to which Russell were subjected were very similar to those limiting the scope and content of war reporting that came to be employed by the British military in conflicts that followed.

During the First World War, Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour summed up the notion of protecting military secrets through censorship by stating: “Let us learn what we

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<sup>260</sup> John Sweetman, *The Crimean War: 1854-1856* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001), p. 68; Knightley, pp. 10-15.

<sup>261</sup> William Howard Russell, *The British Expedition to the Crimea* (London: Routledge, 1858), p. 64.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

can from the enemy; let us teach him only what we must.”<sup>263</sup> To this end, the Great War was the occasion for the first large-scale effort by the British to bureaucratically organize press censorship through the establishment of a department known as M.I. 7 (which later became M.O. 7). According to an official history of the department written by the British War Office in 1938, the guidelines by which it operated were clearly the direct precursor to censorship rules in the Second World War, as well as the official procedures for the accreditation of war correspondents.<sup>264</sup> Essentially, it codified and expanded the censorship policies first seen in the time of Russell and remained a source of debate between the government, military and the press through the Second World War.<sup>265</sup>

Philip Gibbs, one of only five correspondents accredited to the First World War British Expeditionary Force, wrote in 1918 of the official censorship that manifested itself over the course of the conflict. After he was in the field, Gibbs summed up First World War censorship by saying that one night he “scribbled a long dispatch, which became a very short one when the British censor had worked his will with it.”<sup>266</sup> Following the Great War, Arthur Ponsonby, an anti-war activist and liberal-leaning member of the House of Commons and later the House of Lords, described the mechanics of war propaganda and the supporting role of the press in his 1928 book, *Falsehood in Wartime*, in which he wrote that a period of reflection upon official proclamations might give average citizens pause, a chance to consider the legitimacy of what they were being told, but that could be tactically countered by a fast torrent of lies to sway the public and make the government’s actions seem righteous by distorting and concealing facts: “The amount of rubbish and humbug that pass under the name of patriotism in war-time in all countries is sufficient to make decent people blush when they are subsequently disillusioned.” Ponsonby went on to say that this results in a type

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<sup>263</sup> As quoted in Wilfrid Eggleston, “Press Censorship”, *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Aug., 1941), p. 313.

<sup>264</sup> TNA, INF 4/1B, British War Office, “Military Press Control: A History of the Work of M.I. 7, 1914-1919”, 11 May 1938, pp. 3-5.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> Philip Gibbs, *The Soul of the War* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, originally published 1918), pp. 38-39, 181.

of “national wink” in which individuals, including members of the press, take up falsehoods “as a patriotic duty” that makes them complicit.<sup>267</sup>

John F. Williams’s 1999 study of the press in Australia, Britain, France and Germany during the First World War expanded on Ponsonby’s belief that the media had to be complicit in this wink: “The mass media had no choice but to collaborate with government and the military in the implementation of a system of information dissemination which inflated minor successes, concealed disasters, incited hatreds, and disguised the nature of battlefield experience.” And yet the wink was not enough, according to Williams, who argues that despite press collaboration, the First World War censorship system was “based on the premise that people could not be trusted with the truth” and allowing the full story out via the media would reveal valuable details that could aid the other side. Governments of the Entente Powers even put forth the argument that censorship would help guarantee that the correct version of events was reported during the war, which Williams refutes: “Censorship was always aimed directly at truth. The censor was not there to pick up on lies, which, since they were rarely written with an eye to anything but boosting morale, could hardly be said to reveal anything of value to the enemy.” He notes there is a distinction to be made between military press releases that revealed little detail and those that spread lies, although journalists were still beholden to both types.<sup>268</sup> The result was that communiqués with limited detail and rosy situation assessments directly affected reportage in the Great War and continued to do so in wars of varying sizes that came after.

During the Spanish Civil War, Alan Moorehead attempted to cover the conflict from the British garrison on Gibraltar in 1937, but was contained and kept ineffective; this tactic of marginalizing Moorehead was an oblique form of direct censorship and – despite the non-involvement of British forces in the combat – is worth noting because it was a direct precursor to the Second World War and the censorship tactics that would be

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<sup>267</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War Time: Containing an Assortment of Lies Circulated Throughout the Nations During the Great War* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1928), pp. 5-6.

<sup>268</sup> John F. Williams, *Anzacs, the Media and the Great War* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), pp. 1-2.

applied then. Moorehead related: “The chief secretary... told me flatly when I called upon him that he would expel me from the Rock if I published anything which he considered subversive. There was no censorship, of course, he said – nothing like that. I just had to be careful.”<sup>269</sup>

Allied military censorship during the Second World War was even less subtle. Sharing bits of rumour and intelligence among each other, as well as collecting information from their sources, were practically the only activities correspondents could do without the censors looking over their shoulders. The Allied military held all the cards when it came to reporters covering the hostilities. The armed forces handbook, *Regulations for War Correspondents*, states clearly that correspondents were to be accredited by the government of the force they aimed to cover, with the Supreme Allied Commander holding “the right to reject any application without assigning a reason for such an action”, as well as the right to withdraw a war correspondent licence “if, in the opinion of the Supreme Commander, such forfeiture appears necessary.” The military aimed to align the reporters by nationality by having “the majority of correspondents... representative of the nation from which the force is drawn.” Reporters had to have a special visa to travel abroad and provide a written promise to pay any charges incurred, while the possibility of being removed from war correspondent duty to serve in the forces still remained.<sup>270</sup> Following official accreditation, correspondents became subject to the rules spelled out in the *Regulations* handbook, an updated version of which was published for each year of the war, although the basic censorship rules did not waver throughout the course of the conflict. While the reality of the battlefield might have offered more freedom, especially in the Desert War where the front was so fluid, the journalists were always at the mercy of the military. The 1944 version of the *Regulations* states: “War correspondents must at once carry out any instructions issued to them by any personnel of the Allied Forces acting in the execution of their duty.” Reporters could not leave the force to which they were assigned without permission of the senior public

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<sup>269</sup> Alan Moorehead, *A Late Education: Episodes in a Life* (Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing, 1970), pp. 76-77.

<sup>270</sup> Allied Forces, *Regulations For War Correspondents: Accompanying Allied Expeditionary Force in the Field 1944* (Allied Expeditionary Force, 1944), pp. 6-10, 13.

relations officer. A conducting officer” accompanied them during their travels in the field and they were required to keep a correspondent license or a pass on hand at all times or face arrest. The rules also stated that while they were “free to converse with the forces whenever they wish”, it was not necessarily an open invitation for discussion with soldiers, as this interaction was “subject to the approval of the officer in charge of the forces in question.” Enforcement of these rules was made easier by the fact that correspondents were themselves considered members of the armed forces, wearing uniforms and holding honorary officer rank, although they were banned from carrying weapons.<sup>271</sup> Part of the enforcement system was the looming threat of lost accreditation, arrest and expulsion from the war theatre. As stated in the *Regulations*:

Correspondent may be suspended by the Supreme Commander because of distortion or other violations of the approved messages, pictures, captions, commentaries, etc.... The Supreme Commander may, however, detain a correspondent within the area in which censorship is exercised, for such period as he deems fit, and may prescribe the route by which he shall proceed out of the area.... Should a War Correspondent appear to have committed a serious offence which *prima facie* renders him liable to be discredited, his facilities will at once be suspended pending the outcome of an official inquiry.<sup>272</sup>

The military offered correspondents the option of filing a formal complaint under these rules and some reporters necessarily availed themselves of this clause. General Montgomery, for example, expelled the BBC’s Chester Wilmot from the French war theatre in 1944 for broadcasting a speech he wanted unpublicised; “Monty” invited him back upon learning his order for a news blackout had not been conveyed to Wilmot. General Omar Bradley claimed the BBC had cost America lives by prematurely announcing the Falaise Gap’s closure in August 1944, although it was later deemed a censorship error.<sup>273</sup> Earlier, General Alexander tried in December 1943 to cancel Frank Gillard’s accreditation, wrongly accusing the BBC reporter of using a secret transmitter

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-16.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), pp. 154, 162, 176-177.

to circumvent army headquarters in Italy, which led to an investigation involving Minister of Information Bracken and BBC Editor-in-Chief William Haley.<sup>274</sup> Gillard maintained Alexander was a “good friend” who confronted him with the transmitter accusation after the pair had dinner in a mess hall, saying to the correspondent, “[W]e’re very concerned about you... we think you are beating the gun in some way.... You have got a secret transmitter, that’s what you’ve got.... You’ve got a secret transmitter and you are getting stuff over.” Gillard protested but Alexander continued, “How is it that I learn what’s happening on my army fronts from you on the BBC before I get it from my own channels?” Gillard retorted, “The reason for that is that your own channels are not very efficient!” Years later he explained that the whole episode was the result of a mere “trick” of timing the censorship:

Actually what I was doing was quite simple. I discovered that there was a forward censorship unit right up with the armies. I did my day’s exploration with the army, so I came back at 4 o’clock in the afternoon to that little unit, because I knew that at 4 o’clock they got their directions from the Head of Intelligence in the army as to what was going to be passed that day. I simply said to these people at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, “What are you passing?” They said, “You can have this... you can have that, you can have the other thing....” I wrote it down as they said it and I handed it to them for transmission. So information was that immediate you see, and it got to London in a matter of an hour or so, not in the voice but by cable, and of course the BBC was getting well ahead of everybody else. The other correspondents never discovered the trick.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Trevor Royle, *War Report: The War Correspondent’s View of Battle from the Crimea to the Falklands* (Worcester, England: Mainstream Publishing, 1987), pp. 152, 157-159, 166-168. This practice of demonizing reporters was not contained to the European war theatre. Following the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Australian Broadcasting Commission moved Chester Wilmot from the Middle East to help cover the Pacific war. Yet he had run afoul of Australian land forces commander Thomas Blamey several times in his previous assignment and they clashed again when Blamey took over in New Guinea. Later Australia’s first field marshal, General Blamey revoked Wilmot’s war zone accreditation and ordered his return to Australia. This led to Wilmot being loaned to the BBC for the remainder of the war.

<sup>275</sup> WW2 People’s War Team, “An Interview with Frank Gillard”, *WW2 People’s War: An Archive of World War Two Memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, 4 February 2005,

Gillard was detained another time simply for displeasing the military powers with the range, rather than the specific content, of his reporting. Staying in a hotel room in Tunis as the battles in North Africa came to a close, Gillard recalled an officer coming to his room and saying he was under arrest and had a first-class air ticket to Algiers where General Eisenhower was going to charge him. Arriving in Algeria he learned “the charge was that in my reporting I had given excessive favour to the 8th Army at the expense of the 1st Army.” Gillard protested that the charge was ridiculous, telling the military men, “I am accredited to the 8th Army, I simply report what the 8th Army has done, information has gone back to London, and it’s been used on its merits. I have no choice in what was put on the air and what wasn’t.” He added that if they had problems with the coverage they should “get onto the BBC’s editors in London about that. It’s not my fault.” After some arguing among the Allied officers, Gillard said he received an official “reprimand” and was put on another first-class flight back to Tunis.<sup>276</sup>

Still, reporters sometimes genuinely broke the censorship rules and suffered the consequences. Seaghan Maynes of Reuters, for example, received help from Ernest Hemingway and the writer’s friends in the anti-Nazi Maquis underground to enter Paris before Allied troops did so in late August 1944. Using a Maquis transmitter, Maynes then sent a dispatch to Reuters in violation of censorship rules. Maynes was stripped of his accreditation for a time, although during his suspension he filed a report following a flight in a Canadian forces aircraft over Nijmegen, Holland, during Operation Market Garden in September 1944. The broadcast, blatantly ignoring his suspension, escaped the attention of the Allied authorities.<sup>277</sup>

The military, of course, had important reasons for employing these weighty censorship measures and regulations on the correspondents in the Second World War, as it had in previous conflicts. Censorship was not only the military’s attempt to control the factual content of the message, but was also part of an inherent mistrust of journalists to

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<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/51/a3618551.shtml>> (accessed 5 December 2010).

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Read, p. 225.



frame the context and meaning of the message as bureaucrats and military officials wished; while conditions may have changed, these attitudes had endured since the Crimea. As journalist Jack Shafer wrote in 2003 regarding more modern conflicts, but which rings true for the Second World War, “Why should we expect it to be any other way? No government has ever endorsed the notion that the press should have unfettered access to the battlefield.”<sup>278</sup> This echoes Canadian academic Wilfrid Eggleston, who wrote in 1941, “The essence of successful warfare is secrecy... the ideal state of affairs from the narrow viewpoint of military operations is a complete black-out on all information regarding such matters as the strength of military forces, the disposition of units, the nature of defences, the stocks of war supplies, the rate of production of war weapons, and so on.” Yet Eggleston admitted this ideal of an information lock box creates a Catch-22 in a non-totalitarian state: “Complete acceptance of the military philosophy of censorship would raise grave problems in a democracy, which relies so largely on an informed public, and on voluntary effort.”<sup>279</sup>

News was at times stopped for tactical and strategic concerns, a good example being the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Italy in March 1944 while Allied troops operated there. Godfrey Talbot explained the situation: “Vesuvius was an amazing story, but one we could not tell fully, at the time – our friends the military security censors saw to that: the enemy had not to know that Allied aircraft and some of our vital supply roads were suffering from extraordinary violence of nature.”<sup>280</sup> This was clearly a unique situation, yet it shows how considerable the use of military censorship power could be; even a natural cataclysm as loud and obvious as a volcanic eruption could not be allowed to offer any indication as to the circumstances of the Allied forces. In this way, the

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<sup>278</sup> Jack Shafer, “Full Metal Junket: The myth of the objective war correspondent”, *Slate*, 5 March 2003, <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2079703/>> (accessed 8 February 2010). Describing censorship in the first Iraq war, Shafer said the Pentagon barred correspondents from filing reports of fighting without the commander’s permission. Journalists were also to remain with the specific units to which they were assigned. He compared these rules to those used in Vietnam, but they were also nearly identical to Second World War regulations.

<sup>279</sup> Eggleston, p. 313.

<sup>280</sup> Godfrey Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now: A Broadcaster’s Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 87.

frequent result of field censorship was to degrade the quality of the basic aim of war reporting: to let people on the home front know the course that the war was taking including both victories and setbacks and, more specifically and important to the public, the condition and experiences of the troops – their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers; for example, whether soldiers were buried under a lava flow. As a result, while understanding its necessity, many correspondents never fully embraced censorship. As with the experience of Gibbs in the First World War, the heavy restrictions in the early days of the Second World War could be infuriating; while the process of censorship was a stringent, machine-like operation, the machine at times had a few loose screws.

Reporters were at the mercy of censors who put their stories through rigid and sometimes nonsensical vetting. While on a temporary detachment with the French army during the Phoney War, Dimbleby travelled to Strasbourg and made a recording while standing at one side of the Kehl Bridge over the Rhine as a German soldier stood on the other side of the crossing watching him. When Dimbleby returned to the safety of the French bunker one of the officers informed him he could not divulge their location. The correspondent explained he would only say the report was from France. Still, he was rebuffed. “But everyone knows we are in France,” he said, “and everyone knows that the French Army is in France.” Refused again, Dimbleby shouted, “What shall I say then, that we’re on the front line in the middle of Switzerland!”<sup>281</sup> Later in the war, Gillard highlighted his report on the Dieppe raid as an example of heavy censorship suppressing the truth and distorting the story because he was not allowed to give a full account of the enormous losses of men and equipment suffered by British and Canadian forces: “I read in BBC literature about my ‘memorable report’ from Dieppe. To me it’s memorable in all the wrong ways. It’s memorable with shame and disgrace that I was there as the BBC’s one and only eyewitness and I couldn’t tell that story as I ought to have told

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<sup>281</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 94; Leonard Miall (ed.), *Richard Dimbleby: Broadcaster* (London: BBC, 1966), pp. 22-23.

it.”<sup>282</sup> Tom Hickman notes, “What was necessary censorship, what was bloody-mindedness and what was crass stupidity was always a matter of viewpoint.”<sup>283</sup>

Sometimes censors delayed the publication or broadcast of stories, not because they revealed too much, but simply because the process did not keep up with the news cycle. During the Desert War, for example, transmission of stories to London hit a dual roadblock due to the policy of censoring them twice, once at the front by the British 8th Army and then again at the censorship office in Cairo, where messages going into the battle zone, as well as out of it, were examined. Unfortunately for the reporters rushing to get their news out, the Cairo office was closed each day from 1 pm to 4 pm and from 2 am to 8 am. Beyond the office closures and two-tiered censorship system, any queries over their communiqués presented further delay for reporters and their editors back home because, as Donald Read explains, “If there was any doubt, messages were referred to one of seven different authorities.”<sup>284</sup> Irritation with the sluggishness of the censorship apparatus was a constant for reporters. Alan Moorehead wrote of he and his fellow correspondents in Egypt trying to find the comedy in the situation:

Censors were established in the three services in offices so far apart that a correspondent had to travel a full fifteen miles in order to visit them all and obtain their stamps on his messages. We thought of organising a censorship Derby in which each correspondent would mount a horse-drawn gharry outside Shepheard’s Hotel, and set off to get a message stamped by all three censors. Since the censors were frequently at golf or in their clubs or at parties, it was reckoned that four hours would have been fast time for the course which was to have ended at the cable office.<sup>285</sup>

Later in the war, Robert Cooper of *The Times* sent a message to his editor on 21 June 1944 complaining that he spent day and night looking for material but “the [field] censorship is miles away from house where I’ve dug in”; it once took him five-and-a-

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<sup>282</sup> Hickman, p. 28.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>285</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943* (London: Cassell, 1944), p. 5.

half hours to get a long message to London via the Signals Corps. By 29 June, he said his material still suffered continued censorship delays due to the military being ham-fisted. His telegram read:

If any of these dispatches are appearing in the times it is in spite of public relations service that must be one most inept tone operated in any theatre war stop Correspondents are called for many miles from their sectors to wait hours for conferences that never take place and are regimented with an officialness that comes straight out of pantomime.<sup>286</sup>

Live broadcasts by radio reporters were almost universally forbidden, although there were a few exceptions made under strict conditions. Peter Stursberg of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation wrote about his one live broadcast from Rome, along with other radio correspondents, and how it was made under rigorous censorship conditions. He noted how there was “An atmosphere of excitement and frenzied expectation” among everyone, military and correspondents alike, regarding the situation in Rome upon its liberation, but that there was still a very bureaucratic bearing about how it would be reported. Stursberg wrote: “We had to wait for the official communiqué announcing the Allied entry into Rome before going on the air. Then, with our copy checked and approved by the censors, who had been brought up to the front, we lined up in the order of the draw to go on the air. I was last and I described in part what I had seen.” After his dispatch about fighting on the outskirts of the Italian capital, with mentions of “the clash of artillery and the sharp clatter of machine gun fire”, he said that his was the first live war broadcast for the Canadian radio outlet: “I felt that I was talking into a barrel, but I heard later that I was one of the few who got through without too much disruptive static.”<sup>287</sup> Delaying a live broadcast while the military prepared its official announcement and moved censors up from the rear to approve correspondents’

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<sup>286</sup> “Transcript messages from the front: Messages between Robert Cooper (War Correspondent) and Ralph Deakin (Foreign News Editor) sent during June 1944”, *Times Online*.

<sup>287</sup> Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 180-181.

“spot news” reporting was an obvious example of how censorship could slow the release of news, especially when it came to radio broadcasting.

The BBC encountered a unique set of problems that differed from those of the print press. Jonathan Dimpleby writes:

Traditionally the Army was suspicious of journalists; it viewed broadcasting with consternation – the reporter, with his microphone ready to record stray words, was a menace. The restrictions of all war correspondents were severe. No reporter could leave Arras without a ‘conducting officer’; nor could he use a telephone; nor could he report without being censored by a blue-pencil mind which instinctively regarded all information as secret, and journalists as irresponsible muck-rakers. For the BBC it was worse: less understood, it was more distrusted.<sup>288</sup>

Gillard observed that in addition to the various technical challenges of radio reporting, such as trying to make an audio recording in a desert sandstorm, the difficulties in getting recording disks back to London were compounded by the multi-layered system of both field censorship and censorship in London. He recalled that after cutting a disk he delivered it to army public relations staff, who were then charged with delivering it to Cairo for censorship:

In Cairo it had to go through four censors. It had to go through the army censor, the naval censor, the air force censor, and the Egyptian government censor, who was a civilian. If any one of those censors didn’t like something he just took out his pocket knife and scoured out on the disk that part of it. And, of course, he scoured out everything that led into it and a good deal that followed from it. But the disk, finally mutilated as it was, was then transmitted by beam radio to the BBC in London, re-recorded in London and used on the air.<sup>289</sup>

BBC News Controller A.P. Ryan sent a long memorandum to his correspondents in the War Reporting Unit a month before D-Day, which contained various pieces of information and advice, including a warning about censorship: “You will meet practical

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<sup>288</sup> Dimpleby, p. 92.

<sup>289</sup> WW2 People’s War Team, “An Interview with Frank Gillard”.

difficulties in the field. Censorship, when it is on your plate and off ours, will sometimes seem to you slow or unreasonable, or both. There will be arguments about the issue of information, about conducting Officers, about transport, maybe of favouritism.... The soldiers with whom you work will make mistakes and get het up, the same as you will.”<sup>290</sup> He was right on every count. Ill-timed or flawed reports that went out over the radio were usually not the fault of the correspondents, and even landed some of them in hot water with soldiers.

The control over the message conveyed to the public that the military strove to achieve through its censorship of the media, which periodically resulted in misleading representations of the troops’ circumstances, had been going on throughout the war. Dimpleby, for instance, had endured accusations of unrealistic sanguinity and inflated British patriotism by the very people he covered in North Africa. Newspapers would often take six weeks to get back to the frontline and therefore could be put into better perspective by army personnel, while BBC reports were usually heard just twenty-four hours later. It angered soldiers when he recorded a positive story on their progress and then the situation changed by the time it was broadcast due to censorship delays, as well as transmission limitations. Frank Gillard explained that Dimpleby suffered from a strange combination of the delaying process of censorship, as all other correspondents did, but also the relative immediacy of radio compared with print news. After filing a report, Gillard noted, “if in those intervening twenty-four hours things had gone badly, with fortunes perhaps reversed, there was little understanding on the spot for the unhappy BBC reporter. With some in the Army [Dimpleby] became discredited, and sometimes confused and dispirited fighting men tended to find an outlet for their own understandable dejection in voicing harsh judgments against him.”<sup>291</sup> This was yet another example of the process affecting the product, although it had different impacts upon the different mediums; with print, censorship could cause delays that were considerably long and cause the news to become old and stale, while with radio it could

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<sup>290</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, Ryan to Maxted, 8 May 1944.

<sup>291</sup> Miall, pp. 29-30.

cause much shorter delays which, however, were just long enough to make the reporting seem inaccurate.

Sometimes reporters encountered problems of misrepresentation of the situations upon which they were reporting due to censorship. During the Phoney War, *The Times* correspondent Robert Cooper complained to his editors in letters and memoranda “about the whims and stupidities of the military censors, preventing him from pointing out weaknesses [in the war strategy] that he saw.” This included what Cooper called the Maginot folly, which he was able to write about only after the fall of France. Cooper wrote: “Probably the greatest blunder of all was the absurd belief fostered in the public mind that the Maginot Line extended from the Channel to the Mediterranean, and here a rigid censorship was to blame.”<sup>292</sup> In a 25 August 1941 diary entry, Alaric Jacobs of Reuters recorded that troops with whom he was inside the siege of Tobruk were tired of reading in the papers they occasionally received about “what wonderful fellows they are and they live only for the day when the big push comes from the frontier and they get the order to break through.” Jacob, who was barred by censors from calling the position anything as negative as a “siege”, also said the British and Australian troops in Tobruk “don’t like newspaper stories written in Cairo describing the romance of their lives and the comfort with which they manage to surround themselves, because their lives are unbelievably hard and monotonous and, save for an occasional swim in the sea, they know no comforts whatever.” Despite the fact he did not intend to romanticize the situation (or perhaps because he did not) the division commander, Australian General Leslie James Morshead, told Jacob he wanted to personally inspect all the copy the reporter wrote. One of the general’s aides warned Jacob, “He’ll censor every bloody word himself, and correct the grammar too.”<sup>293</sup>

When the Allies launched the D-Day invasion, correspondents found censorship conditions that had been tightened even further since the start of the war. Philip Howard of *The Times*, writing in 2004, explained that in Normandy, “Communications were

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<sup>292</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, vol. V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), pp. 75-76.

<sup>293</sup> Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller’s War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), pp. 35-37.

difficult, slow and subject to strict censorship. The military controlled the medium as well as the message.... Censors were provided on the assault craft and even on the beaches.”<sup>294</sup> Doon Campbell said this was not a surprise, as Monty had already informed correspondents of this during a briefing prior to the invasion at a school in Hammersmith, London: “He warned that for the first few days censorship would be very strict and said, ‘Confine yourselves to what you see going on, describing what the soldiers are doing, and do not attempt to tell how the battle as a whole is going or what is likely to happen.’”<sup>295</sup> This rigid censorship affected the reports dispatched to both sides of the Allied Atlantic. Stephen Ambrose explained in his 1994 book, *D-Day*, that American correspondents were confused and their commentary unhelpful to the public at the time of the invasion: “Their attempts at military analysis ranged from misleading to silly.” Yet the public wanted to hear something about the offensive, so the correspondents “chattered away, with little to say except that it was on” because dissemination of the most sought-after details was forbidden. Ambrose writes: “SHAEF refused to give out the information the American people most longed to hear – what divisions, regiments, squadrons, ships were involved.... The reason for this strict censorship was to keep the Fortitude operation alive; the price in the United States was heightened anxiety.”<sup>296</sup>

In rare cases, however, censorship could be advantageous to a correspondent. Ernest Hemingway, ever the novelist, used D-Day censorship seemingly as a way to dramatize events and make his reporting more compelling, according to Leo Mellor, who analysed Hemingway’s report for *Collier’s* magazine about accompanying troops in landing crafts. Mellor says of Hemingway:

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<sup>294</sup> Philip Howard, “The Times and D-Day” *Times Online*, May 31, 2004  
<[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article850678.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article850678.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009).

<sup>295</sup> A. Doon Campbell, *Magic Mistress: A 30-year affair with Reuters* (Norwich, England: Tagman Press, 2000), p. 57.

<sup>296</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6, 1944, The Battle for the Normandy Beaches* (London: Pocket Books, 1994), p. 490.



The fragments of dialogue within the landing craft he includes are not explained and the piece closes with an invocation of what the correspondent has left out: '[t]here is much what I have not written.' That authenticity is the province of the reporter who is there but does not tell all amounts to the incorporation of censorship until it becomes a stylistic effect.<sup>297</sup>

Noting that Hemingway hoped the details of a certain fighter aircraft remained secret, Mellor called him "the correspondent as – ironically – the non-divulger."<sup>298</sup> It is possible that other correspondents used censorship in this way, that is to say a manner by which to dramatize events through omission; no reporter would ever say something akin to, "the rest of the battle details have been censored." Yet in knowing something was being cut, it created an opportunity to rewrite the dispatch in such a way that some things were not fully explained, leaving the news consumer to wonder if there was more that had occurred rather than complain about the quality of the journalism.

Correspondents who were more interested in simply getting the news out found the trend of heavy censorship an impediment, but some developed innovative methods to cope well within the system. The BBC's Denis Johnston found a way to get ahead of both the censorship and his print competitors in North Africa; Nicholas explains that he "would send back to London marked 'Hold till required' seemingly innocuous descriptions of desert locations that intelligence suggested would be the scene of the next military action; when the battle commenced press correspondents on the ground found their reports held up by the military censorship while BBC news ran Johnston's eyewitness description of the battlefield."<sup>299</sup> Doon Campbell, like Gillard of the BBC as mentioned previously, employed his own trick of timing the censors, enabling him to quickly break news from the briefings of which General Montgomery was so fond. Campbell wrote "snaps" of just a few lines giving the most important items from

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<sup>297</sup> Leo Mellor, "War Journalism in English", *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. Marina Mackay (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 72.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>299</sup> Siân Nicholas, "War Report (BBC 1944-5), and the Birth of the BBC War Correspondent", *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003*, edited by Mark Connelly and David Welch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 145.

Monty's press conferences. Those quickly passed through the censors and gave his editors at the wire service an advantage over the competition; later he sent his full story as well as a summary paragraph that could be run in the newspapers.<sup>300</sup>

Even with these subtle techniques in place, the censorship was still a daily impediment to the flow of news back to those engaged in the People's War in Britain. Donald Read states that one of the greatest causes of this was how the men who redacted the words of the correspondents seemingly could work against the media with impunity; Read notes, "The censor enjoyed power without responsibility." Head censor Admiral Thomson sent out frequent Defence Notices, although he often left these instructions frustratingly ambiguous. Yet, arguing in favour of the censors, Thomson warned, "the fact that matter is passed for publication by the censorship does not mean that it is guaranteed as accurate or that its publication is desired."<sup>301</sup> Thomson's scepticism is understandable, as it was inherent to his position. Also, Thomson's point about accuracy might have been true in certain cases, Dunkirk being the most obvious. Anderson writes that in covering the so-called miraculous evacuation, "The newspapers were not interested in the reality."<sup>302</sup> The military and government, then, must have been pleased to find a substantial degree of cooperation from the correspondents and their employers in the form of self-censorship.

### **Self-Censorship**

In Tom Stoppard's aforementioned play, the journalist character is told by a businessman that his coverage of the war is going to make the dictatorial president of the African country think the reporter's newspaper is against him. The reporter responds, "We're not here to be on somebody's side, Geoffrey. That was World War II."<sup>303</sup> While fiction, the statement indicates the wide understanding that in the Second World War

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<sup>300</sup> Read, p. 225.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>302</sup> Duncan Anderson, "Spinning Dunkirk", World Wars in-depth, *BBC Online*, 8 September 2010, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/dunkirk\\_spinning\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/dunkirk_spinning_01.shtml)> (accessed 14 October 2010).

<sup>303</sup> Stoppard, p. 353.

journalism was biased in favour of the nations from which the correspondents hailed. That is not to say they purposely reported untruths, simply that they were partisan. This often manifested itself in self-censorship, which was due to both practical concerns and patriotism, the latter of which was the greater danger to objectivity.

As with official censorship, self-censorship was not born in the Second World War. The practice has existed throughout modern war reporting. During the Crimean War, the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Panmure, suggested that war correspondents should “put it to their patriotism and honour whether they would endanger the success of the army by premature and improper publication of its number, conditions etc.”<sup>304</sup> Thus, the gauntlet was thrown down before correspondents and remained there through conflicts that followed. Kevin Fewster, who edited the published version of First World War correspondent C.E.W. Bean’s Gallipoli diary, explained that the *Sydney Morning Herald* staffer, who became the official correspondent for the Australian Imperial Force in 1915, believed reporters should be fully briefed on any military action but he “did not agree with those who contended that it was the journalist’s place to question authority or criticise strategy. Bean firmly maintained that his rightful role was to report, not criticise. Nor did he see it as his place to sensationalise his copy or ‘scoop’ his fellow correspondents on any story.” Bean himself wrote in 1917 that a correspondent “has to take very great care not to write matter which may be valuable to the enemy even though the censor might not realize it.” This was self-censorship of the patriotic sort that would be seen again in the Second World War.<sup>305</sup>

Reuters participated in a type of group self-censorship when the company’s management decided even before the war began that full cooperation with the government was paramount to itself and the country. As Reuters chairman and managing director Sir Roderick Jones told his editorial staff in July 1939:

Reuter must never lose sight of the national interest. Reuter is authoritative, more so than any other British press organ, even

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<sup>304</sup> Knightley, p. 15.

<sup>305</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Gallipoli Correspondent: The frontline diary of C.E.W. Bean*, ed. Kevin Fewster (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 13, 16-17.

including *The Times*, and Reuter is so regarded abroad. This places Reuter under the obligation to observe great prudence in handling news which may possibly involve the national interest, and to act in close collaboration and accord with Whitehall in this connection.... On a lower plane, Whitehall is a most important source of news to Reuter, and any failure on Reuters' part to conform to the principle and practice of close collaboration with Whitehall would ipso facto close that source of news to us.<sup>306</sup>

Donald Read explains that Jones believed this policy was “perfectly compatible” with an independent news organisation because Whitehall was essentially being used as another source rather than an overseer of Reuters output. Jones stated, “It is not submission to dictation, but consultation of expert advice.” Read, however, argues that this collaboration permeated the Reuters editorial philosophy to the point where at times it did not require government instructions before censoring news in a manner that would have met with official approval: “Support for the national interest could involve suppression of news, even without reference to Whitehall.” In one case, in the first days of September 1939, Reuters suppressed a report from its own Denmark correspondent that the RAF had dropped flyers there that had been intended for Germany, which might have brought into question the accuracy of any future bombing campaign.<sup>307</sup>

In the Second World War there does not seem to have been much need to reconcile the roles of patriot and journalist; the nations of the world had faced off on two opposing sides with the fate of both the correspondents and their countrymen hanging in the balance. Most reporters made very little attempt to set themselves apart as mere objective observers, but rather proudly spoke of the troops as their “own”; in their writing and broadcasting it was clear they felt part of the effort, especially in the use of the words “we” and “our” when referring to the forces. This journalistic formula of kinship with the forces went as far back as the Crimea, when William Howard Russell made statements such as “Heavy firing was going on at the time, and a serious affair on *our* right....” and “On the 22nd a furious fight raged along *our* front.”<sup>308</sup> [My emphasis.]

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<sup>306</sup> Read, p. 217.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Russell, pp. 241, 244.

Obvious examples in the Second World War came from each of the three news outlets: newspaper, news agency, and radio. An unnamed correspondent for *The Times*, writing about Dunkirk on 26 June 1940, referred to “*our* lines” and “*our* defensive positions.”<sup>309</sup> Recalling the fall of Fort Rudero in Libya on 27 January 1941, Alan Moorehead of the *Daily Express* wrote, “I could still see odd groups of Italians on the run, but suddenly *our* artillery got onto them and they disappeared in clouds of blown dust and rock. Three of us – the photographer and two war correspondents – were asked to escort the three senior Italian officers back to *our* own lines.” Describing the aftermath of one day during the Battle of Cape Matapan off the coast of Greece, which lasted from 27 to 29 March 1941, Moorehead stated, “In all *we* had destroyed some twenty enemy aircraft.”<sup>310</sup> Jack Smyth of Reuters reported on 21 September 1944 from the difficult and prolonged British assault on the Arnhem bridge: “On this fifth day *our* force is still being heavily mortared, sniped, machine-gunned, and shelled by self-propelled guns.... The medium guns of the Second Army have just come into communication, and have begun shelling enemy targets that *we* have signalled.”<sup>311</sup> In the same way, the BBC’s Dimpleby narrated live as he flew over the Normandy beachhead after D-Day: “The roads are full of *our* transport, all *our* chaps driving on the right-hand side in the continental style.”<sup>312</sup> The military, at least publicly, also regarded journalists as part of the war effort: in the introduction to a collection of BBC wartime dispatches released the year after hostilities

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<sup>309</sup> “Brigade that Saved B.E.F.: Heroic Action at Calais, Four Days’ Defiance”, *The Times* (London), 26 June 1940, p. 7.

<sup>310</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, pp. 48, 94.

<sup>311</sup> Read, p. 226.

<sup>312</sup> William Grierson, Mark Jones, and Humphrey Walwyn (prods.), *D-Day Dispatches: Original Recordings from the BBC Sound Archives June 1944*, BBC Radio Collection, BBC Audiobooks Ltd., 2004; see also Hickman, p. 180. In 2007, after hearing of the Dimpleby quote from the plane over Normandy, Allan Little, a BBC foreign correspondent, explained that a BBC reporter can no longer say “*our* troops” or “*our* transport” and he related an anecdote about one modern correspondent who used the phrase “our tanks” in a broadcast and an editor sarcastically chided him by saying, “The BBC does not own any tanks.” Allan Little, personal conversation with Brian Hannon, 10 November 2007.

ended, Field Marshal Montgomery wrote that “these correspondents made no mean contribution to final victory.”<sup>313</sup>

Stursberg of the CBC, discussing the taking of Rome by the Allies, notes how a broadcast made under stringent conditions, while also reporting such a joyous event, could come across as propaganda: “It was a triumphal occasion, this entry into Rome, and a war correspondent could be excused for sounding like a booster.”<sup>314</sup> Yet in his 1993 memoir, Stursberg explains how he came to understand that regardless of whether the report seemed affected in some way by excitement and patriotism, it was also fuelled by the understanding that to a large degree there was no escaping government control of the message through the official censorship:

The passage of time has brought the war into focus. As reporters, we tended to look at it through rose-coloured glasses, owing, in part, to the prevalent patriotic fervour, and, in part, to censorship, which allowed no criticism of the war effort. This was total war, and there was total censorship. There was no way of evading it – one could leave the fighting for the rear, for London, or even for Canada, and the same censorship would apply. If one somehow evaded it, or broke an embargo, the penalties were severe: dis-accreditation, disgrace, and even imprisonment.<sup>315</sup>

In a review of a Smithsonian Institution exhibition on war correspondents in 1995, David Culbert notes that, “reporting, controlled by self-censorship and official censorship, functions as a form of propaganda.”<sup>316</sup> At times reporters themselves could fall prey to the propaganda they helped disseminate, most likely because they wished it to be true. Charles Lynch of Reuters wrote, “It was propaganda – everything done by all of us was propaganda, though we might not have admitted it or realized it at the time.” He recounted visiting a military cemetery years after the war where a headstone read,

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<sup>313</sup> Donald Boyd and Desmond Hawkins (eds.), *War Report: A Record of Dispatches Broadcast by the BBC's War Correspondents with the Allied Expeditionary Force 6 June 1944 – 5 May 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), foreword.

<sup>314</sup> Stursberg, *The Sound of War*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>316</sup> David Culbert, “Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (Dec., 1995), pp. 1166-1169.

“Well done, son”. He recognized the part his journalism played in that message to the dead: “I reflected that one of the reasons people had felt that way was that we who reported on the war had glorified it and made ourselves part of the propaganda apparatus required for the waging of total war.”<sup>317</sup> Similarly, Alan Moorehead explained that one of his first in-depth conversations with a man who would become a close friend, *Daily Mail* correspondent Alexander Clifford, occurred when they were both stationed in Greece in April 1940. Moorehead, a junior member of the *Daily Express* foreign staff, said he listened in shock as the veteran reporter, Clifford, dabbled in “subversive talk” about how the Nazis at that time had a better army. Moorehead wrote:

[I] answered him with the stock wartime propaganda, which seemed so definite and irrefutable in the spring of 1940: the Allies had the oil, the money and the manpower. I myself, I said, had just arrived from Italy, and even if Italy came in on the German side then it would make no difference, for the fascists were half-hearted, venal and frightened. In Germany the enemy were already short of food.<sup>318</sup>

Clifford assured him that was not the case. For his part, Clifford described the prominence of his younger colleague’s sentiments among the general populace, recalling that upon his arrival in Egypt in the early summer of 1940 the propagandistic belief in British superiority and German shortfalls was widespread:

It was still, you must remember, the era of blind confidence. In view of what was happening in France it had to be blind; otherwise it couldn’t have remained confidence. But the tragedy of France was too big, too new, too remote to be digested immediately. It could not at one fell swoop efface that long propaganda era when all German tanks were made of cardboard, when the German people had been half-starving for six years and their clothes were made of ersatz fabrics which melted in the rain, when Hitler was an incompetent nincompoop who had no following in Germany. The Middle East in June 1940 shared the same absurd, illogical inability to recognize probable defeat which carried

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<sup>317</sup> Charles Lynch, *You Can’t Print That!: Memoirs of a Political Voyeur* (Edmonton, Canada: Hurtig Publishers, 1983), pp. 60, 65.

<sup>318</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, p. 6.

Britain through that perilous summer and the terrible winter which followed.<sup>319</sup>

Moorehead's willingness to believe the popular propaganda during what Clifford terms "the era of blind confidence" may have tainted his objectivity to a degree, although the fact he went on to become one of the war's most respected print reporters suggests he was no more a propagandist than any other correspondent. He was certainly not the only war correspondent who took this patriotic view, especially as it was practically mandated by those above them. As Trevor Royle explains, "Shortly before the 'Torch' landings in Tunisia in November 1942 General Eisenhower, in his first address to the press, went so far as to tell Allied war correspondents [both British and American], that he regarded them as military personnel and would treat them as such."<sup>320</sup> In this way, Eisenhower appealed to their patriotism and sense of duty in asking for self-censorship:

I regard war correspondents as quasi staff officers, and I want to emphasize that, in my opinion, each newsman has a greater responsibility than that of a competitive newsman. I am not prepared to treat you as if you were my enemies or a bunch of commercial gentlemen. If I thought you were, I tell you here and now I would do nothing for you. It is for that reason I do not worry if I see you in the corridors of my headquarters, or passing my window or anywhere else. I trust you. As staff officers your first duty is a military duty, and the one fact which you must always bear in mind is to disclose nothing which would help the enemy.<sup>321</sup>

Royle notes that many correspondents were content to go along with military and government controls over their coverage due to patriotic convictions and for security reasons. Those who did not quickly learned that it was a tactical error:

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<sup>319</sup> Alexander G. Clifford, *The Conquest of North Africa 1940 to 1943* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2005; originally published 1943), p. 4.

<sup>320</sup> Royle, pp. 148-149.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.



Eisenhower clinched the issue by adding that he regarded a mass of copy covered with [a censor's] blue pencil marks as failure. Stay on our side, tell our story, he seemed to be saying, and we'll treat you well. Give your own version, and you're out on your own. Most of the 92 allied journalists in North Africa favoured the former approach, and those who attempted to file "bad news" stories – defeats or setbacks, criticism of commanders, descriptions of agonising deaths, for example – soon discovered a formidable array of military and civilian censors to cut their material.<sup>322</sup>

Eisenhower reiterated his sentiments about news coverage in a foreword to the *Regulations for War Correspondents*: "With regard to publicity, the first essential in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first essential in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide-open publicity. It is your job and mine to try to reconcile these sometimes diverse considerations."<sup>323</sup> This sort of appeal to correspondents to adhere to strict lines of war coverage was not only incorporated in internal documents, but also in the public sphere. An April 1942 opinion piece in *The Sunday Times* by Maurice Hankey, 1st Baron Hankey and a former British War Cabinet minister, provided both practical and moral reasoning as to why journalists and politicians alike should engage in self-censorship. An army officer in the First World War, Lord Hankey repeated the military line that too much information in the public sphere could be helpful to their foes, noting that "politicians, unless exceptionally versed in the art of war, do not always appreciate that particular information may be of value to an enemy." Extending the admonishment to journalists, he echoed Lord Panmure during the Crimean War when he warned that all criticism of the military command and the government "encourages the enemy to some extent." Lord Hankey, like Lord Panmure and General Eisenhower, made an appeal to patriotism:

The would-be critic, then, would do well continually to ask himself the following questions: Will what I want to say assist the enemy? Will it discourage my fellow countrymen, or weaken their confidence, and especially that of the Fighting Services in their leaders? Will it injure

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Allied Forces, *Regulations For War Correspondents*, pp. 3-4, 9.

national unity and the will to win? Is it constructive or destructive? Will it do more good than harm in present circumstances? For the sole object of those who guide public opinion must be to make such contribution as they can towards winning the war.<sup>324</sup>

It cannot be overlooked that there were also examples of journalists who practiced self-censorship simply in order to get a story out quickly. The BBC's Godfrey Talbot knew much of his written work could be marked off by a censor's blue pencil, or in the case of a recording, a pen knife on a disc, so he took the initiative of censoring himself in order to save time:

[I]f it was a spontaneous and unscripted description or interview, recorded on discs, we had to take a machine and play the discs back for the censor to hear. If I had said anything reckoned dangerous to security, mentioning a regiment or location on which there was as yet a 'stop', the censor would have to deface the record and I would have to lose the dispatch or try to do the whole thing again. So 'talking on to disc' was an inhibiting business, and I had to be my own censor as much as I could.<sup>325</sup>

Overall, the appeal to journalists to employ self-censorship was largely successful.<sup>326</sup> The Dunkirk evacuation is one of the best examples of how journalists had already taken up Lord Hankey's notion of contributing to victory by guiding public opinion in a "constructive" manner that essentially resulted in a form of group self-

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<sup>324</sup> TNA, KV 4/317, Maurice Hankey, "Criticism in War", *Sunday Times*, 19 April 1942.

<sup>325</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 79.

<sup>326</sup> Richard Collier, *Fighting Words: The Correspondents of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 146. In August 1943, when U.S. General George Patton infamously slapped one of his infirm soldiers for what he alleged to be cowardice for being in a hospital bed rather than fighting, journalists were on hand in the hospital ward but did not report the story; instead a group of American correspondents presented Supreme Commander General Eisenhower with a petition demanding Patton privately apologize. Eisenhower reluctantly said there was no military security censorship in the matter and that the journalists "have got yourselves good stories." Apparently concerned about public morale and the continued fighting status of one of their nation's best generals, the reporters declined and informed Eisenhower, "We're Americans first and correspondents second."

ensorship, and acted as great ammunition for The People's War, despite Churchill's declaration that Dunkirk was "a colossal military disaster". Nicholas notes: "However, on their own initiative the press and BBC largely ignored the panic at Dunkirk and disillusionment at Dover and instead created an instant myth, conveying some of the confusion of the real situation, but in general reporting the retreat in a florid and dramatic style."<sup>327</sup> The BBC was one of the worst offenders.

BBC correspondent Bernard Stubbs broadcast from the docks at Dover on 31 May 1940, describing the disembarkation of troops from the ships that had just brought them back from the Dunkirk beachhead. Stubbs was stark in his descriptions of dirty, haggard and wounded men, leaving no doubt they had been through a horrible ordeal, yet he still preferred to emphasise the indomitable spirit of the troops. And this was undoubtedly what the British people wanted to hear, that the United Kingdom was never truly defeated even in such a desperate hour. He broadcast:

All of them were tired. Some of them were completely exhausted. But the most amazing thing was that practically every man was reasonably cheerful and most of them managed to smile. Even when a man was on the verge of collapse from sheer fatigue you could still see by his eyes that his spirit was irrepressible. And that is a thing that all the bombs in Germany will never crush.<sup>328</sup>

This was the magic of the media during total war: the journalist could write or broadcast that men were on the verge of collapse, even show them wilting on the bow of a ship in a newsreel, but then mitigate the image in stating that "by his eyes" it was clear that each of those fighting men had irrepressible spirits that could never be crushed and, by extension, the surrender of the nation in the overall war never conceded. It was a manner of telling the British and Dominion publics that their combined armies had just been beaten badly, but the war was not lost. In addition to observational journalism,

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<sup>327</sup> Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p. 196.

<sup>328</sup> Sarah Kilgarriff (prod.), "Operation Dynamo: Scenes at Dover (31 May 1940)", *Eyewitness 1940-1949: A History of the Twentieth Century in Sound*, BBC Audiobooks Ltd., 2004.

Stubbs's report for a news outlet considered otherwise objective was clearly tinged with a combination of self-censorship and propaganda.

On the same day, the BBC broadcast its 9 p.m. newscast, which became an essential source of information for most Britons throughout the war. The unnamed newsreader (anonymity being the BBC policy for announcers in the early years of the war, except in the case of special commentaries) began, as always, "This is the news..." and continued with details of the circumstances in Dunkirk, including both situation reports and narratives:

A large number of British and French troops have arrived safely from northern France; Allied forces are holding out round Dunkirk and on the line of the Yser [river]. The Royal Air Force have helped the withdrawal of the Allied army by attacking enemy columns and lines of communication; unfavourable weather conditions have brought about a marked decrease in enemy air activity.<sup>329</sup>

With the understanding the BBC might not have had the full picture at that point, the self-censorship in this case is that at no point in the 9 p.m. broadcast is there any mention of the pounding that the Allied forces were taking, instead providing largely positive reporting that made it clear fighting was going on, and large numbers of men were returning home, but not how dire the situation truly might have been. On the contrary, it was made to seem as if the Allies were competing with each other to see who could do the better job in fighting back the Germans:

The evacuation of British and French troops from the north of France goes on by day and by night. Although no specific figures can yet be given, it is known that the number of those who have already reached this country is large. The Allied troops in Flanders are now holding a covering line some miles from the coast. This line has become known as the "Corunna Line" in memory of the famous fighting retreat from Spain of Sir John Moore's army in 1809. French and British troops are fighting side by side, and the sight of one another in action has produced a healthy rivalry between them.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> BBC WAC, Nine p.m. Newscast, transcript, 31 May 1940.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

The broadcast continues with narratives describing British heroism: “About the vaunted invulnerability of the German heavy tanks, there is a well authenticated story that one British officer stopped such a machine with an ordinary anti-tank rifle, it cannot be disclosed what method he adopted, except that he ‘kept his head’, and that anyone else could do it in the same way.”<sup>331</sup> The announcer adds:

The Germans have claimed on more than one occasion that, in face of their pressure, the British Army was fleeing from them in disorder. This, of course, is a fantastic libel. The fact is that there is no military operation so difficult as a retreat, and that re-embarkation at the end of a retreat requires more skill, more courage and more discipline than anything else in war. When it is remembered that all this is being done – and done successfully [these three encouraging words added to the transcript in pencil by a BBC editor] – by our men, for the most part on open beaches, without any possibility of concealment, it is perfectly obvious that there could have been no disorder and certainly no question of the B.E.F. running away from its enemies.<sup>332</sup>

The broadcast cites an officer returning to London who said that while the German bombardment was “terrific” and more intense than anything he experienced in the previous war, “the casualties were surprising low.”<sup>333</sup> Further along, a redacted paragraph crossed out by pencil in the original transcript states:

[One officer] was on one of the beaches when a man in the uniform of a British officer and speaking good English came up to him and said: “I’ve just got orders that you are to take all your men two miles further along.” The officer was just about to do so when he met a naval officer and said: “Surely it’s rather stupid to try and take us off down there, because the Channel is so much further out.” The naval officer replied that there was no intention of doing so. An hour afterwards the point and less further on was heavily bombed.<sup>334</sup>

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331 Ibid.

332 Ibid.

333 Ibid.

334 Ibid.

This excised paragraph, speaking of what might have been a fatal error by an army unit, was a clear example of self-censorship by the BBC. The broadcast then wound up with the final line: “Here on the Flanders coast, however, the battle ground has been so narrowed that the soldier has been able to see constantly and continuously, with his own eyes, the magnificent work performed by the R.A.F., the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy.”<sup>335</sup> This largely positive report was broadcast with a focus on the so-called “Miracle of Dunkirk” despite the fact that any of the military personnel they interviewed would have been able to relate the true horror of the scenes on the French coastline, including the destruction of ships sent to retrieve the troops. This is not to say the evacuation was not brave and, in some ways, miraculous in the number of men rescued. And there is indeed evidence that in many ways the evacuation was conducted with military organisation; in an article for *BBC History* magazine, Laurence Rees writes:

As the Germans attacked, several hundred thousand Allied troops on the beaches around Dunkirk still waited patiently to be rescued. “It was just queues,” says Edward Oates, one of the British soldiers who was trapped at Dunkirk, “queues of men... and people going out into the water. And, of course, the Germans kept coming over, planes, we had to keep dashing up to the dunes to stop being hit.”<sup>336</sup>

Yet Hugh Sebag-Montefiore’s 2006 book about Dunkirk directly refutes the BBC 9 p.m. broadcast’s claim of “fantastic libel” regarding “disorder” in the retreat with historically researched accounts of British troops who did indeed act disorderly. Sebag-Montefiore writes:

General Voruz, head of the French liaison section, described how, while he was waiting on the Quai Felix-Faure in the Dunkirk harbour area, a panic-stricken British captain rushed up and seized his car. The British officer would not leave the car until forced to do so. Even more alarming were the hundreds of British troops who stormed a ship set aside for French soldiers including Voruz and his men. According to Voruz, there was trouble even after the ship set sail. Her commander

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Laurence Rees, “Hitler’s Greatest Gamble”, *BBC History*, May 2010, p. 28.

was reduced to brandishing his revolver in an attempt to restore order. But this did not work for long since the British troops continued to insult the French. Worse still, when the British soldiers heard that the ship was to dock at Cherbourg before she went on to Dover, they were so upset that they went on the rampage, throwing any guns they could find into the sea, presumably hoping that if they arrived back in France unarmed, they would not be asked to carry on fighting.<sup>337</sup>

Sebag-Montefiore adds that this sort of behaviour also included actual physical altercations between British and French troops:

One Sherwood Forester later confessed that he and his mates were so incensed by two French soldiers who had jostled them that they told them, "It's your country; you defend it!" and pushed them off the mole into the harbour. These soldiers were not alone; there are many similar tales of French troops trying to board boats, only to be thrown back into the sea.<sup>338</sup>

Yet he also recounts how the rear guard bravely covered the retreat of the remaining force that was in danger of being overrun by Germans, thus proving that the British people did indeed have much to be proud of in spite of the stories of disreputable behaviour that the BBC seemed unwilling to report. Sebag-Montefiore writes:

They [the Germans] would almost certainly have succeeded, had it not been for the BEF battalions who were ordered to stand in their path. Their job was to shield the safety zone or corridor behind them down which the rest of the Army was retreating to Dunkirk, and they were not to give way until they had fired their last bullet. They were to fight to the last man. Hardly any of these brave men made it back to the beaches or the Dunkirk 'mole'. Most remained in the front line until it was too late to flee, and were either killed or captured at their posts. They are the forgotten heroes of Dunkirk.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, *Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 405.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

A BBC audio retrospective on the war produced in 2004 shows how the British people truly considered the BEF evacuation a “miracle”, while also painting a more realistic picture of the scene at Dunkirk than the Corporation included in its self-censored news reports at the time. A woman who observed the convoy of boats leaving England to rescue the soldiers recalls the scene:

Do you know, it was marvellous. The sea was like a millpond. It looked as if god was there and he was watching over us. And you know, there wasn't a wave, as if there was god watching over us. And I believe it today that he was, that he was watching over us and we was going to win the war because of that.<sup>340</sup>

Yet the narrator of the production follows with a less Biblical assessment: “When the German troops became aware of the evacuation, they attempted to respond. But their efforts were impeded by weather which grounded much of the Luftwaffe. German planes were only operational for two-and-a-half days of the nine-day evacuation.” Meaning the myth of the little armada of watercraft being the saviours of the BEF was not entirely true; for a time the weather played a benevolent part for the Allies, as was very briefly mentioned in that 9 p.m. news report. The narrator in 2004 continues: “But when the weather cleared, dive bombers attacked the helpless men waiting on the beaches. Discipline faltered; many soldiers went crazy with terror. Others mobbed the boats; causing them to capsize, drowning their wounded comrades.”<sup>341</sup> Indeed, Sebag-Montefiore relates how a Gunner Lieutenant Elliman and his men fared, including one crazed by fear: “Elliman had been spared, but some of his men were less fortunate: his medical orderly's right cheek had been blown away. Two other men had been killed. The telephonist was so shocked by the injuries he saw that, as Elliman put it, he went ‘wackers’ and was carried away laughing uncontrollably.” Sebag-Montefiore also tells of the captain of the destroyer HMS Keith, which was sunk and many of its crew and passengers lost, who upon reaching Dover, “had a nervous breakdown triggered, apparently, by other men on board insisting that they must report to the harbour's

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<sup>340</sup> Kilgarriff, “Evacuation: Voices From Dunkirk”.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.



examination vessel. When he heard this, Berthon became abusive, shouting that he was Captain D (the officer in charge of his flotilla), and as such did not have to report to any ‘bloody’ examination vessel, especially after what he had been through.”<sup>342</sup> Clearly this runs counter to the 1940 BBC broadcast stating that “there could have been no disorder” and that each survivor showed “by his eyes” that there was no sense of defeat in them. The carnage on the French coast and on the ships being bombed and sunk described by the survivors was not reported in any sort of detail in 1940, perhaps due to simple propriety in avoiding such harrowing detail, but also undoubtedly as a way of maintaining public morale through a focus on the positive aspects of the story.

And the press was no different. The *Daily Mirror* headline after the evacuation read, “Bloody Marvellous”.<sup>343</sup> *The Times* ran a piece on 26 June 1940 titled, “Brigade That Saved B.E.F.: Heroic Action At Calais, Four Days’ Defiance”. As was its policy during the period, *The Times* did not print names of its reporters in a byline, only “From Our Special Correspondent”. Yet the story named the two British battalions – the Rifle Brigade, 60th Rifles, Queen Victoria’s Rifles, and a battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment – along with French troops, all together totalling approximately 4,000 men, who held off two German heavy armoured divisions while the rest of the BEF escaped across the Channel. The newspaper story quotes Winston Churchill telling the House of Commons on 4 June that these groups had “added another page to the glories of the light divisions.” It also relates how on 26 May “a flag of truce was passed through our lines to the Brigadier, and a demand for immediate surrender was refused.” On two occasions the Allied troops are referred to as a “gallant force” who fought on with little food, water or ammunition as they attempted to hold Calais, “not realizing that they were thereby saving the B.E.F.” in what was termed “a remarkable feat of arms.” It even tells the tale of an officer of the Rifles who found a dinghy and rowed alone across the Channel: “A feat of great skill and daring.” Another three officers escaped from the column of prisoners taken by the Germans and, along with seven French soldiers they encountered at a river, used a motorboat to link up with a British destroyer: “This escape showed

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<sup>342</sup> Sebag-Montefiore, pp. 387, 419.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

great courage, determination, endurance, and skill.”<sup>344</sup> This was the story which the people wanted to hear, and this is the “miracle” that the media gave them.

Ian McLaine discusses how Dunkirk became a great national legend used to repeatedly excite national spirit. Writing in 1979, he states:

British civilian morale during the Second World War has subsequently assumed the quality of myth: ‘myth’ in the sense of a story which encapsulates for its believers all the qualities they see themselves as possessing in circumstances of extreme adversity. Since the war the myth has been continually nourished by the tendency of politicians and others to call for a revival of ‘the Dunkirk Spirit’ whenever Britain has faced a threat to her well-being.<sup>345</sup>

Angus Calder writes in *The People’s War*: “Because Britain was fighting a regime which burnt books and suppressed the truth, journalists and other intellectuals in Britain consented to the suppression of the truth, and gladly took part in the fabrication of mendacious propaganda, arguing with themselves that the ends must justify such means.” This statement by Calder about “the prevalence of voluntary self-censorship”<sup>346</sup> could be used to explain the edict by the head of Reuters to tow the government line in the news agency’s reporting, and even more so in the eager self-censorship by reporters and editors who promoted the Dunkirk Miracle.

While journalists at all the various news organisations may have been hindered by military censorship in the amount, content and timing of material sent out to the public, they did not have to fulfil Admiral Thomson’s warning that their censored material was not necessarily accurate, nor did it have to be pleasing to those in power. William Haley of Reuters and Kent Cooper of the Associated Press jointly relayed their attitude toward wartime censorship in 1942: “There is acceptance of the right of government to have us withhold news for the common good, but no acceptance of any right of government to

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<sup>344</sup> “Brigade that Saved B.E.F.: Heroic Action at Calais, Four Days’ Defiance”, *The Times (London)*, 26 June 1940, p. 7.

<sup>345</sup> McLaine, p. 1.

<sup>346</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 502.

say how we shall word what we do transmit.”<sup>347</sup> Whether or not intentionally, Phillip Knightley also refuted Thomson in his book, *The First Casualty*, when he summed up censorship’s overall effect on the accuracy of reports from the field: “The point about censorship is that while it can prevent a correspondent from sending a story the military does not want published, it cannot force him to send a false or exaggerated one.”<sup>348</sup> So while there were various examples of self-censorship and even propaganda by Allied correspondents during the Second World War, they seem to have been motivated by professional and strategic concerns as well as patriotism, rather than any conscious attempt to subvert the truth. Knightley expounded on these factors in the practice of wartime journalism:

There are basically two types of war as far as journalists are concerned – other people’s wars, and our wars. You can hope to get a reasonably accurate and objective report of other people’s wars (although idealism might interfere) but it’s naive to expect objectivity from journalists covering their own country’s war. They are pulled into line by their own patriotic instincts, pressure of public opinion and the military which puts them into uniform, censors them, and only grants access in return for propaganda. It was called accreditation. Now it’s called embedding. It hasn’t changed over the years.<sup>349</sup>

Having addressed the structure of official censorship and motivations behind self-censorship that helped shape or restrict to various degrees the final news product that reached the people at home, it is subsequently necessary to analyse the avenues through which that news was gathered and dispatched from the field: the techniques and tools of the war correspondent.

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<sup>347</sup> Read, p. 216.

<sup>348</sup> Knightley, p. 77.

<sup>349</sup> Phillip Knightley, “Re: Richard Dimpleby questions”, personal email to Brian Hannon (6 June 2009).



## **Correspondent Techniques and Tools**

The structural aspects of war correspondents' work can be broken down into three key elements: the techniques for gathering the news stories, methods of transmitting these stories back to Britain and the Dominion nations for dissemination to the public, and the equipment used to achieve these functions. The techniques for obtaining the news can be placed in two general categories: embedding with the troops and/or travelling with other correspondents to the war zones to do first-hand, eyewitness reporting; and developing healthy working relationships with sources including military leaders and civil servants in order to get information such as troop movements, casualty statistics and updates on strategy and policy. This was also beneficial to the military sources in that it allowed them to shape the stories in a way that advanced their own aims, while also helping to buoy the morale of the soldiers in the field and the public. Once they had their stories, correspondents needed to transfer the reports from the Continent and North Africa. Telegrams were the method most often used by newspapers and Reuters, although there were also slower means including letters and, a holdover from the First World War, carrier pigeons. Many of these techniques were also employed by radio reporters who sent back written dispatches to be read by editors, although it was more complicated when they wanted to file their own recordings, requiring them to use military aircraft to ship recording discs and, later in the war, new recording technology and equipment designed for broadcast transmissions. There were various radio outlets using this broadcasting equipment and their correspondents became well known to listeners; the most famous of these was not a British or Dominion correspondent, but American Edward R. Murrow of CBS, however, Australia, Canada and of course Britain also employed this technology to great success.

### **Eyewitness Reporting**

The most direct form of war reporting in the Second World War, and every other conflict since William Howard Russell reported from the Crimea, was fieldwork in the battle zones. As previously explained, correspondents needed to gain accreditation to

travel with military units and endure many of the same hardships and dangers as the soldiers, and the journalists themselves considered this paramount in order to give the public a proper feel for what their troops were enduring at the front. Without eyewitness reporting, the public in Britain and the Dominion nations would not have had any real sense or definitive news of the developments of the war. Correspondents travelled with military personnel directly into the most hazardous situations simply because that was the best way to convey not only the facts of the war, but also the images of the fighting; it could be said they painted a picture of battle, and often in extremely vivid colours. This was done to varying degrees of skill, but undoubtedly the readers and listeners were granted lucid, dramatic insight to the conflict, perhaps more so than any previous conflict. For example, Desmond Tighe's report from a British destroyer off the French coast at Berniere-Sur-Mer at dawn on 6 June 1944 provided the sort of vivid description of the Normandy landings that enthralled the wartime public – as well as generations of historians, filmmakers and others since then – because Tighe was allowed to convey his personal experience, which was the same as the soldiers and sailors whom he stood beside:

Guns are belching flame from more than 600 allied warships. Thousands of bombers are roaring overhead, fighters are weaving in and out of the clouds as the invasion of Western Europe begins. Rolling clouds of dense black and grey smoke cover the beaches south east to Le Havre as the full fury of the allied invasion force is unleashed on the German defence. It is the most incredible sight I have ever seen... The air is filled with the continuous thunder of broadsides and the crash of bombs. Great spurts of flame come up from the beaches in long snake like ripples as shells ranging from 16 inches to 4 inches find their mark.<sup>350</sup>

Radio reporters believed they needed to be close to the battle because they wanted “actuality” – the sounds of battle in their recorded reports. Peter Stursberg of the CBC noted that at Monte Cassino he learned of an upcoming attack that would include the

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<sup>350</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters 1849-1989* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 224.

heaviest barrage of the war thus far and he knew that for the full magnitude to be conveyed to his listeners he needed actuality: “Obviously I had to get the sound of the opening round of gunfire... We had selected the place to make the recording very carefully because we wanted to be in the midst of the artillery, in front of the howitzers and just behind the twenty-five pounders.” Stursberg provided the audience with a type of auditory reference list for the battle noises that could be heard in his recording: “It’s an amazing and terrifying sight and yet thrilling. I don’t know how to describe it properly in words, and I think it’s easier for you to picture it by listening.... There are guns in front of us – they’re the ones that make the sharp cracks – and guns behind us – if you listen carefully you’ll hear the whoosh of their shells going over our heads – and guns to the side of us.”<sup>351</sup> In another example, Stursberg recalled the battle of Coriano Ridge, where in September 1944 British and Canadian troops tried to dislodge German troops entrenched on an Italian hilltop. Stursberg said he and his crew had to get their recording equipment in place the night before as they had been informed that on 13 September shelling by 700 guns would begin at 1 a.m. precisely. In Stursberg’s opinion, having that position so close to the scene was key to making the story memorable by enabling them to get “one of the best actualities of a battle.”<sup>352</sup> In Normandy, the BBC’s Chester Wilmot made the first recording of the wailing sounds of incoming Nebelwerfer mortars as he sheltered in a nearby ditch, clearly risking his life to be in close to the battle and thereby obtaining a ground-breaking story: “The midget [portable recording device] recorded perfectly right through the bursting salvo, for the mortars landed a little further away; and so, for the first time, we had a recording of the German weapon which our troops most disliked.”<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 165.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>353</sup> Donald Boyd and Desmond Hawkins (eds.), *War Report: A Record of Dispatches Broadcast by the BBC’s War Correspondents with the Allied Expeditionary Force 6 June 1944 – 5 May 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 20-21, 27; Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), pp. 151, 172-174. The Midget recording device was a small, portable unit pioneered by the BBC and will be discussed later in this chapter.

This desire for actuality, which clearly made the broadcasts more vivid, was why radio reporters felt the need to be so close to the fighting. Yet did it make a difference to how they covered the combat compared to print correspondents? While the newspaper and press service reporters undoubtedly made a habit of being in the thick of the action, as proven by many of the vivid descriptions of battles that were printed, Charles Lynch, a Canadian correspondent for Reuters, put forward a “theory of the correspondents” arguing there was not as much of an urgent need for print reporters to be directly on the frontline:

The theory of the correspondents was that being in the heat of an all-out military action doesn't help you to write about it, because the infantryman's view of things is so narrow and because the chance of witnessing classic acts of heroism, the stuff of combat journalism, is so slight. It is better to do it afterwards by interviewing survivors and getting details like home towns and names, which is difficult to obtain when the action is hot.<sup>354</sup>

Lynch seems to be in the minority of former war correspondents who was willing to come out and admit an aversion to the frontline so bluntly. This is borne out by the memoirs of journalists who complained about their colleagues, without naming anyone specifically, who preferred to report the war from army headquarters in the rear, where they took information and quotations from the officers in charge of strategy, movements, supply, and other elements of overseeing the forces. In many of these memoirs, those types of reporters were considered to be, not cowardly, but rather reluctant or even lazy. Correspondents would not have had brushes with danger, to be discussed further on in the dissertation, or been captured by the enemy such as Edward Ward, had they perpetually languished in the back. Eyewitness reporting indeed comprised the backbone of a war correspondent's work. Yet while the journalism conducted at the headquarters in the rear was still considered to be the easier aspect of war reporting, it was still a vital part of the job.

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<sup>354</sup> Charles Lynch, *You Can't Print That!: Memoirs of a Political Voyeur* (Edmonton, Canada: Hurtig Publishers, 1983), p. 59.



## Dealing with Authority

Forming good relationships with the military officials at those headquarters was of paramount importance to reporters in their efforts to fully understand the bigger picture of the war as it progressed. What should be kept in mind is that this type of interaction was mutually beneficial; both sides were using each other for their own means. The correspondents acquired quotations with which to supplement their stories on the battles, and the military was able to disseminate its preferred message, i.e. propaganda, to the public. The correspondents also garnered a great amount of intelligence both on what was happening at the time, as well as what was very likely to happen in the future, although without divulging specifics of upcoming actions. This sort of symbiotic relationship with authority is not specific to war reporting, however, it is a regular part of most fields of journalism, past and present. The BBC's Godfrey Talbot summed up this relationship when he described both how he made contact with higher-ranking officers and their importance to his own eyewitness reporting. He noted that the conducting officers provided by Army Public Relations at El Alamein:

[They] all possessed one splendid quality – they seemed to have been at school with half the senior officers in the army, which meant that it was all Christian names in Divisional H.Q. tents from the start, and a smoothed entrée for me into the dugout operations rooms and intelligence officers' map lorries which from now on were my sources of information to supplement what I saw of the fighting for myself.<sup>355</sup>

Clearly Talbot and other correspondents understood that just seeing the battle with one's own eyes was not enough; there also had to be a big picture perspective from those who planned the fighting.

In dealing with the military, the BBC deliberately meant to exploit vanity – in this case the lure of being interviewed or being talked about on the radio – as a way to gain an edge, as demonstrated in an internal memorandum from BBC Deputy Director of War

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<sup>355</sup> Godfrey Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now: A Broadcaster's Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), pp. 71-72.

Reporting Malcolm Frost: “Commanders are only too human in that they attach considerable importance to their own prestige and publicity. This is a card which the BBC can usefully play in obtaining adequate services.”<sup>356</sup> That card might have been best played with General Montgomery, who was well known for his acumen and enthusiasm in engaging the media, both for communication as well as self-promotion. Frank Gillard noted they first became acquainted when he deployed to cover Montgomery’s British 8th Army in North Africa:

I knew nothing about Monty and didn’t know him at all. But, as an enterprising BBC reporter I made it my business to get introduced to him, and to say to him that I hoped that he would from time to time receive me, and record interviews and statements and his orders of battle and that sort of thing, and that I hoped we could have a good working relationship.<sup>357</sup>

The pair did indeed form a mutually beneficial arrangement, he claimed, due to Montgomery’s belief in the power of radio to buoy spirits in the field. “[He] believed that through broadcasting he could speak to every man in his army and to their loved ones, and this was very important as morale is essential to the soldier in battle.”<sup>358</sup> Gillard also recalled that the general recognised the value of boosting public confidence through the media:

Monty said to me, ‘If I can assure the people at home that I am not the man to waste lives, that I think we’ve got a fair chance of winning, and that I’m going to run this battle as effectively and economically as I can, if I can say that to them, that will do good for morale at home, and it will also be reflected in the mail that the soldiers get out here.’<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Anne Macadam, “The BBC War Report Programme on the Second Front, June 1944–May 1945” (MSc dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>357</sup> WW2 People’s War Team, “An Interview with Frank Gillard”, *WW2 People’s War: An Archive of World War Two Memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, 4 February 2005, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/51/a3618551.shtml>> (accessed 5 December 2010).

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

The relationship Gillard formed in the desert with Montgomery, and the general's conviction that the broadcast outlet served a useful purpose in his war efforts, greatly benefitted the BBC when the Allies launched the second front in Normandy. Gillard explained:

Now, up to this time, the military authorities had regarded the BBC as just another newspaper. So you were only allowed one man out reporting with you, and it was a great concession that you got a truck and a recording engineer. With this you had to cover the whole range of the BBC's output – home, external, all those vernacular services – all had to be done by one person, which was almost an impossibility. But once we got Monty on our side you see, we were able to lead Monty on. And whereas in the western desert there I was with one recording engineer, and that we were the BBC, when we landed in Normandy there were 32 of us, and we were with the airborne troops, we were with the infantry landing on the beaches, we were with the air force during the bombardments, we were with the Navy and, what's more, we took ashore with us our recording equipment, and within a few days we had our own transmitters which we took around with us from that time onwards right across Europe. We also had a censorship unit attached to us staffed by BBC people now serving in the army who thoroughly understood our needs and this was all really due to the relationship which one could develop with Monty who was really very keen to use broadcasting as an arm of warfare.<sup>360</sup>

On 23 October 1942, the first day of the second battle of El Alamein, Montgomery summoned a "small party of war correspondents" to the patch of sand outside his tent, according to Talbot, to explain that he planned to attack the German Afrika Corps that night:

He then handed to each of us a printed copy of his personal message to the troops, the first of his familiar eve-of-battle calls which always sounded half Kipling and half school padre. 'Let every officer and man enter the battle with a stout heart,' it read, 'and with the determination

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

to do his duty so long as he has breath in his body. Let us all pray that 'the Lord Mighty in Battle' will give us victory.<sup>361</sup>

Angus Calder notes that this interaction with his men was part of the “mystique” cultivated by the general that helped him win over both the soldiers and the public: “Monty himself was by way of being the People’s General of the People’s War. His mystique was based on his novel concept of leadership, which conformed well to the new and swift type of war which was fought in tanks and spitfires.” He adds that Montgomery stated a belief that wars were fought by civilians in uniform rather than military professionals, and he had never employed a “remote control” philosophy with his men, “they are human beings and their lives are precious.”<sup>362</sup> It was this attitude that set him apart from other military leaders and this was where his communications to the soldiers were so important. Calder writes: “His enthusiasm for putting his men ‘in the picture’ with familiar and colloquial ‘personal messages’ showed that he understood the reasons why ABCA [Army Bureau of Current Affairs] had been created. In the centre of ‘the picture’, Monty, of course, placed himself; his excellent opinion of General Montgomery was part of the legend, though many people in and out of the forces disliked him for it.”<sup>363</sup> Regardless of the feelings this legend engendered among others in the military, it was undoubtedly why Montgomery and the war correspondents had such a symbiotic relationship; he needed them to be in the centre of the picture, and they needed him to stay on top of the war information they were trying to report. Yet there were occasionally negative consequences to this access to power. Talbot wrote of Britain’s desert commander:

As the BBC man with his army, I occasionally came under the Montgomery lash. He would listen each night to our Overseas Service news coming from a small radio set by the bed in his caravan and if there was something he didn’t agree with on my day’s report on the desert situation as quoted in the bulletin he would have an orderly find

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<sup>361</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>362</sup> Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 303.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304.

me and haul me up in front of him for a dressing-down. He made me feel like a small boy in front of a peppery house-master.<sup>364</sup>

Talbot said he appreciated the close interaction, not only with Montgomery, but also with other top military commanders. He was “indebted” to Field Marshal Harold Alexander, commander of the Allied armies in Italy, who sometimes invited him to dinner at his headquarters: “on those occasions the wealth of information he gave me about the whole military situation and his future battle plans formed an absolutely invaluable background to my work as a war correspondent.”<sup>365</sup>

Many other correspondents had similar working relationships with military leaders that helped smooth the way toward obtaining their stories. Alan Moorehead, in his trilogy of books about covering the war in North Africa for the *Daily Express* newspaper, related how General (later Field Marshal) Sir Archibald Wavell called a group of seven or eight war correspondents to his office in Cairo. They sat around him in a semicircle as he stood and explained how his forces had launched an attack in the Western Desert earlier that morning, calling it an “important raid” and cautioning them from calling it “an offensive” in their stories. He explained to the reporters that he was giving them this special briefing to provide time to make arrangements to travel and cover the story. Wavell added that he wanted to know if the correspondents had been tipped off.<sup>366</sup> “He questioned us then to discover if any of us knew that the attack had been planned. It was important, he said, since, if the correspondents had not known, then, presumably, no one else except the authorised few had known,” Moorehead wrote. “Not one of us was able to say he had had any hint of it.”<sup>367</sup> This could be considered an acknowledgement by the military of the reputation the correspondents had earned for doggedly chasing the important stories of the war up to that point, but also the importance of developing a close relationship between the two parties.

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<sup>364</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 76.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>366</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943* (London: Cassell, 1944), pp. 59-60.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

While utilising their patterns and techniques of eyewitness reporting and establishing the important relationships with the military authorities who were able to give them details of past and future battles and greater perspective on the overall strategy of the theatre of war they were covering, the correspondents were still faced with the matter of exactly how to record the news they observed and heard. This is what made the equipment they employed so important to the work they conducted.

### **Correspondents' Tools**

War correspondents have always needed certain tools and provisions to do their assignments. These developed over the years as the times changed and the technology of war progressed, but historically some have always remained the same, whether or not they were truly necessary. Examples used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are provided by Richard Harding Davis and W.F. Deedes. Davis, in his 1911 book, *Notes of a War Correspondent*, explained that in his time covering conflicts in various parts of the world, including for British newspapers, he had seen different pieces of “kit” employed by “travellers and explorers, and... by army officers and war correspondents” and that each was a very personal arrangement. “On a campaign you may attack a man’s courage, the flag he serves, the newspaper for which he works, his intelligence, or his camp manners, and he will ignore you; but if you criticise his patent water-bottle he will fall upon you with both fists.”<sup>368</sup> Davis goes on to list the items he carried with him on a regular basis while in the field, many of which were different than those carried by Second World War correspondents simply because of the different time period. Harding had many items specific to travel by horse or cart rather than the jeeps and trucks used by the reporters in the mid-20th century, as well as items that were unnecessary in a more modern battlefield or one in a different type of environment. He included in his list extra riding breeches, mosquito net, folding rubber bathtub, an axe, two pairs of drawers (“For riding, the best of those are silk”), two briarwood pipes, canvas gaiters, collapsible lanterns, a bottle of ink with a fountain pen, and a revolver with six cartridges. (Second

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<sup>368</sup> Richard Harding Davis, *Notes of a War Correspondent* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), pp. 239-240.

World War correspondents were banned from carrying weapons, although some still did for personal safety.) Harding said there was no need for more than six cartridges “on the theory that if in six shots you haven’t hit the other fellow, he will have hit you, and you will not require another six.” Yet some of the items stood the test of time and were necessities regardless of which war the correspondents found themselves in: candles, matches, tooth brushes, soap, towels, handkerchiefs large enough to tie around the neck, playing cards, smoking tobacco, writing paper, envelopes, and books.<sup>369</sup> Upon assigning W.F. Deedes to cover the conflict between Abyssinia and Italy in 1935, his *Morning Post* editor suspected he might get cut off by the fighting and should therefore take a significant amount of equipment to sustain himself. This resulted in what Deedes termed “a lively shopping spree” at the Austin Reed shop in London’s Regent Street, where he purchased “three tropical suits, riding breeches for winter and summer, bush shirts, a sola topi, a double-brimmed sun hat, a camp bed and sleeping bag, and long boots to deter mosquitoes at sundown. To contain some of these purchases we bought two large metal uniform cases and a heavy trunk made of cedar wood and lined with zinc to keep ants at bay.” Continuing on to the Army and Navy Store in Victoria Street, he bought quinine pills against malaria and black chocolate as an iron supplement. “Our purchases in all weighed just short of 600 pounds – a quarter of a ton.”<sup>370</sup> Evelyn Waugh, who worked as a correspondent in Abyssinia alongside Deedes, later lampooned this exorbitant amount of gear in his satiric novel, *Scoop*.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., pp. 259-263.

<sup>370</sup> W.F. Deedes, *At War With Waugh: The Real Story of Scoop* (London: Pan Books, 2003), pp. 4-5.

<sup>371</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 60. Waugh wrote of William Boot, his fictional reporter ostensibly based on Deedes, “William, hesitating between polo sticks and hockey sticks, chose six of each.... By the time [the sales clerk] had finished with him, William had acquired a well, perhaps rather overfurnished tent, three months’ rations, a collapsible canoe, a jointed flagstaff and Union Jack, and handpump and sterilizing plant, an astrolabe, six suits of tropical linen and a sou’wester, a camp operating table and a set of surgical instruments, a portable humidior, guaranteed to preserve cigars in condition in the Red Sea, and a Christmas hamper complete with Santa Claus costume and a tripod mistletoe stand, and a cane for whacking snakes.”

When Godfrey Talbot of the BBC set off for the front in the Egyptian desert, he took what more experienced correspondents assured him were essentials: a thousand cigarettes (to be used for bartering with Bedouins), stomach medicine, a crate of Stella beer, three bottles of whisky, rolls of toilet paper, a spade, a hair-horse whisk for beating off flies, a bedroll and sleeping bag, suede desert boots with thick soles, and three weeks of rations.<sup>372</sup> Unlike with Deedes and the purchases made with his editor for the journey to Abyssinia, most of these items were unlikely to have been discussed with BBC management as necessary supplies before leaving London to cover the Second World War because they would have seemed excessive and not directly essential to the job of reporting the war.

Alan Moorehead listed the articles he carried while reporting from Egypt for the *Daily Express* in April 1940 alongside his friend, Alex Clifford of the *Daily Mail*. In addition to buying “large-scale maps of the desert”, he said the correspondents wore clothing and carried items specific to the desert, as well as the normal kit issued to all correspondents:

We bought desert boots made of suede that came halfway up the ankle, knee-length khaki stockings, shorts of khaki drill that fastened with two neat buckles at the midriff, drill shirts, and the whole was surmounted by the regulation khaki sun helmet. (It was not until a year or two later that the army at last agreed that sunstroke came through the eyes and not through the back of the neck, and thereafter we wore peaked caps or berets.) We were given, also, water bottles, gas masks, flat steel helmets and, for the first and only time in the war, a revolver each. The revolver, we were told, was not to be used against the enemy but against the local population in case it turned against us. Finally we bought mosquito net, camp beds, sleeping bags and canvas washing buckets; and we were complete.<sup>373</sup>

While Moorehead was proud of his vocation, he found the insignia worn on the uniform purchased as part of his kit and meant to set him apart from regular army units

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<sup>372</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 71.

<sup>373</sup> Alan Moorehead, *A Late Education: Episodes in a Life* (Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing, 1970), pp. 9-10.



to be a source of embarrassment, rather than pride, in the initial stages of the war in the desert: “I disliked the little green tabs we were obliged to wear on our shoulders. They were inscribed in gold ‘British War Correspondent’ and gave one the feeling of being a delegate at a Rotary convention.”<sup>374</sup> He continued with his description of how he felt the uniform, while marking him out as an official war reporter, still caused some awkwardness:

War correspondents were rare birds at that time, and people in the Turf Club [in Cairo] were forever sidling up to us, arching their necks to read the inscription, and, having read it, they were apt to laugh facetiously among their friends. This was unpleasant, for at heart we took ourselves rather seriously and were already in imagination projecting ourselves into all sorts of heroic dangers at the front.<sup>375</sup>

Doon Campbell of Reuters was first called up to cover Italy in September 1943. He was given a kit allowance of £75, which he took to the Moss Bros. store in London to purchase a gabardine uniform with the war correspondent shoulder tabs that Moorehead disliked so much. A colleague, however, informed him that he could obtain free gear in the basement of the Reuters headquarters, from which he took a sleeping bag and a used great coat that had already been through Kashmir and Jerusalem. Later, in his preparations to cover the invasion of Normandy, he was required to get inoculations against Typhoid, Tetanus and Smallpox, as well as to acquire a new steel helmet.<sup>376</sup> Charles Lynch, the Canadian correspondent for Reuters, also went to the Moss Bros. “used-clothing emporium” for his uniform, acquiring an outfit that he said mightily impressed himself. He purchased “a serge dress uniform with leather buttons and a cavalry greatcoat down to my ankles and a Sam Browne belt and calf-high officers’ boots in pebbled leather and a pair of waterproof veltschoen shoes and a sheepskin jacket and a knee-high pair of fleece-lined Wellingtons.” He was sure his visage “would strike terror into friend and foe alike” on the battlefield, but he must have looked more

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> A. Doon Campbell, *Magic Mistress: A 30-year affair with Reuters* (Norwich, England: Tagman Press, 2000), pp. 31, 55.

like a caricature as he noted that his officer's cap was so new and stiff that a friend from the forces took it from him and literally beat it into a shape becoming of someone who had actually been in the field.<sup>377</sup>

Although they might have been well equipped at the outset, as with the soldiers they covered the war took a hard toll upon the correspondents and, subsequently, their kit. A day after coming under ambush in Libya, Moorehead and Clifford went back to the truck in which they had been traveling to salvage any useable gear they could find. Moorehead recalled: "Smashed cameras and typewriters, bedding rolls riven with bullets, suitcases battered into shapelessness, lay strewn about. Even our fine Parmesan cheese was pitted like a Gruyere, and a tin of army biscuits had all but reverted to its original flour. Razors, glasses, compasses, revolvers, water bottles – everything was smashed." In contrast to the ample amount of supplies they had when first setting out, the men were practically stripped to the bone. Moorehead wrote: "We had no food now and practically no clothes. Apart from my greatcoat, all I was able to salvage was the uniform of an Italian sailor – stuff I had got at Tobruk – and in that uniform I stayed until the end of the campaign." Despite being down to the bare bones of gear, the pair did the only thing left to them under the circumstances, the prime dictate of their vocation: follow the war. Moorehead and Clifford decided there was nothing else to do when history was moving past them except try to keep up: "We were sitting forlornly there among our wreckage when the other war correspondents arrived, and we clambered aboard their vehicles. There was no time to lose. The advance was going very quickly now."<sup>378</sup> This is an example of the lesson most correspondents learned as the war progressed: they could make do with far less kit than they had initially thought they needed and could subsist on fairly minimal provisions when thrust into difficult circumstances.

Despite all the optional items they could and often did bring, the biggest difference between the correspondents and the servicemen upon whom they reported

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<sup>377</sup> Lynch, pp. 50-51.

<sup>378</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943* (London: Cassell, 1944), pp. 104-105.

was that they were not officially allowed to carry firearms. However, they had their own authorized “weapon” used to do their service in the battle zones, the most important piece of kit for all correspondents: the typewriters they all carried. They were cumbersome and difficult to heft around the countryside and through cities and villages where battles raged, but key to the work of the Second World War correspondent. Typewriters were so important because handwritten messages were impractical for sending back to Britain, as they could be smudged or their handwriting found to be illegible. Moorehead explained that correspondents tapped away at their indispensable typewriters in “strange” circumstances and using any surface that was at hand: “We typed on the backs of trucks, on beaches, in deserted houses, in gun emplacements and tents. We hoisted our typewriters on kerosene cases, on bathtubs and rolls of kit, on humps of sand and the steps of cars, or just perched them on our knees.” He also noted that they developed the unique skill of being able to type regardless of the conditions and distractions, or nearly so: “We wrote by candlelight or lamplight, or with an electric torch shining onto the paper. And in the end we could write anywhere at any hour of the day or night – anywhere, that is, except during a bombardment, for I tried it and failed miserably.”<sup>379</sup> Alexander Clifford recalled that although he was desperate to reach Tunis after hearing reports of its impending fall to the British in May 1943, he held on to this essential piece of gear: “I fell in with a Signals vehicle which took me eighty miles to Thibar... Terry Ashwood, the Paramount photographer, and Frank Gillard of the B.B.C. were just starting for the front in a truck, and I abandoned everything but my typewriter and climbed up behind onto their spare wheel.”<sup>380</sup> And once they had put their typewriters to use, there was still the problem of getting the story back to Britain and the Dominions.

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>380</sup> Alexander G. Clifford, *The Conquest of North Africa 1940 to 1943* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 431.

## Delivering the Story

War stories were obviously worth no more than a yarn shared between correspondents in a tavern unless they reached the vehicles of dissemination – newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasters – that distributed them to the public hungrily awaiting this information. Unfortunately for the correspondents, getting the news to their organisational headquarters could often be just as difficult as accumulating the stories in the field. In this, all correspondents shared a common goal and a common obstacle.

In order to get stories out, correspondents made frequent use of telegrams, also called cables; to save money on the cost of these messages that were priced by the word they employed a type of shorthand called “cablese”. Doon Campbell explained the technique: “omitting ‘the’, ‘a’, and prepositions, and creating single words by such devices as turning ‘keep up’ into ‘upkeep’ and ‘hold down’ into ‘downhold’, or writing ‘Londonwarded’ instead of ‘left for London’”. Too often these economies were taken to excess; some reporters were so creative they were incomprehensible.”<sup>381</sup> Yet while the reporters to a large extent used telegrams, at times they employed even older methods. Campbell, for example, tried a bribe. The first correspondent to land on the Normandy beaches from a ship, Campbell wrote his initial dispatch and handed it to a naval officer who was returning across the English Channel; the story did not make it to Reuters headquarters: “I gave him £5, and never saw him again.”<sup>382</sup> Donald Read notes that during the D-Day landings, Reuters correspondent Monty Taylor sent a message from a ship back to England by carrier pigeon.<sup>383</sup> Campbell recalled that in one of the final pre-invasion briefings, a brigadier general at army headquarters said that carrier pigeons could be employed, as wireless (radio) communications “will be pretty shaky.” Campbell said that pigeons had a “special resonance for a Reuter man” because it was with these birds that Paul Julius Reuter had been able to gain a foothold for his new company in 1850 by getting the news out faster than the Brussels-Aachen mail train that

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<sup>381</sup> Campbell, pp. 22-23.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>383</sup> Read, pp. 224-225.

was normally used at the time, but that Campbell himself was unwilling to use them for reasons he did not state.<sup>384</sup> Charles Lynch recalled going over the side of a naval ship and into a landing craft on D-Day, disembarking on the beach hefting his own carrier pigeons: “I put my typewriter on my head and the basket of pigeons on top of that, and jumped, wondering what would happen if my feet didn’t find bottom. They did, and I struggled to the shore, keeping the typewriter and the pigeons dry.”<sup>385</sup> Lynch remembered that he and another correspondent wrote their dispatches on tissue paper, which were then submitted to censors who used scissors to cut out the sensitive parts before the messages were placed in capsules attached to the legs of the pigeons. They were to be released in male and female pairs, “for some sexual reason known only to pigeons.” Yet, when the pigeons were released, they turned and flew inland instead of going across the Channel toward the English coastline. The sound of gunfire indicated they had passed into the German lines, thus revealing the great unpredictability in the use of these birds to deliver the war news to a waiting public. Lynch said that thirty-four of their thirty-six pigeons flew into France. With the last two birds they went back down to the beach, hoping the sight of the ocean would give the pigeons a better idea of their task. The result was predictable but still disheartening. Although, as Lynch explained, the moment was instantly cemented in war correspondent lore: “They made one pass over the breakers and then swerved inland, disappearing in the general direction of Germany. Whereupon I shook my fist and, in an utterance that became part of journalistic legend, shouted, ‘Traitors! Damn traitors!’” Lynch expressed displeasure that when he saw the movie, *The Longest Day*, the person portraying the correspondent shouting those words was British, “assuming that anybody who worked for Reuters must be a Limey. That was a Canadian cry, and it came from the heart.”<sup>386</sup> Thus, despite the new communications technology revolutionising the news industry, even late in the Second World War correspondents still employed timeworn methods for dispatching

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<sup>384</sup> Campbell, p. 58.

<sup>385</sup> Lynch, pp. 54-55.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57; see also, Darryl Zanuck (prod.), *The Longest Day*, CinemaScope, 1962.

stories. And there were additional problems for print reporters, even with the advent of the most modern methods.

Philip Howard of *The Times*, in his reminiscences about D-Day in 2004, explained, “Getting films and copy back to Printing House Square was a nightmare. There were limited and erratic radio links, infrequent courier planes, speed-boats, and special facilities for journalists covering D-Day from London.” One of the paper’s other correspondents, Robert Cooper, wrote in June 1944 that he could only get his dispatches out “very late near or after midnight”, which clearly missed the paper’s deadline. In a series of internal communiqués between 21 and 29 June of that year, Cooper and Foreign Editor Ralph Deakin discussed how wireless breakdowns had kept Cooper’s stories from getting through, which Deakin characterized as “largely a failure thanks to sluggishness in transmission and delivery”. He lamented that many of the paper’s Normandy stories had been from sources other than *The Times* correspondents, which can be assumed to mean they came from Reuters, but he encouraged his reporter to keep working. He stressed that Cooper’s attempts to file via America on more secure channels, which had slowed the process, was not the right course and that he should send his stories straight to London. Deakin stated in a cable, using the combined words of the so-called cablese style of writing, “Please don’t get discouraged and continue filing but importanest you file direct not newyorkwise.”<sup>387</sup>

Another war correspondent of *The Times*, John Prince, also had difficulties. Prince wrote to Deakin on 21 July 1944, “It is difficult to get through promptly under present conditions. We are living in an apple orchard miles from anywhere and getting to the front means an all-round jeep ride of six hours or so. We have no newspapers and no briefing from the army involved in present operations. The unit I am with is not yet operational; when it is the P.R.O. organisation and communications look like being

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<sup>387</sup> Philip Howard, “The Times and D-Day” *Times Online*, May 31, 2004 <[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article850678.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article850678.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009); “Transcript messages from the front: Messages between Robert Cooper (War Correspondent) and Ralph Deakin (Foreign News Editor) sent during June 1944”, *Times Online*, 31 May 2004 <[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article426796.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article426796.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009).

good. Meanwhile, we are remote from everything. A copy of the paper would be most useful and much appreciated.” He wrote again on 10 August to thank Deakin for reassuring him his dispatches were getting through:

Communications have been very bad. Mostly to London direct they are non-existent except for the air courier. Partly this is due to the need for constantly moving of camp. We have just moved again and it is hoped by tonight to have direct wireless communication with London, though for how long no one can tell. These swift thrusts are hard to follow. If you keep up with them there is the problem of getting copy back to what communications there may be. The great distances to be travelled from camp to front have been a very real obstacle. This was especially so at the beginning when we were allowed to cover the First Army front as a courtesy, had enormous distances to travel from our camp to the front, from there to First Army, and then back to our camp, with all our copy having a second priority on First Army communications.<sup>388</sup>

Radio correspondents used some of the same methods of getting the stories out as their print counterparts. Peter Stursberg recalled that keeping down the costs of cables was a major concern for CBC administrators; one reporter was chided for sending a long telegram that cost the equivalent of \$70 Canadian. “The CBC never forgot that \$70 cable and would make snide reference to it whenever there was an austerity campaign, which was quite often.”<sup>389</sup>

Yet the Second World War saw one of the great sea changes in war reporting technology with the rise of the radio correspondent, fundamentally and forever altering the technology through which conflicts are reported. The war was a vital period for radio news as broadcasting technology made great leaps with the advent of portable recorders and other developments that allowed correspondents to bring the sounds of battle and reports from the frontlines directly into the homes of their listeners, something never

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<sup>388</sup> “Messages between Robert Cooper John Prince and Ralph Deakin, transcripts: Messages between John Prince (War Correspondent) and Ralph Deakin (Foreign News Editor) sent during July and August 1944”, *Times Online*, 31 May 2004 <[http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol\\_archive/article426781.ece](http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/tol_archive/article426781.ece)> (accessed 23 February 2009).

<sup>389</sup> Stursberg, *The Sound of War*, p. 187.

before experienced despite radio's growing popularity since its launch approximately forty years before the war.

In early 1939, Dimbleby opened a new era in war reporting when he deployed to the Pyrenees as an "observer" of the Spanish Civil War and gained the dubious honour of being the first radio reporter to record the sounds of an ongoing battle, as previously discussed. During the Second World War the technology improved and reports from the front, including the noise of bullets and bombs, became commonplace on radio networks. This gave war reporting an immediacy and closeness never before experienced by the public and made these broadcasts almost a daily necessity, in addition to the newspapers through which people were used to obtaining their news. They also cemented the reputations of the organisations and reporters broadcasting the stories, who became on-the-spot conduits of battle.

As previously discussed, radio was not entirely accepted by some in the wartime journalism world, as it had what the newspapers perceived as an unfair advantage with its ability to broadcast at any time rather than only on the set publication schedules of daily papers. In Britain, the close relationship between the long-established newspapers and the Ministry of Information resulted in the government's reluctance to let radio beat print publications to big stories, instead requiring the BBC to hold broadcasts over until the morning hours when newspapers hit the street.<sup>390</sup> In the early part of the war Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain even considered doing away with broadcasting altogether. Yet the shortage of newsprint and the fact that more than seventy of every 100 households owned radios helped drive the public toward broadcasting. The BBC's nightly 9 p.m. reports became essential listening and its reporters unreservedly trusted to provide news of the war.<sup>391</sup> Undoubtedly the same can be said about Edward R. Murrow and his CBS radio colleagues for Americans and the broadcasters of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for those Allied nations.

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<sup>390</sup> Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 198-199.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211; Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 175, 188.



The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, although not a major international player in coverage of the war, boasted at having the conflict's superior broadcasting units. The CBC's best-known war correspondent, Peter Stursberg, stated: "One American reporter had a portable recording unit. It was a disc recorder, and it weighed about 20 or 30 pounds, and its fidelity was absolutely hopeless. I mean, gunfire sounded like a pea dropping on deck, but it was good enough for voice but not for sound."<sup>392</sup> A 2005 article by CBC News described the Corporation's portable equipment used during the war as "Technology that neither the BBC nor the Americans could match."<sup>393</sup>

That may have been true at some point, but from D-Day to the end of the war the BBC was arguably the world leader in radio reporting with some of the most cutting-edge technology used in the field.<sup>394</sup> Edward Ward's description of the changes enacted by his employers at the BBC between the time he was captured by Rommel's North African army in November 1941 and his release from a POW camp three-and-a-half years later offered a synopsis of the giant advances the broadcasting media achieved in recording and transmission technology:

[T]he B.B.C. had certainly made great strides in their war reporting since my days in the desert. During the Wavell push I had no recording gear at all, and had to rely on the Australian Broadcasting Company's kindness to make records at all. Otherwise, I simply sent cables. I only had a recording set right at the end and that was simply installed in the back of an ordinary truck and took at least twenty minutes to get under way. Now things were very different. Mobile transmitters were scattered over the country. There were almost countless recording vans magnificently equipped and which could start operating in a couple of minutes. And there were even miniature recording machines called 'Midgets' which were about as big as a portable gramophone and could

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<sup>392</sup> Alison Smith, "InDepth: VE-Day, War Correspondent", *The National*, CBC News, 3 May 2005, Bob Weiers (prod.), <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/ve-day/correspondent.html>> (accessed 1 April 2009).

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), best known for the London Blitz transmissions of its European news chief, Edward R. Murrow, was the other predominant broadcaster among radio news outlets.

be taken in a jeep to places where it was difficult to manage the heavy recording vans.<sup>395</sup>

In 1941, the BBC broadcast ninety-nine news talks per month, including reports on the war. By late 1942 the BBC plans for dispatching recordings back to Britain included, “Direct radiotelephonic transmission”, motorcycle riders, air transport, and submarine telephone cables and landlines. By 1943 the Corporation had increased the number of its disc recordings from the war theatres to 5,000 weekly and then up to 7,000 during the week of D-Day.<sup>396</sup> This was not all due to the war, it was part of an evolution; BBC recording technology had already made great leaps in the 1930s. The Corporation’s headquarters moved in 1932 from Savoy Hill, located off the Strand, to a larger, purpose-built facility also in central London, Broadcasting House at Portland Place, where engineers used German magnetic tape recorders called Blattnerphone-Stille machines. These had six-millimetre, steel tapes that recorded for twenty minutes, later improved to thirty-minute, three-millimetre tapes. When a new studio opened in 1934 at Maida Vale, northwest London, the BBC upgraded to the Marconi-Stille machine, a metal box about five feet high with two steel wheels of magnetic tape mounted on its face; the tapes themselves were unsuitable for editing and easily damaged. In short, it was nothing to take into the field, and certainly not onto the field of battle. The BBC therefore began experimenting with significantly smaller machines recording onto discs that looked and acted like phonograph records.<sup>397</sup> With this technology functional, the main engineering goal became the development of mobile recording units. Disc recorders with hydraulic levelling mechanisms were mounted in trucks, creating mobile studios, although the vehicles were too large and heavy to be practical and smaller automobile units came into use. As James Godfrey noted: “The experiment of using

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<sup>395</sup> Edward Ward, *Give Me Air* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), p. 191.

<sup>396</sup> Hickman, p. 151; Foreign News Committee, BBC WAC R28/280/1, “Report to Controller (News) on Radio War Correspondence and News Services from the Fighting Fronts”, 8 December 1942.

<sup>397</sup> James W. Godfrey, “The History of BBC Sound Recording”, *Journal of the British Sound Recording Association*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1959), pp. 7-11, 14.

single disk recorders in saloon cars proved more successful and a number of these were put into service just before war broke out.” In 1939, the BBC had six mobile disc recording machines in operation; by 1945 there were twenty-eight.<sup>398</sup>

Superintendent Engineer of Recording R.J.L. Pulling opined in January 1943, “battery operated recording equipment of any kind is something of a freak.” He explained that the BBC’s design of a mobile disc recorder was “the only battery operated high quality recorder so far as we know anywhere in the world” and he warned that making it so light one person, or even two people, could carry it into the field would require significantly more development work; in short, he did not recommend the BBC tackle the job.<sup>399</sup> Meanwhile, an American portable device known as the Heller Recorder, which was battery powered, could record thirty-two minutes of sound, and weighed in at only twelve pounds, seemed at one point to the BBC engineering division to be “the ideal method of recording for Combined Operations.” They had, in fact, been considering both the Heller and a “sound camera” since late 1942.<sup>400</sup> Yet additional testing proved them both to fall short of the BBC’s desired standards and the Corporation eventually opted to invest in its own ingenuity. The result was the “Midget.”

The invention of the Midget recorders most likely was prompted by a 6 October 1942 memorandum from Overseas Controller J.B. Clark, who wrote, “It may be a wild suggestion for a layman to make, but the sight of the midget wireless field telephones used by the U.S.A. army prompts the thought that something more portable than we have at present available for recording or broadcasting communication could be devised for really practical use.”<sup>401</sup> It took the BBC research department until 1944, but the Midget was ready before D-Day. Tom Hickman explains:

Officially, it was called the Riverside Portable: spring-wound with two recording positions (one to cut out background noise, the other to open

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Pulling, “Light Weight Portable Recording”, 14 January 1943.

<sup>400</sup> BBC WAC, R28/279, “Meeting on B.B.C. Raids Requirements”, 29 October 1942; BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942.

<sup>401</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Clark to Graves, 6 October 1942.

up the field of sound so that the pandemonium of battle could be heard); a clip-on mike; twelve double-sided 10-inch discs slotted inside the lid, giving seventy-two minutes' worth of recording.... It weighed 42 pounds and must have been a bitch to hump in and out of trenches. Not only that, it was unreliable, too, working on only two out of three occasions. It had no playback facility, either, so there was no way of knowing if it had recorded. And it was fragile: when they could, the correspondents used the detachable dry battery to save wear on the wind-up handle, but breakdowns were frequent.<sup>402</sup>

Yet it proved worthy when Wynford Vaughan-Thomas field-tested it at Anzio in March 1943.<sup>403</sup> Writing in the June 1944 issue of *Picture Post* magazine, correspondent MacDonald Hastings praised the Midget recorder he saw at work while observing the Operation Spartan exercise during which the BBC tested both the Corporation's and the recorder's readiness for the upcoming second front. He said the quality of the discs was not as good as those made in recording vans, but the Midget enabled correspondents to take recording gear to places where a van could not reach and that the "chances of sound recordings of actual battle scenes have been immeasurably strengthened by the development" of the machines, which he likened to a "portable gramophone" and said could even be carried by a correspondent during a parachute jump.<sup>404</sup> Hastings wrote:

The men of the B.B.C. War Reporting Unit themselves are enthusiastic about the possibilities of the new recorders. Given a reasonable chance by the military censors in the field, they believe that there should be no difficulty now in getting back real sound pictures of actual battle. If they can indeed do it, they can change the whole character of the B.B.C.'s war news.<sup>405</sup>

As previously mentioned, Chester Wilmot demonstrated the effectiveness of the Midget in Normandy when he clipped a microphone to a tree and recorded Nebelwerfer mortars. And, according to Hickman, despite the frequent malfunctions, "it was on a

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<sup>402</sup> Hickman, pp. 172-174.

<sup>403</sup> Boyd and Hawkins, pp. 20-21, 27; Hickman, pp. 172-174.

<sup>404</sup> MacDonald Hastings, "How the B.B.C. Covers the Invasion", *Picture Post*, 17 June 1944, Vol. 23. No. 12., pp. 10-11.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

dozen or so of these [Midget] machines... that much of the final struggle for Europe was captured for all time.”<sup>406</sup> Getting the recordings back to Broadcasting House once the long-awaited second front opened on D-Day required the BBC to make special preparations prior to the invasion. Midget discs were to be returned by air and sea couriers; telediphone units, another type of recording device, were employed as dictaphones that could record verbal messages onto wax cylinders for replay to a typist; and special recording stations were installed in southeast England so correspondents could travel across the channel and send recorded or live broadcasts without having to return to London. The BBC kept recording channels open twenty-four hours daily and cars were stationed at the main ports to drive correspondents to the transmitters.<sup>407</sup>

Mobile transmitters were also an integral part of the system installed for sending news back from the continent in the latter part of the war. Well before D-Day, in October 1942, the BBC engineering division was asked to look into recording stations along the south coast of England so correspondents could report on aircraft deployments or quickly deliver reports of commando raids in western Europe. Yet there was also an understanding of the need for mobile transmissions from the field; engineers were directed to develop more mobile units for war correspondents beyond the six medium-wave transmitters outfitted on large trucks that the BBC kept for emergency broadcasting around Britain. Corporation administrators meanwhile expressed concerns over the subsequent technical issue of whether these transmitters would interfere with military communications, as well as the need for correspondents and engineers to practise using mobile transmitters from spots around Britain before they deployed.<sup>408</sup> BBC engineers planned for mobile base camps comprising “medium-wave transmitter lorry, power lorry, and two six-wheeled mobile recording lorries” until more permanent and powerful stations could be established.<sup>409</sup> They perceived the coming western front

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<sup>406</sup> Hickman, pp. 172-174.

<sup>407</sup> Hawkins, pp. 30-31; see also BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942.

<sup>408</sup> BBC WAC, R28/280/1, “Report on Broadcasting Facilities in the Field”, 23 October 1942.

<sup>409</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, Foreign News Committee, 8 December 1942.

offensive in three progressive phases: the invasion, the time shortly after a beachhead was established, and the period of permanence when there was no fear of being driven off the continent. For each phase, they developed a plan for the amount and type of staff and equipment needed; for instance, in Phase One they assumed a need for a pair of two-kilowatt truck transmitters, the same number of truck-mounted power and recording units, a “studio truck”, and a mobile control room. For Phase Two it was to be ten-kilowatt, medium-wave transmitters and additional short-wave transmitters.<sup>410</sup>

The Corporation initially encountered difficulties in getting the War Office to provide vehicles on which to load the transmitters. By December 1943 there was concern that if the equipment was not ready to move with the army by D-Day then American broadcasters would set up their equipment first and the BBC would be reliant on these facilities instead of its own,<sup>411</sup> which would have been a huge blow to the speed of news delivery if BBC correspondents were always second in line to broadcast. Yet the Corporation eventually procured trucks from the army and prepared three mobile transmitters using equipment acquired from various sources, including RCA in America. Each of these transmitters was designated with a call sign in an “MC” series: Mike Charlie Oboe (MCO), Mike Charlie Peter (MCP), and Mike Charlie Nan (MCN). MCO, a 250-watt transmitter on a three-ton truck, was the first to reach Normandy shortly after D-Day, with the five-kilowatt MCP following in July 1944 and established at a semi-permanent BBC headquarters in Creully before its eventual transfer to Paris. The 7.5-kilowatt MCN arrived in September. Not everything had been anticipated before the invasion and, as the frontline moved further east, MCO could no longer reach London; the engineers worked out a system of relaying signals through MCN and then to Broadcasting House, as well through captured German aerial masts. Eventually they

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<sup>410</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/1, “Broadcasting Facilities in the Field: Preliminary Survey of Technical Equipment and Personnel Required”, 9 December 1942.

<sup>411</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/4, G.J.B. Allport, “D.G.’s Interview with A.G.”, 17 December 1943.

were able to broadcast directly to the United Kingdom capital, as well as New York and Australia.<sup>412</sup>

These technological advances did not necessarily make the lives of the reporters any easier; sometimes just the opposite. While print reporters were writing notes and typing up text as they had always done, the radio reporters had to deal with equipment that could cause many problems. Godfrey Talbot was among the BBC correspondents who experienced the changes in BBC technology as they happened, from the early years of the war until the end. He explained that for radio reporters in the initial years of the conflict, “On-the-spot reporting was not a simple business”. While reporting on the Desert War he was often hundreds of feet away from his engineer, to whom he was attached by a cable between his microphone and the recording truck, where they made the discs to be sent back to Britain. He also had to dodge the battle while trying to provide an eyewitness account. He wrote: “The [British] tanks were churning up such a fog of sand that I could judge the coming of each monster only by the sound of its squeaking and grinding; and during the whole broadcast I had to keep leaping backwards and forwards to prevent not only the cable but myself from being cut in two.”<sup>413</sup> Talbot also noted that it was not technically possible to do broadcasts from the desert, everything needed to be recorded and then shipped to Britain, and therefore they tried different techniques to get the best sound: “The recordings were all on heavy old discs: there was no tape at that time. I made many of the recordings standing near the truck, but sometimes we would manhandle the gear out and into a smaller vehicle, or use the gear out on the sand after the truck had disgorged it and retreated.” The truck, which they had named Belinda, was too large and cumbersome for use in forward areas and they were at

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<sup>412</sup> Martin Ellen and Norman Shacklady (eds.), *On Air: A History of BBC Transmission* (Kent, England: Wavechange Books, 2003), pp. 12, 134, 137-140; see also Hickman, pp. 174-176; and Old BBC Radio Broadcasting Equipment and Memories (ORBEM), “Reporting War: Into Action”, <[http://www.btinternet.com/~roger.beckwith/bh/repwar/wr\\_action.htm](http://www.btinternet.com/~roger.beckwith/bh/repwar/wr_action.htm)> (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>413</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 78.

times told by the soldiers to get the vehicle out of the area, lest it catch the attention of the Germans and subsequently bring down shelling.<sup>414</sup>

Talbot also recalled that after the recording process the problems were far from over: “When passed [by the censor], the recorded dispatches were flown or sent by dispatch riders back to Cairo, and from the studios of Egyptian State Broadcasting were beamed to London.” The distance between a reporter and a transmitter was sometimes hundreds of miles, causing delays in the news being delivered.<sup>415</sup> This at times caused agitation among the troops and subsequently problems for correspondents trying to get information from military sources. Talbot described how at El Alamein he carried discs that could hold recordings of four minutes on each side containing the voices of soldiers and battle sounds that were edited by BBC engineers in trucks fitted with the equipment needed to make the recordings, essentially a mobile studio. Due to the necessity of getting the discs to Cairo and then “radio-beamed” to London, there was sometimes a day between the event and the story being broadcast. Yet Talbot saw this as acceptable due to the importance of, and widespread interest in, the war news: “[T]here was a first-class story to tell, and my spoken dispatches were on the air every night, top-of-the-bulletin stuff, heard by millions not only at home in Britain but in the BBC overseas services throughout the world.”<sup>416</sup>

After the Desert War, when the BBC reporting team moved on to Italy, Talbot wrote that they used “army Signals or civilian Cable and Wireless network out of Naples to get our broadcast reports back to London” for inclusion in the Corporation’s various news programmes. As previously mentioned, the BBC eventually developed its own transmitting equipment that gave greater freedom and greatly improved speed and transmission capabilities to the correspondents. Yet this did not completely fix the problem; as Talbot observed, “Reporters, or their dispatches on disc, still had to be sent from ‘up front’ by dispatch riders or small aircraft to wherever the transmitter and its tent had been set up, on Roman hillside or Tuscan vineyard, but at least we talked direct

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Godfrey Talbot, *Permission to Speak* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 46.



from that point to London; editors in Broadcasting House could answer us back, and our spoken reports usually reached Britain pretty clearly.”<sup>417</sup> Broadcasting from Athens in 1944, Talbot continued, was a technical problem in that he had to send his reports by military wireless and BBC connections; he used a transmitter that relayed his news from Greece to Italy, and then on to London. This was lucky because the military and BBC channels were free while the Greek economy was crippled and using commercial channels, as was sometimes done, was not ideal: “Payment in cash would have been difficult: the currency had collapsed, as I realized when I went into an Athenian bank and asked to change a pound note into local money. I emerged with a kitbag stuffed with notes: the rate was 22,000,000,000,000 drachmas to the pound.”<sup>418</sup> Moving on to France in August 1944, Talbot was equipped with the new Midget recording gear: “[A] small box – revolutionary then – in which recordings were made not on disc but on thin wire: yards and yards of it in coils, so that I could talk for many minutes on end.” Once he and the other correspondents had this new technology in hand, it allowed the BBC to greatly improve and even expand its war coverage. As Talbot noted:

By the time final victory over the Germans was won, dozens of BBC men were in the field, combining many skills, performing a professional job in personal danger. Armed with the virtues of truth and courage – and new technical gear – they forged new broadcasting techniques and securely founded British radio’s world reputation for swift, accurate and vivid first-hand news spoken by men on the spot.<sup>419</sup>

Being on the spot, however, was often a job in itself. Even without their carrier pigeons, typewriters, Midget portable recording devices or recording vehicles of various sizes, traveling to the war zones and moving around within them could be extremely difficult, whether due to rugged means of passage or simply a lack of transport altogether. And while correspondents considered obtaining and dispatching the news to the people in Britain and the Dominions to be an extremely important vocation, they all

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-67.

recognized that life in the battle zones also came with numerous perils and harsh realities from punishing weather to the possibility of serious injury or death. The Second World War might have been the most dangerous for correspondents, since they were allowed such close proximity to the combat and the attendant risks. At the same time, when the fighting slowed and the reporters found an opportunity to escape the rigours of their work, they enjoyed some advantages and gratuities that were likely never attained by the foot soldiers whose stories they were there to record. This is why the travel, perils and perks experienced by the Second World War correspondents comprise another important chapter in their story.

## Correspondent Travel, Peril and Plunder

### The Travelling Correspondent

Matthew Halton of the *Toronto Star* described riding on a British destroyer carrying ammunition and food from Alexandria harbour to Tobruk harbour in August 1941. This was a perilous journey taken on a regular basis during which it was not unheard of for destroyers to be lost to the frequent enemy aerial strikes. British naval officers had dubbed it “The Death Ride”. During his journey he heard a thud and thought the ship had been hit by a torpedo, but learned that a plane too high to be seen or heard had dropped bombs that fell into the sea forty feet from the bow.<sup>420</sup> Later, German Stuka dive bombers also attacked the ship. Halton wrote:

It is one thing to lie on your back on land and watch the Stukas dive, aiming at this or that gun position or group of vehicles in a large area, but something else to be on a small ship and know that this time it's for you. The captain, the chief gunner and even the navigator stood there giving their commands as if ordering tea, even as the Stukas dived, machine-gunning as they came.<sup>421</sup>

The planes missed Halton's destroyer and another that was making the run, held off by the anti-aircraft guns of the ships. “In five minutes the action was over. I hoped nobody had noticed my knees.”<sup>422</sup> Having arrived safely in Tobruk harbour, with some measure of luck, Halton had learned that even travel was a hazardous undertaking for correspondents during the war.

Just trying to get to the areas where the fighting was taking place could be an adventure filled with beauty or danger, but most certainly with difficulty. Alan Moorehead summed up the strategy of travelling around the various war zones of the western theatre: “Covering the war in these huge countries we always tried to be at one of two places – at the front, or back at headquarters. Either way you got the news. But if

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<sup>420</sup> Matthew Halton, *Ten Years to Alamein* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1944), pp. 112-113.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

you were caught halfway you got nothing, and even if you did have any information you usually had no means of sending it.”<sup>423</sup> Making sure he was in one of those two places was paramount to a correspondent’s job, but it was mostly troublesome and required resourcefulness, fortitude and especially patience. Direct flights over Europe were out of the question due to the German Luftwaffe menace, requiring correspondents to use a combination of land and sea travel, as well as air trips over non-combat areas that often took them far out of the way while trying to reach their destinations. To add to the difficulty, the war was a fluid, moving entity that required many transfers from one battlefield to the next. The correspondents were therefore frequently on the go in order to reach the next big story.

Alex Clifford of the *Daily Mail* took a “flying boat” from Crete to Alexandria in June 1940 in anticipation of Italy joining the war and moving its troops to Egypt from Libya. Egypt presented serious geographical difficulties, Clifford noted, as it was “surrounded on three sides by impassable deserts and on the fourth by the sea.” Along with the other journalists in Cairo who “clamoured to be allowed up to this desert front”, he had to wait nearly a week for British military permission to move out “on that horrible journey I have made so many times since.” He described the travel along a “dead-straight, double-tracked motor road” headed toward Mena past the Cheops pyramid, moving north out of the Nile Valley toward the coast and then, with a turn west, into the desert. His initial expectations of the desert were “vague thoughts of rolling golden sand dunes, sheikhs on pure-blooded Arab steeds, romantic green oases”; the sort of idealized beauty that caught the imagination of numerous European travellers before him. Instead he encountered scrub brush and beige sand, of which he and so many other correspondents in the North African theatre complained: “Always there was dust – dust as fine as snuff or flour which can seep through closed lips and eyelids, through any clothing, which gets into food and bedding and gun barrels and aeroplane engines; which, when it blows, makes men pray for deliverance.” There was a dreaded thirty-mile stretch of the road, “known to thousands of drivers as the ‘Humpty Dumpty,’ where the

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<sup>423</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943* (London: Cassell, 1944), p. 118.

tarmac has been laid straight onto the desert surface, without foundations, and faithfully follows every bump (the contractor who built it, we learned, was still in prison.)”<sup>424</sup> Clifford also described what many correspondents making their maiden voyages through the desert must have become conscious of – its disorientating emptiness:

For mile after mile the road was a shining black-satin ribbon bisecting an utterly monotonous landscape. It was all so unchanging that one had little or no sense of progression. The road might have been a continuous band going round and round. At the end of that first trip my memory of it was telescoped into one static picture of a dun-coloured countryside slashed by a black strip of sand-proof tarmac.... [The desert] is thoroughly bewildering until you know it. You find your sense of direction completely fuddled and you can't tell whether the horizon is one mile away or five. You need to get your stomach and your mind and your eyes and your habits thoroughly acclimatized to it before you can be happy living and fighting in it.<sup>425</sup>

Alaric Jacob of Reuters took a slow trip to the Middle East when he was dispatched to cover the North African war in 1941. A reading of various correspondents' memoirs and letters and memoranda show that his experience was typical. He started at King's Cross Station in London and took a train to Edinburgh. He then boarded a Dutch freighter on a seven-week journey that took him 10,000 miles through Atlantic waters past Iceland, Newfoundland, the American east coast, the West Indies and Brazil on the way to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa before traveling north toward his target.<sup>426</sup> Godfrey Talbot of the BBC stated that, “It was the very devil getting into that war. Most frustrating.” He added that during the war he normally found his travels to the battlefields to be “bizarre and baffling.” His first trip to Cairo in 1942 included travel up to Scotland, then a voyage with Atlantic and West African convoys that involved the danger of torpedoes, a stop-over in Nigeria, “hitchhiking” with civilian aircraft from Nigeria to the Congo and Uganda, and finally flying along the Nile. In all it took him six

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<sup>424</sup> Alexander G. Clifford, *The Conquest of North Africa 1940 to 1943* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2005; originally published 1943), pp. 4, 7-8.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>426</sup> Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller's War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), pp. 2-4.

weeks to arrive in the Egyptian capital from London.<sup>427</sup> In his field diary kept during the war, Chester Wilmot of the BBC described transferring to different ships seven times during his initial deployment, using his sleeping bag to get a hard nap on one ship: “While the others breakfasted I curled up on wardroom seat for a cold sleep.”<sup>428</sup> Halton, who eventually left the *Toronto Star* to work for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, said travel by sea was “a waste of a good life.” He deployed in April 1941 on a ship that was part of a convoy carrying 20,000 troops and other war correspondents to the Middle East, a trip he found stultifying. “I vegetated for several weeks – weeks in which time seemed not to pass,” Halton wrote. He recalled that during the trip he endured the worst condition of all for a news man – very little news:

For news of what was happening in the world we had only the briefest of daily bulletins. On May 10th the Germans bombed London and the night was an apocalypse of flames and horror – we read three lines about it in our daily bulletin. Greece fell and the British Army there was evacuated – we had six lines in the bulletin. The Germans sank the *Hood* and the British sank the *Bismarck* – in another six lines. Rudolf Hess flew to England – in one line.<sup>429</sup>

These accounts indicate the sort of tedious, frustrating and often uncomfortable conditions that were the norm for correspondents deploying to the war. Meandering routes across both sea and land were not unusual and often necessary, sometimes for safety precautions in order to keep away from the German land and air forces, but more often due to the paucity of available transport.

In spring 1941, Alan Moorehead experienced what was a familiar and frequent predicament for correspondents in the Second World War: working desperately just to find adequate transportation as a distant story slipped away. Arriving in Nairobi, Kenya, Moorehead heard that Italian-held Addis Ababa was about to fall to the Allies and he

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<sup>427</sup> Godfrey Talbot, *Permission to Speak* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 34.

<sup>428</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, Chester Wilmot, diary entry “Mon June 12<sup>th</sup>”, Papers of Reginald William Winchester (‘Chester’) Wilmot, 15/15/63.

<sup>429</sup> Halton, p. 99.

wanted to reach the Abyssinian capital to cover the story in person. He began by taking a flight of a few thousand miles, the pilot landing twice at refuelling stations and finding that only the first had any petrol, before reaching a muddy airfield located miles outside the Abyssinian city of Harar. The field was “wet and dangerous” and soldiers told the pilot they had been trying to radio him with a warning not to land. The soldiers then could not risk getting a vehicle stuck on the sodden runway so “there was nothing for it but to struggle across a mile of mud with our baggage in the darkness” to a waiting truck. Moorehead found, however, that this detour in the journey was more of a roadblock: “No plane was going onto Addis Ababa. No convoys were going. A private car I could not have, since hostile banda tribesmen were swarming along the roads and attacking single vehicles.” He said the British Army’s intelligence unit in Harar offered to let him send two hundred words per day back to his paper with its signals equipment, “but everyone was too busy and too harassed with their own job to bother about a stray journalist.” The British forces were moving into Addis Ababa and Moorehead was stuck three hundred miles away, a bitter pill after having travelled 3,000 miles for the story.<sup>430</sup>

Rather than be cowed, however, Moorehead adopted the singular principle employed by so many other correspondents beset with travel difficulties, which is a recurring theme in their war memoirs: reach the story by any available means. The *Daily Express* reporter spent the night in a R.A.F. mess hall and waited in vain the next day for a flight out of Harar. In the evening he therefore decided to take his chances on a military convoy of three trucks and an officer’s staff car that held the promise of reaching the capital in twenty-four hours, but heavy rains in the mountains forced them to stop at 2 am. In the morning they realized they were on the wrong road. By 2 pm, following an encounter with African soldiers, the party reached the spot where they had spent the previous night and embarked upon the correct road. Over the next twenty-four hours they travelled through a valley that dropped several thousand feet and whose roads had been ripped apart by Italian explosives and then became “an interminable series of

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<sup>430</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, pp. 124-125.

small switchbacks through the thick scrub” before rising 7,000 feet above sea level to Addis Ababa.<sup>431</sup>

BBC radio engineer Bob Crawford described how the difficulties of travelling in Africa could become dangerous, partly due to his headstrong broadcasting partner, correspondent Edward Ward:

There were times we went out on the desert with a vehicle that shouldn't have been off the tarmac. There was one occasion when [Ward] wanted to get to this particular unit and we followed the telephone wires which should have led to them, except we met a signals unit vehicle coming in the other direction, rolling the wires in. Now the sensible thing to do would have been to go back to the starting point, but Ward reckoned that we were fairly close so on we went. We went 10 miles, 15 miles, another 15: and now we were in trouble because we were at a barbed wire fence and the posts with the death's head on them; we were either in a minefield or the other side of a minefield. It got dark so we bedded down. The next morning, looking over this little hill, we could see a sandbag enclosure with anti-aircraft guns. But we hadn't a clue if we were in front of our own troops or what. So we put our hands up and walked forward. Luckily they were British and we got breakfast.<sup>432</sup>

An internal report by BBC engineer M.C. Donovan to managers in London dated 13 April 1942 is informative not only regarding the difficulty of travel, but also about the resourcefulness and determination with which the reporters and sound engineers dealt with their transport problems. “Throughout the various Campaigns our greatest concern and difficulty was to get dispatches back to the nearest base where the Records could be mailed off by plane,” Donovan wrote. He explained that in the Desert War he, or Dimpleby, or both of them, would overcome the paucity of dispatch riders by themselves driving a truck – a six-wheeled vehicle commandeered from the Italians and loaned to them by the British Army – anywhere up to 200 miles “simply to set a couple of Records rolling towards the nearest Turntable about 2,000 miles distant.” He said the

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., pp. 125-127.

<sup>432</sup> Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), p. 153.



conditions of these trips, usually taken after a day in incredibly high temperatures, were far from ideal and taxed the men to the edge: “We have often had to stop driving through sheer physical exhaustion to take ten minutes ‘shut eye’ on the bare ground to recuperate sufficiently to drive another few miles in safety before having to repeat the process.” He mentioned narrow escapes when one or the other fell asleep at the wheel on twisty mountain roads. What he termed a waste of petrol, time and energy could have been avoided, he claimed, if they simply had a portable Morse Code transmitter.<sup>433</sup>

Travel in Europe later in the war could be just as scattershot or dangerous as in North Africa. As in Africa, correspondents in Europe at times had to travel by whatever means they could muster, or randomly encounter, or beg from officials. Often they were just as reliant on the military for getting to the story as for the story itself. Yet at times even the military seemed unsure as to how to navigate the issue of transport for correspondents. A War Office file compiled in July 1944 includes notes for Eisenhower and his Chief of Staff, General Walter Bedell Smith, for a briefing of correspondents that was held on 22 May 1944.<sup>434</sup> On the job of the war correspondent, Smith addressed what were perceived as the “two controlling forces” of a combat journalist’s work: to get the facts and to get the story to their respective press or radio outlets. “The great problems are transportation and communications. It would be ideal if we could provide each one of you with a personal driver, a jeep and a walkie-talkie tuned to London but that is out of the question,” he told the reporters at the briefing, discussing how in the early days of the Second Front it would be better for correspondents to work in groups due to limited communications resources.<sup>435</sup> He further remarked:

The transportation problem, aside from the limited number of vehicles, also offers a problem to correspondents. The crowded conditions of

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<sup>433</sup> BBC WAC R57/330, To S.E. (Recording) From M.C. Donovan, 13 April 1942, Report by M.C. Donovan, pp. 1-2.

<sup>434</sup> TNA, WO204/2215/AFHQ/2048 (July 1944), N.A., “Plan for Press Conference”, N.D.; N.A. Eisenhower’s Prepared Remarks to Correspondents, 22 May 1944; N.A. “Suggestions for General Smith’s Talk”, N.D.

<sup>435</sup> TNA, WO204/2215/AFHQ/2048 (July 1944), pp. 1-2, “Suggestions for General Smith’s Talk”, N.D.

pools cuts into valuable time and sometimes nullifies the enterprise of a correspondent. Take the case of a group wishing to visit a certain division. The distance is not great, but the roads are jammed with transport. There are cases in the Mediterranean theatre where a single bridge formed a bottleneck which took eight hours to pass. Naturally, the car carrying the correspondents would have to wait its turn to get across. It will be a case of weighing the value of the story against the time consumed in getting it – that is for your judgment.<sup>436</sup>

This reveals that Smith and the rest of the planners at SHAEF were well aware of the situation on the ground for reporters and the difficulties, especially in the area of transport. He also made clear that the correspondents were largely on their own once out in the field.

While they might not have been a top priority in terms of transportation, the military did not completely abandon the correspondents to fend for themselves. In fact, one part of the SHAEF hierarchy wanted to ensure it had oversight of the movement of correspondents. A memorandum of 18 July 1944 to Smith from SHAEF staff discussed the handling of correspondent transport by the military's Public Relations Division. The document recalls a request earlier that month by PR Division to be the "sponsoring authority and also authorising agency for movement of war correspondents." It also indicates that the request was turned down by SHAEF leadership on the grounds that the travel and accommodation problems were so strained as to prevent oversight of the correspondents at that time. This memorandum renews the request, arguing that "the functions of the Public Relations Division cannot be properly and expeditiously carried out unless it has complete control and authority over the movement by air, sea and land of accredited war correspondents." The PR staff sought not only to coordinate initial travel arrangements for correspondents into combat areas, but also to follow up with arrangement of substitutions for wounded journalists, facilitate rotation of correspondents in and out of the war zones, as well as to help provide additional reinforcements of the press corps when it was necessary in a specific field of operations. "Rotation plans, shifting of correspondents, replacement of casualties, reinforcements,

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

etc. are all accomplished in accordance with quotas established by the Public Relations Plan and accommodations for correspondents already exist.”<sup>437</sup> This was clearly a bureaucratic attempt to exert control over a potential scenario in which correspondents went wandering about the battlefield using whatever transportation they could manage rather than remaining under the purview and authority of the army authorities, even if they were with an accompanying officer. Yet the military attempting to facilitate the transport of correspondents around the combat areas only benefited the journalists in terms of obtaining vehicles from the military rather than always being left to their own devices.

Talbot described how all of the BBC’s transport was on loan from the British Army, stating that during his Italian service he “wore out two jeeps, one fifteen-hundredweight truck and a military staff car.” He recalled that in 1944 alone two vehicles were stolen from him “in that cesspit of thievery—Naples....” He appealed personally to General Montgomery, who wrote a note to his staff: “Issue to Mr. Talbot, one jeep.” This got him a brand new vehicle from the Press Relations corps. Four months after the war ended, back in London, Talbot received a phone call from the War Office informing him that his jeep was waiting for him and asking him to provide his home address for delivery. Talbot, who was flabbergasted that Montgomery’s scribbling had been taken as actually giving him a jeep rather than just loaning it, turned down the gift, not wanting the expense of obtaining petrol during the austerity of post-war Britain. The BBC, however, took the vehicle and used it for future overseas reporting assignments, until it was eventually stolen in Greece.<sup>438</sup>

Some correspondents employed resourceful but more unorthodox modes of transport. In late April 1945 Edward Ward needed to report the much-anticipated rendezvous of American and Russian forces on the Elbe at Torgau, Germany. He was informed that SHAEF planned to block release of the story for twenty-four hours, if not longer, so he wrote a long cable about the meeting to be sent to the BBC and then

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<sup>437</sup> TNA, WO204/2215/AFHQ/2048 (July 1944), “Memorandum for: Chief of Staff, Subject: Travel of Accredited War Correspondents”, 18 July 1944.

<sup>438</sup> Godfrey Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now: A Broadcaster’s Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), pp. 95-96.

headed off with the intent of reaching Paris by airplane, where he could transmit directly to London. He took a jeep ride from a press camp at Eilenburg to the airfield in Weimar, but inclement weather prevented more than one in five flights from departing that morning and he was informed he would certainly not find passage to Paris from there. A call to BBC correspondent Frank Gillard confirmed the weather had also grounded flights out of Wiesbaden and there was no chance of sending a small plane to collect Ward and take him to Paris. So he decided to move west by the only manner left to him: “Frank advised me to try and get road transport to Wiesbaden and broadcast from there over the B.B.C. transmitter. But it was impossible to get transport of any kind. There was only one thing for it. Hitch-hiking.”<sup>439</sup> Ward had to thumb his way 200 miles in seven hours to make the BBC’s nightly 9 pm broadcast:

I had no sooner reached the road when a jeep driven by a negro soldier approached. I stopped him and asked if he was making for Frankfurt. No, he was going to Fulda. But that would take me a good bit on my way, and if I cared to jump in he’d be glad to drop me on the *Autobahn*. I should be able to pick up something else there easily enough. We drove at breakneck speed for seventy miles, and just off the *Autobahn* I found a convoy of trucks just about to take off. One of the drivers said they were going to a place about half-way to Frankfurt, and if I cared to come along with them I would be welcome. I added another fifty miles to my total. I had no sooner jumped off the truck than a jeep came up just as if I had ordered it. It wasn’t going to Frankfurt, but to Mainz. That was even better. Two American officers were in the jeep and they made room for me between them. I told them my problem and explained how vital it was for me to get to Wiesbaden before nine o’clock. I pointed out that Wiesbaden was only a few miles from Mainz, and asked them as a great favour to take me there.... But between Frankfurt and Wiesbaden a tyre burst, and precious minutes were lost changing the wheel. And then we took a wrong road.... By means of almost shameless persuasion I had got them to go a very considerable distance out of their way and they had ended up in Wiesbaden on a pouring wet night with no prospects even of finding anywhere to spend the night. So I felt it was only what I deserved when I was dumped in the street after they had found some military police

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<sup>439</sup> Edward Ward, *Give Me Air* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), p. 215.

who offered them shelter for the night. By this time it was past nine o'clock, and I had missed the news.<sup>440</sup>

As Ward indicated, by the end of the war the transport situation was probably bordering on chaotic in terms of reaching anywhere. Ward, who had managed to make it to Paris and then London and then back to Paris in spring 1945, was told to report on the 3rd US Army, which he could reach via a plane flying out of Le Bourget. Ward explained his situation to a sergeant at flight control, but the sergeant's response was indicative of the confusion that permeated logistics in the fast-moving last days of the war in Europe: "Haven't an idea,' he said cheerfully. 'Would you suppose it's in Germany? Because we've got one [flight] going to Germany at 11.15....' I thought to myself that I'd better get on this plane since nobody seemed to know anything about 3rd Army H.Q. here, and anyway Germany would be a step in the right direction."<sup>441</sup>

Even getting away from the war could be difficult. Peter Stursberg said that when he was called back to London from Algiers, he first flew to Rabat, Morocco, but then had to remain there for four days: "Every day and sometimes twice a day I would visit the airport, only to be told that people with higher priorities were ahead of me."<sup>442</sup> Yet he was not cowed, as the travel difficulties during the conflict had given him some unusually helpful life skills, boasting in a letter home, "The war has made me a marvellous hitch hiker."<sup>443</sup> Travel along standard routes, including civilian transport, also held troubles and even dangers, as described in a second-hand account of a fateful trip by Kenneth Stonehouse written by his Reuters colleagues: "Transatlantic travel in wartime held risks of attack from the air and by submarine. Stonehouse and his wife, Evelyn, a vivacious 22-year-old, 13 years younger than him, sailed from New York on 12 May 1943, aboard the Portuguese liner S.S. Serpa Pinto. Portugal was a neutral state.

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<sup>440</sup> Ward, p. 216.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>442</sup> Stursberg, *The Sound of War*, p. 139.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

They reached Lisbon on 28th May.”<sup>444</sup> The story explains that their flight to London was booked for five days later:

At 9.30 a.m. on Tuesday 2nd June, the Stonehouses left Lisbon for London aboard a DC3 of the British Overseas Airways Corporation, BOAC, forerunner of British Airways. There were 13 passengers and four Dutch crew members aboard. Over the Bay of Biscay shortly before 11 am, the aircraft reported it was under attack by a German plane. Then the radio went dead. The wreckage was never recovered and there were no survivors.<sup>445</sup>

However, war travel was not all gloom and frustration; there was still easy and even enjoyable passage in some places. Peter Stursberg said it hardly seemed like there was a war at all when he was moving about in southern France.<sup>446</sup> Moorehead, an airsickness sufferer, said there was one trip by air over Africa he could “almost enjoy”, which was the flight up the Nile River Valley on a flying boat. “Even the meaningless and utterly boring shapes of the Pyramids achieve a faint distinction from the air. All the rest of the journey is just the green ribbon of the Nile and the desert roasting itself under the ‘unrelenting triumph of the sun.’ You are not obliged to look at anything, since there is nothing to see.”<sup>447</sup> Matthew Halton, who professed a hatred for travel, especially by sea, said quite the opposite about his first expedition to Africa during a “wonderful four-day trip in a British flying boat.” Halton wrote a glowing description of the sights of the Dark Continent:

We took off each morning, from Durban, Mozambique, Lake Victoria and Khartoum, in breath-taking sunrises. The first day’s flight was over the Africa of miasmatic swamps and jungles and oozing sludgy rivers. The second was over Uganda and Kenya, the Africa of hot dry uplands and native villages and the snows of Kilimanjaro. The third,

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<sup>444</sup> “Kenneth Stonehouse”, *The Baron*,  
<<http://www.thebaron.info/kennethstonehouse.html>> (accessed 12 November 2010).

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Stursberg, *The Sound of War*, p. 213.

<sup>447</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy: The Desert War 1940-1943* (London: Cassell, 1944), p. 116.

after a night on the equator at Lake Victoria, was over the Sudan, and the pilot flew the aircraft very low for three hours to show us hundreds of giraffes, thousands of elephants, tens of thousands of deer, herds of rhinoceroses and zebras.<sup>448</sup>

These descriptions and anecdotes demonstrate that there was no standard, or usually easy, form of transportation for correspondents in the Second World War. The recurrent tales of roundabout journeys, hitching rides, begging or borrowing transport, facing dangers on the road, getting stuck in various exotic or more often remote locations, or simply getting stuck in the mud, shows that reporting a story was at times less difficult than merely getting oneself to the story. This was clearly one of the more arduous tasks of a correspondent's job, although it was hardly the most stressful aspect of life in the war zone.

### **Correspondent Perils**

Speaking to reporters prior to the D-Day landings, General Walter Bedell Smith said he was aware of the hazards which the correspondents would endure in the coming days and cautioned them not to act recklessly for the sake of a story: "There is no need to elaborate on the dangers that you are to face. The record of war correspondents in this war and the list of casualties speaks for itself. However, needless exposure to danger serves no one. A wounded or dead correspondent doesn't produce any copy except the story of his own misfortune – and that has to be written by someone else." He added that the reporters were about to cover "the greatest news story of modern times... not in the quiet corner of a library, but in the blazing hell of battle. You will be called upon to do this when you are tired, dirty and hungry – C rations get mighty boring at times." Yet he said he was sure that, as with the military, the correspondents were "determined to do better than our best."<sup>449</sup> This was all true: the correspondents went beyond the normal call of their journalistic duty throughout the war, and at times suffered for it.

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<sup>448</sup> Halton, pp. 99-100.

<sup>449</sup> TNA, WO204/2215/AFHQ/2048 (July 1944), N.A. "Suggestions for General Smith's Talk", N.D., pp. 1-3.

This has been the case for years through many conflicts, and still is today. In his 2008 book, *War Journal*, NBC News foreign correspondent Richard Engel outlines his theory of the four stages he believes correspondents go through when covering war zones:

Stage One: I'm invincible. Nothing can hurt me. I'm Superman. Stage Two: What I'm doing is dangerous. I might get hurt over here. I'd better be careful. Stage Three: What I'm doing is really dangerous. I am *probably* going to get hurt over here no matter how careful I am. Math and probability and time are working against me. Stage Four: I have been here too long. I am going to die over here. It is just a matter of time. I've played the game too long.<sup>450</sup>

While the Second World War correspondents did not articulate this theory in their memoirs, it is likely they went through stages and had thoughts very similar to those described by Engel. This was clearly a very different type of journalism than what they had performed in the offices, meeting rooms, town halls or streets of Britain and the Dominion nations prior to the war. Even the most hard-nosed newspaper beats, such as coverage of the police and fire-fighting forces, did not include being shot at and dodging explosive ordinance; but for the correspondent covering the fighting in the Second World War, this was a frequent occurrence, especially as they were allowed to be in much closer proximity to the fighting than in previous conflicts. Yet while they were all working as war reporters on a voluntary basis and could have stopped covering the war and gone home if they felt its risks and adversities were too much for them to endure, their dedication won out over thoughts of personal danger and once they arrived at a battle zone, by whatever means necessary, the correspondents willingly endured many of the same privations and risks as the combatants themselves.

This occupational hazard was something that was understood by news consumers as part of the lives of soldiers but not necessarily those of the news reporters who brought them the combat stories. Correspondents did not discuss their personal safety in

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<sup>450</sup> Richard Engel, *War Journal: My Five Years In Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 177.



dispatches, since print page space was too tight and radio airtime too short to discuss the dangers of gathering wartime news, although descriptions of battle clearly conveyed they were often in treacherous circumstances. But with soldiers dying around them on a daily basis, the reporters would have been seen to be putting themselves in a category of greater importance had they showed anything other than the same fortitude as the subjects of their stories. Therefore, they did not express their state of mind about the peril they faced. That did not mean, however, they were not concerned for themselves and their colleagues. Alan Moorehead described his feelings upon departing from a group of his fellow correspondents: “When they had gone it was in my mind that anything might happen and we might not meet again.”<sup>451</sup>

Edward Ward was not able to meet with his fellow reporters in the field for years following his capture in November 1941, which occurred during a Panzer attack on the makeshift desert headquarters of a South African army brigade. The soldiers and the correspondents covering them – including Ward and his sound engineer Bob Crawford, Harold Denny of *The New York Times*, and journalists from the Associated Press and South African Radio – were surrounded by German forces whose tanks and shells were getting closer by the moment. Ward and his colleagues dug slit trenches that would keep them below the level of the surface sand and, ostensibly, any bullets and bombs flying overhead.<sup>452</sup> He described the incoming munitions in acoustic terms:

The orchestra had stopped tuning up. The symphony had started.... Things were warming up in a rising crescendo. Harold at last climbed into his slit-trench. We were all lying down now.... The brass gave way to the strings. A pizzicato of machine-gun bullets followed the screaming, booming shells. Then the shells started again.... The din was overpowering. And then came a deep, rumbling noise, which was greatly magnified through the fact of my being below ground-level. It grew louder and louder, and as the noise increased the machine-gun bullets came thicker and thicker, until they hummed a few feet over my head like a wasps' nest.... The firing died down somewhat. Then came

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<sup>451</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, p. 148.

<sup>452</sup> Ward, pp. 7-9.

an appalling noise. I looked up and saw a German tank heading straight for my slit-trench.<sup>453</sup>

These are the sorts of stories that did not appear in the newspapers or on the radio, but were left to the memoirs of correspondents. An analysis of these memoirs and other sources, such as internal memoranda, does, however, show a fairly common pattern: while the details and locations differ, correspondents routinely risked their lives to get the news to the public. In the case of Ward, his book focuses on how he lost his freedom for a large stretch of the war and suffered in the squalid conditions of Italian and German POW camps. Yet, like other correspondents, he accepted personal hazards as a part of his job.

Frank Gillard of the BBC was pragmatic about these risks: “As a war correspondent I operated on the front line.” He explained that his first overseas assignment was at the Allied general headquarters in Cairo before moving outside of Tripoli to cover the British 8th Army. He was dedicated to the premise of reporting just “what I could see with my own eyes.” He believed he could only be sure of his stories if they came from his own experiences:

And that was my policy right through the war from then on. I was not a base reporter, I was a front line reporter. I trained with the troops and knew what it was like to have a shell exploding right beside us, and men dropping dead at my feet. This didn't happen often but if you are a war correspondent, you naturally go to the area where action is taking place. Therefore, you are bound to be exposed continuously to these dangers. You accept that.<sup>454</sup>

Indeed, correspondents working so close to the action were often in as much danger as troops. Clifford and Moorehead found themselves the target of attack, rather

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<sup>453</sup> Ward, pp. 9-10.

<sup>454</sup> WW2 People's War Team, “An Interview with Frank Gillard”, *WW2 People's War: An Archive of World War Two Memories – written by the public, gathered by the BBC*, 4 February 2005, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/51/a3618551.shtml>> (accessed 5 December 2010).

than observers, in Libya in February 1941 while travelling with Australian troops hunting Italian forces. Along with their conducting officer, British army Captain Geoffrey Keating, they moved up ahead of the column of regular Australian army with a patrol of British armoured cars, encountering Italians who were ready to surrender and who told them the road was clear for miles up ahead. The patrol found another group of Italians around a corner, but these were setting mines and scattered into bushes alongside the road when they saw the approaching Allies. The British disembarked from their vehicles and began tearing up the mines. Moorehead recalled, "As they worked, the Italians, about half a dozen in all, emerged onto the road a little higher up and stood watching us. It was strange they did not surrender. 'Give them a burst,' someone began to say, and then from the hill ahead a long whining scream of bullets came down the roadway. We were ambushed." They tried to take cover by the side of the road but came under heavy fire from Breda machine guns and mortars a few hundred yards away. "The fire was very close and very heavy and our cover not more than eighteen inches, so we had to stop and be still from time to time," Moorehead wrote. "Clifford was nicked neatly in the behind. Another bullet passed through the folds of the sleeve of my greatcoat, and, certain I was hit, I remember waiting frigidly for the pain to come. By now the line of cars was blazing, and although the enemy could see Clifford and me alone, trying to bind up the wounded men, they concentrated all their fire upon us."<sup>455</sup> Moorehead later reflected on the incident the introspective hindsight of nearly three decades:

This was my first acquaintance with death, and I think I can remember it very well. I never thought of surrendering. I thought only: this is too cruel, they cannot realise what they are doing to us. If they were here with us they would see it and they would stop. No one, not even a hungry beast, could inflict harm like this. There could be no hatred or anger in the world which would want to hurt us so much.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>456</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, p. 153.

He described its effect on his subsequent performance as a correspondent, which was antithetical to the image of the swaggering, death-defying reporter conjured up by Hemingway or war films: “I do not think that I ever recovered from this incident. Often afterwards we were obliged to put ourselves briefly in the way of danger, but I never again did it with any confidence or even with any feeling of dedication. Whenever I went into danger I did it as a duty or because I thought that others were watching me.”<sup>457</sup>

This theme of great danger is present in the stories of other correspondents; their memoirs or biographies include admissions of fear and mortality that were a departure from the straight factual accounts put out to the public in the newspapers and over the radio. Richard Dimbleby was frequently in danger and was brave in its face, but may also have been harbouring fears. In Eritrea, he had some very close calls. A British airplane accidentally bombed the Allied base camp at the battle of Keren and killed six soldiers in close proximity to him. On another occasion, as he looked over a ridge at a nearby Italian position, a bullet struck a rock near his head, prompting a soldier to remark that the enemy normally did not shoot at that hour, adding, “It must be your size, thought you were a general I expect.” Continuing on with the British troops toward the Red Sea, an Italian mortar attack caught Dimbleby and an officer exposed in a road; one of the shells landed within feet of him, but failed to detonate. While in Greece, an Italian dive-bomber dropped its payload next to a car carrying Dimbleby and two other correspondents and blew out the vehicle’s windows. In late August 1941, on a mountain road in Iran, a group of men brandishing rifles and sticks tried to stop a car carrying Dimbleby and *The Times* correspondent James Holburn. The driver slowed before the two correspondents loudly ordered him to drive through the outlaws and Dimbleby used a thermos to smash the hand of a man hanging onto the car door. Jonathan Dimbleby related, “The next day German radio announced that two British correspondents had been captured in Persia – before the two reporters had had time to report it – and ever afterwards Dimbleby was convinced that the ambush had been arranged by the Germans

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

to silence him.”<sup>458</sup> In January 1943 Dimbleby was among the first group of journalists to climb aboard RAF Lancasters for a bombing run over Berlin; he eventually flew on twenty missions.<sup>459</sup> Considering the extraordinary number of casualties suffered by the Royal Air Force – nearly 70,000 killed, with almost 56,000 of those from Bomber Command<sup>460</sup> – Dimbleby took a huge risk by going on so many flights. That became even more obvious with the deaths of two of his colleagues during bombing missions over Germany.<sup>461</sup> Despite his brave flying record, however, Dimbleby was so anxious about his first bombing mission that on the way back he just missed a crew member when he vomited. Jonathan Dimbleby wrote, “At the best of times he was frightened of flying; he always felt ill and was frequently sick.”<sup>462</sup>

Writing about the fall of Tunis in May 1943, Alexander Clifford described the dangers of close-quarters combat and how he was at one point literally in the firing line:

The worst thing about street fighting is that you don't know where the bullets are coming from or where they are going. I edged along the street jerkily, wondering where to go for cover. Just across the way hand-grenades started to explode. I drew in my breath sharply as a burst of fire whined straight across beside me above my shoulder, and I stared bewildered when I saw that a British soldier had fired it. Then I looked behind me and a German was squirming in his own blood in the garden of a villa.<sup>463</sup>

In such close quarters with combat, these brushes with death were commonplace, and the risk of injury was just as high. In this way the correspondents lived – or died – in nearly the same way as the soldiers. Although, as Talbot explained, escaping unscathed

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<sup>458</sup> Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), pp. 113, 123-125, 128-129.

<sup>459</sup> Richard Havers, *Here Is The News: The BBC and the Second World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2007), pp. 203-204. See also Dimbleby, p. 184.

<sup>460</sup> I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 898-899.

<sup>461</sup> Kent Stevenson went down in a Royal Air Force Lancaster on 22 June 1944, Guy Byam died flying with the U.S. Air Force on 3 February 1945. Hawkins, p. 58.

<sup>462</sup> Dimbleby, pp. 169, 184-185; see also Havers, p. 204.

<sup>463</sup> Clifford, p. 435.

was sometimes simply a matter of luck or, in some cases, physique. Talbot recalled ducking into a roadside track to avoid an incoming anti-personnel bomb. He lay alongside his conducting officer, who suffered bomb splinters in his backside: “I was lucky that time: he was a fat man and his bottom stuck up more than mine did.”<sup>464</sup>

At times some reporters also took direct part in combat activities, breaking not only Allied regulations but also the unwritten law of journalists to be observers only. Cyril Ray of the *Manchester Guardian* delivered a message to a platoon ordering it to withdraw after its commander and sergeant had been killed, bringing the men back to safety. He volunteered for the job.<sup>465</sup> Clifford was an equally bold sort of correspondent, although even his friend, Moorehead, admitted to being unsure whether the former acted out of bravado or necessity: “With Alex I could never tell.” Moorehead recounted the example of a RAF flight over Sicily during which the mid-ship gunner was wounded and Clifford took over his weapon and shot down an enemy fighter plane. “But the interesting thing was that he experienced no elation from the exploit, or at any rate he never expressed satisfaction of any kind. Later on he went on other bombing raids as well, usually without telling me beforehand, and as the months went by it became clear that he was one of those men who from time to time have to test themselves in some adventure lest they should grow to fear too much.”<sup>466</sup> After Clifford took over the gun of that wounded airman, the incident was kept quiet because of the non-combatant status of war correspondents, a protection Clifford likely would have lost in the eyes of the Germans if the event had ever been publicized. Already facing the risk of capture run by every British and Dominion correspondent who wore a military uniform and travelled with Allied forces, the near certainty of execution if he was captured would have made his continued work as a battle-zone journalist untenable. Then there was the more obvious issue of breaking one of the basic rules for correspondents, who were banned from engaging in combat or even carrying a weapon, although this regulation was disregarded by some correspondents who considered being armed or taking part in a

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<sup>464</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 81.

<sup>465</sup> David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Collins, 1971), p. 549 fn; see also *London Gazette*, 24 December 1944.

<sup>466</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, p. 154.

fight simple self-preservation.<sup>467</sup> If called upon, some correspondents, while not actually taking part in combat, were willing to do so. Gillard explained that this idea of self-preservation was taken up at the BBC office in Cairo: “The climate among the staff was a very, very worried climate. And I remember sitting in on discussions about ‘what do we do if the Germans come here? What do we do then?’ And there were some members of the staff, of course, who said ‘we fight ‘em.’”<sup>468</sup>

Being under the path of bombs or shell-fire was another occupational hazard in a conflict with such a fluid frontline. Reporting on the siege of Tobruk, Alaric Jacob returned to his tent after a bath in an old wine barrel when he heard aircraft overhead. Watching bombs drop on the port from the front of the tent, he was thrown off his feet and began digging into the sand inside his shelter. He felt objects coming through the material, which later turned out to be splinters, and smoke and sand filled the air. Wadi Auda, a small oasis of only eight tents which was near Tobruk and he recommended to friends as a place of rest, had been targeted by at least twenty-five Stukas. “Scraps of metal lay on the floor, still hot, and there were holes all over my roof. I had been very, very lucky,” he recalled. “The soft sand had absorbed much of the blast, otherwise I could hardly have hoped to get away with it.”<sup>469</sup> In his memoir, Edward Ward explained he had faced significant dangers from the air before he was captured: “I thought of the time Geoffrey Cox and I had lain on the ground under the bell-tower of Tournai cathedral, when the Germans had blitzed the town. That had seemed like the end, too. Only that last bomb had hit a house just in front of us – instead of hitting us. I’d been surprised that time that I hadn’t felt frightened.”<sup>470</sup> Soon after he was taken prisoner, however, Ward endured bombing by his own side while being transported in a German truck:

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<sup>467</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, p. 154.

<sup>468</sup> WW2 People’s War Team, “An Interview with Frank Gillard”.

<sup>469</sup> Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller’s War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), pp. 53-54.

<sup>470</sup> Ward, p. 9.

My mind went back a few months to the time when I had been in Tobruk myself at an O.P. [observation post] which was directing artillery fire on Italian transport travelling along the very same road. It had been highly accurate fire, too. Now I was under the same fire myself. A shell burst right alongside a lorry a hundred yards behind mine, killing several prisoners. Other shells burst uncomfortably near. The German drivers continued grimly on their way. We had a brief respite from the shelling, and then the R.A.F. took up the attack. This time the lorries stopped, and we were allowed to get out and take cover.<sup>471</sup>

In Italy, the war was not always the most immediate danger. At times the locals could be a hazard on their own. Talbot was in a car accident between Naples and Rome in which the vehicle hit a tree and landed upside down. He and the driver climbed out after being trapped inside for a short time, only to find men and boys running away with the baggage and tools that were in the trunk of the auto. “They had thought us dead or knocked-out and were making sure of the loot.” He recalled that a short time later, on a road not far away, an American general was held up by a band of armed robbers.<sup>472</sup> Even Mother Nature could pose hazards for correspondents. More than a few journalists in their memoirs described the weather being a hindrance, if not worse. The whipping sands of the North African deserts, the cold of winter in France and Belgium, the mud and rain encountered all over the European continent; these were all impediments to getting the news and at times presented risks that were obviously far less predictable than the enemy.

### **Perks and Plunder**

While facing many of the same dangers, clearly the correspondents lived a different sort of frontline existence than the fighters. Clifford described the early days of the Desert War, when “a whole method and standard of living was being worked out empirically” among soldiers and reporters alike, which was very different than the situations in military camps as described by Richard Harding Davis more than thirty

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<sup>471</sup> Ward, p., 16.

<sup>472</sup> Talbot, *Permission to Speak*, p. 60.



years earlier when correspondents were expected to offer food, alcohol and other comfort items to officers so they were not accused of doing their deployments “on the cheap”. Clifford wrote:

There was in those days a rule that in camps there should be a distance of two hundred yards, not only between vehicles, but between camp-beds. We used to sleep dotted about all over the landscape, each with a grave-like slit trench beside him. We war correspondents made a point of being completely self-contained. Every drop of water we used we had to bring with us from Cairo, and we almost never accepted the hospitality that was offered us for no one had anything to give away.<sup>473</sup>

At the start of their deployments some of the correspondents found life quite comfortable. In Khartoum, Sudan, Moorehead discovered a great oasis at the city’s Grand Hotel, where local dignitaries gathered to enjoy the fruits of the British Empire’s wealth and listen to the BBC on the radio: “Here on the terrace, which is perhaps two degrees cooler than the smiting sunshine outside, you meet ivory hunters and coffee planters from Juba and Wau up the river. On that terrace I was introduced to the pleasant custom of taking a bottle of iced beer for breakfast. From there I saw my first wild hippopotamus floating down the White Nile.”<sup>474</sup> However, he found in the early summer of 1941 that the realities of the heightening North African war had crept into and altered this idyllic scene:

There was great movement in the lounge and the terrace was crowded. Soldiers and airmen moved about everywhere... all these in addition to the habitués. And Wavell and de Gaulle coming from opposite directions were expected on the morrow. Two Tomahawks flew by, and staff cars kept driving up to the hotel. Down the road headquarters had filled a whole great red-brick block and the place buzzed like a hive. You no longer knew each officer by name – the staff had multiplied out of all knowledge and lurked behind strings of initials placarded upon its office doors.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Clifford, p. 11.

<sup>474</sup> Moorehead, *The Desert War*, p. 117.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

This change in atmosphere as the war progressed was noted in several accounts by correspondents; rather than the comfort and grandeur that previously welcomed travelling journalists, when they returned to their favourite pre- and early-war haunts in various African and European cities they found them crowded or emptied or dulled in various ways.

Yet even after the end of what might be called the “Khartoum days”, the war correspondents still found ways to wring perks and small comforts from the war zones. Arriving in the European quarter of Derna in Libya in early 1941, Moorehead recorded that he and other correspondents chose to stay in a villa “close to the sea, richly hung with flowering bougainvillea”, that had been abandoned by the retreating Italian commander, Marshal Graziani: “Except for minor looting, everything had been left as it was, and soon we had good wines on the table and a fire going. I wallowed in the bath, washing away a week’s dirt.” He reminisced, “For three nights we slept in Derna on made beds. We lived luxuriously, and friends would drop in to taste our cooking and selection of wines. Two officers driving up from the rear left cards on us, and we sent them a couple of bottles of the marshal’s better brandy.”<sup>476</sup> Toward the end of the Desert War, Moorehead talked about living in “comfortable safe billets behind the line”. As the war moved north and Naples fell to the Allies, he then “settled with our friends in a comfortable apartment in Posillipo, and fattened a turkey for Christmas.” He subsequently turned down an assignment to cover the battle at Anzio; considering the conditions described there in numerous accounts, this was probably a prophetic decision. When the long-awaited Second Front came with the D-Day invasion, Moorehead was in attendance but admits he was “plucked by a muscular soldier off a landing barge and was dumped on the Normandy beach without so much as getting my feet wet.” While his loved ones in London wondered whether he was alive, that night he “was eating a six-course meal at the Lion d’Or Hotel in Bayeux.”<sup>477</sup>

Doon Campbell also described periods of relative extravagance when he was reporting from Italy, even in places ravaged by the war:

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., pp. 98-99.

<sup>477</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, pp. 167-169.

We dined that night with field officers in the former Fascist HQ in Foggia. Hundreds of starving Italians huddled outside, a few yards away, offering their bodies for a few crumbs of bread. We had a six-course meal and slept in a palace. The next night I was also sumptuously housed, this time in Naples.... There I was telephoned by Haig Nicholson, formerly of the Edinburgh *Dispatch* and now Reuter correspondent based with 5th Army, who arranged to pick me up next day, and soon I was settled with other correspondents in a hilltop villa where the food was even better. Major Nigel Dugdale ran this five-star super mess with two Viennese cooks whose profusion of delicious food was so rich that a cold table of plain beef and ham was kept for those with simpler tastes. Mess secretary David Heneker, a gourmet as well as a composer of popular songs, would sing and play the piano after dinner.<sup>478</sup>

(As with all the frequently changing conditions of war, however, Campbell said the “luxury was short-lived. Within a few days I crossed Italy from Naples to ‘Dysentery Hall’ in Vasto, a bleak square toiletless house on the edge of the Adriatic, where the remnants of correspondents accredited to Montgomery’s 8th Army lodged in overcrowded and sometimes slum conditions.”<sup>479</sup>)

Moorehead said it was not until many years later that he realized something he had taken for granted during these campaigns. One very important aspect of their existence was not only that they were western reporters, but specifically British correspondents: “We were rich and powerful.” This is not always stated as explicitly in the memoirs of other correspondents, but in reading them the same sentiment – that correspondents were of a different order – is present. Moorehead explained that they found it easy to consider the local indigenous population in North Africa as “people belonging to a lower social order.” This sense of entitlement came because they were on what they considered “British soil”. He wrote: “Like the children of very wealthy parents it seemed quite natural to us that we should occupy the best houses and hotels, that we should have at our command cars, motor launches, servants and the best food.” He continued about this ingrained imperialism: “Even if their poverty and their illiteracy did not set them

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<sup>478</sup> Campbell, p. 36.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

irrevocably below us they were still inferior because we were fighting the war and they were not. The British were the committed ones, the fighting cocks, the men with the guns. The others were the camp followers. I don't think we were arrogant, but then whoever recognises arrogance in themselves?"<sup>480</sup> Without always stating these views as outright as Moorehead did in his retrospective 1970 memoir, he and others who worked as the chosen ones of journalism during the war clearly saw themselves occupying their own special place.

Another perk was that in the course of their work, some of the war correspondents became celebrities. This was not necessarily a new phenomenon, as it had already been seen in previous conflicts. When George Steer, correspondent for *The Times* covering the Abyssinian war, married Margarita de Herrero, a fellow correspondent for *Le Journal* of Paris, "to the sound of rifle fire instead of wedding bells", the news of their 4 May 1936 nuptials in the British Legation compound in Addis Ababa – while the citizens outside looted the city in anticipation of it being overrun by the Italians – made the pages of *The New York Times* the next day. "The wedding trip," the newspaper reported, "consisted of a drive around the British Legation park, including the refugee camp where hundreds of foreigners have found safety from the mobs in the city."<sup>481</sup> As biographer Nicholas Rankin recounts, after Steer died in a car accident on Christmas 1944 he received numerous commemorations in the world press:

The *Yorkshire Post* compared G. L. Steer to T. E. Lawrence and *The Times* called him 'one of the adventurers of this generation....' The *Birmingham Post* said he had died a soldier, but would be remembered as a journalist's journalist: 'He was one of the most brilliant, and at the same time one of the most sober and reliable, of that younger corps of special correspondents whom the years before the war produced.' *African World* said: 'Few men have lived a fuller or more exciting life.' *South Africa* magazine described him as: 'an elusive mortal, as restless as he was brilliant... a man of strong opinions and a liberal mind'. Kingsley Martin wrote in the *New Statesman* on 6 January

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<sup>480</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>481</sup> N.A., "Reporters in Addis Ababa Wed to Tune of Rifle Fire", *The New York Times*, 5 May 1936; see also Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Constable, 2009), p. 315.

1945... He was one of the best of that adventurous school of journalists who have by and large fought on the side of decency in all the wars since the Japanese began the series in Manchuria.<sup>482</sup>

The Second World War, however, marked the great blooming of the correspondent as a celebrity and made household names of several of them. Some of the biggest names were American: Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, Ernie Pyle, and A.J. Liebling. Yet many of the reporters who covered the British and Dominion forces were equally well known in their own nations. Godfrey Talbot claimed that at the end of the Second World War BBC reporters “were as famous as film stars.” He noted that they even received fan mail. One letter said all work at the letter writer’s factory stopped when he came on the air. Another divulged that the writer kept Talbot’s photo from the *Radio Times* under her pillow and added, “Here is my number for when you are on leave.” He rationalized this fame by judging the spoken word over the radio as transcending the written word of newspapers and magazines because it had more “impact and immediacy” and gave the listeners a sense of involvement with the broadcasts, almost considering the reporter to be a family member (or prospective boyfriend) with whom they could personally relate.<sup>483</sup>

Upon returning to their home countries many of the correspondents drew crowds who wished to hear them speak about their experiences. Peter Stursberg was surprised to find himself after the war on a speaking tour of Canada set up by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He recalled:

There were very big turnouts. In fact, in Chilliwack just around here, they closed the shops in order to hear me, which is an indication of how important the reporting of the war was. I must have spoken thirty times across Canada, and there were very big turnouts, and everyone wanted to

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<sup>482</sup> Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram From Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 248.

<sup>483</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, p. 100.

hear about the coverage of the war, and I gave the same speech thirty times. You know, I didn't have to look at my script at the end.<sup>484</sup>

Doon Campbell spoke to the Scottish Arts Club in Edinburgh when he returned shortly after the end of the war. *The Scotsman* summarized his tales of friendly encounters with German peasants while the *Dumfries Standard* described his “remarkable experience” of being present at the handover of Hamburg to the Allies, and pushing up the road in a Jeep and arriving two hours before the official surrender to find a city full of armed German troops. The *Standard* also related how Campbell told the club members of the sights he encountered inside Belsen concentration camp within two days of its liberation: “He said the accounts that had been published of the horrors of this camp were in no way exaggerated.”<sup>485</sup> Rather than promoting themselves, the correspondents in these instances were personally bringing their eyewitness narrative of the war directly to their readers and listeners, but also performing a sort of public service by confirming that the stories, such as the nightmarish depictions of the Holocaust, had not been embellished. This likely helped those who had fought The People's War reassure themselves that their suffering and struggles on the home front had not been in vain.

While not all war reporters experienced personal renown, nearly every correspondent, whether from radio or print, at one time or another enjoyed a bit of plunder in the field. On the day the Allies captured Leipzig, the BBC's Ed Ward, along with Harold Denny of *The New York Times*, found the *Rathaus* (city hall) and were shown inside its bullet-ridden walls by an American colonel, who led them down into a stocked wine cellar. The colonel invited the reporters to enjoy the spoils of war when he opened a vintage bottle of *Veuve Clicquot* champagne and told Ward, “I think you'd

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<sup>484</sup> Alison Smith, “InDepth: VE-Day, War Correspondent”, *The National*, CBC News, 3 May 2005, Bob Weiers (prod.), <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/ve-day/correspondent.html>> (accessed 1 April 2009).

<sup>485</sup> Reuters Archive Record, Campbell, 1/9145242, “War Correspondent on German Peasants”, *The Scotsman*, 4 June 1945; “War Correspondent: Doon Campbell's Experiences in Germany: Belsen Camp”, *Dumfries Standard*, 6 June 1945.

better take a case of that back with you. And why not have some cognac too while you're about it?" Ward recalled:

Harold and I didn't have to be asked twice. We collected a couple of cases. They were very heavy (we discovered to our delight later that they contained 24 bottles each and not a dozen), and we loaded them on a wheelbarrow which I found in the alleyway. We got them out to the jeep, stacked them on the back seat and covered them with our coats.<sup>486</sup>

As the pair left the city, Ward noted that the corps of Germans, whom the Americans had deputized as Leipzig's police, announced over loudspeakers that looting would be punished by death: "I tucked our coats a little more securely round the wooden cases in the back of the Jeep and we headed for home."<sup>487</sup>

The correspondents could also be generous with their plunder. Ward and Pidsley went to the Battle of the Nations monument in Leipzig, a pyramid-like structure of red granite standing a couple hundred feet tall, where the American military had just overcome and removed the last defending German soldiers. Inside, there were "enough provisions to have kept a division going for a month," according to Ward. "There were tubs of Danish butter, cases of Norwegian brisling, French wines, Dutch cheeses. There were literally millions of cigarettes and cigars." Ward said he and Pidsley took what he estimated to be 20,000 cigarettes and a few thousand cigars, along with up to sixty bread loaves, with the intention of distributing them to displaced persons they encountered. "For ourselves we took a small case of the Norwegian sardines, which were first-rate," he wrote. Stopping outside the Leipzig Rathaus, Ward unintentionally created a mob scene when he gave a loaf of bread and some cigarettes to a French labourer, which brought many other foreign workers "all screaming for food." The pair left and refrained from handing out any more German supplies until they reached the countryside, where they could be surer of the crowd size. The result for Ward was one of the most fulfilling trips he had taken during the war. "Outside Weissenfels we came upon a group of about

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<sup>486</sup> Ward, pp. 199-200.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

a hundred Russians. We gave each of them two cigars and a couple of packets of cigarettes as well as a good many loaves of bread,” Ward wrote. “Their gratitude was almost embarrassing. They had been treated like animals for so long that they could scarcely understand anyone being kind to them, and many of them wept when they were given their cigarettes – things they had scarcely tasted for years.”<sup>488</sup> This, of course, would have done nothing to diminish the notion among correspondents that they were in a different, somewhat elevated class of individuals in the war.

Beyond plunder, there were other comforts a correspondent could enjoy in between the harrowing scenes of the fighting and ruins. Finding himself in a peaceful artists’ village outside of Tunis in 1943 as Germany’s desert army was crumbling before the Allies, Alexander Clifford expressed how the occasional benefits of working as a correspondent in beautiful foreign locations could make the war seem far more bearable: “That evening we sank deeply into the peace of Sidi Bou Said. Here, you felt, you could end your days in happiness, surrounded by the things that are best in life – reading and writing and good conversation, good food and wine, sitting in the sun, swimming in the sea, making love. Especially making love – the setting was perfect.” Yet the draw of the action and the thrill of chasing the story, what he referred to as “the fever”, were always too strong to give in to temporary serenity: “But next morning the fever had taken hold of us again and we were off back to Cap Bon to watch this fantastic [battle] climax once more.”<sup>489</sup> This feeling was the desire to be out in the field with their fellow correspondents, driven by both camaraderie and the competition to get the story.

### **Conduct, Camaraderie and Competition**

The “fever” brought them into the midst of a world that was a far cry from villas and vintage champagne or even charitable acts for peasants and displaced persons, and changed their perceptions on most everything. The memoirs of correspondents who reported the Second World War indicate that at times they found their perspective – on reporting, on war, and on life itself – was altered by their time spent so close to the stark

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., pp. 205-206.

<sup>489</sup> Clifford, p. 449.



realities of the frontline. Moorhead described losing his sense of what was newsworthy to readers who were back at home following the conflict through his words:

It was a strange sensation, writing dispatches away here in the blue, never knowing whether they would get back to Cairo, let alone London and New York. We had been away now so long without word from the outside world that I, for one, had lost my ‘news sense’—that sense of proportion you have that tells you whether a thing is worth writing or not. Everything here to us at this minute was vital and crammed with interest. But was it interesting to the Home Guard in England, to the sheep farmer in Australia and the commuter in New York? You just couldn’t know. So in the end I used to find myself putting down what I had seen and felt without trying to make a rounded ‘story’ of it, and without the slightest idea of whether it was worth publishing or not.<sup>490</sup>

Some correspondents developed a sort of ghoulish enjoyment in the horrible events that made a story. Following Australian army brigades in January 1941, Moorehead and his group came upon an aerodrome near Derna. At first the Australians took the facility from Italian tank crews, but then endured three or four days of retaliatory shelling. “Once again the Italians got onto them, and the Australians were pursued with a chain of bursting shellfire across the aerodrome into another building and out of that,” Moorehead wrote, explaining that his reaction to the attack made him realize later that his time in the war zone had warped his outlook. “Watching from only four hundred yards away, where it was quite safe, that incident seemed funny to the rest of us. I do not think it is funny now, but it was then, at a moment when one was keyed to meet the tension at the front and the small manners of living were diminished or forgotten entirely.”<sup>491</sup>

Once they had been acclimated to the combat zone mentality of reporting it seems some the correspondents could not regain their small manners of living, and the rough and ready ways of tackling a story took over. The best example would be when a group of correspondents were invited to meet Pope Pius XII at the Vatican the day after the Allies liberated Rome, on 6 June 1944 as the D-Day forces were thrusting into

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<sup>490</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, p. 96.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

Normandy. Talbot described it as “what must have been one of the most extraordinary audiences in Vatican history: a reception of British and American war correspondents, pressman of all shades and shapes, agency chiefs and newspaper staff writers, together with their photographers, engineers and drivers. We were indeed a motley pack.” He recounted how they met in a lavish room of the papal palace, with the combat journalists still in their crumpled uniforms angling aggressively for a quote or photo as they could, no different than if they were still in the field with soldiers: “When the Pope tried to address the throng, the picture boys surged forward, their cameras whirring and clicking and flashing. Ignoring the horrified hands upraised by attendant clergy and the menacing halberds of plumed and helmeted Swiss guards, the rude journalistic tide swept on, elbowing and shouting, and the Vicar of Christ was all but knocked to the ground.” He tried to forgive his colleagues by suggesting that they were products of their wartime environment, noting, “They had just come from a field of war and were unaccustomed to the niceties of throne rooms.”<sup>492</sup> Peter Stursberg of the CBC was at the same audience with Pope Pius and recalled it was the first time that news camera operators were allowed to meet with the pontiff and that, “these war cameramen were a tough, undisciplined lot. They scrambled to get the best shots, some of them kneeling, others even lying on the floor, and there were a series of ‘Hold it, Your Holiness.’” He said some of the Catholic reporters in attendance were indignant at the scene, with a British correspondent calling it, “The Rape of Rome”, while an American journalist stated, “I was never so embarrassed or ashamed at the conduct of my fellow workers before.”<sup>493</sup> Needless to say, it was not the most shining performance put on by the correspondents in the field during the Second World War.

This behaviour may be explained by Moorehead’s description of the war zone as a world of “black or white, or perhaps death instead of living”, where the correspondents existed “exactly and economically and straightly” and priorities were reduced and flipped from those in the civilized world:

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<sup>492</sup> Talbot, *Permission to Speak*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>493</sup> Stursberg, *The Sound of War*, pp. 185-186.

Most of the things it takes you a long time to do in peace-time—to shave and get up in the morning, for example—are done with marvellous skill and economy of effort at the front. Little things like an unexpected drink become great pleasures, and other things which one might have thought important become suddenly irrelevant or foolish. In a hunter's or a killer's world there are sleep and food and warmth and the chase and the memory of women and not much else. Emotions are reduced to anger and fear and perhaps a few other things, but mostly anger and fear tempered sometimes with a little gratitude. If a man offers you a drink in a city bar, the offering is little and the drink still less. You appreciate the offering and often give it more importance than the drink. At the front the drink is everything and the offering merely a mechanical thing. It is never a gesture, but a straight practical move as part of a scheme of giving and receiving. The soldier gives if he can and receives if he can't. There is no other way to live. A pity this is apparent and imperative only in the neighbourhood of death.<sup>494</sup>

One aspect that was not diminished, and was actually heightened by their proximity to death, was the camaraderie shared by the war correspondents, especially as they were a unique club with a limited membership. Moorehead and Clifford struck up their friendship in April 1940 after a night in Athens drinking Ouzo and arguing over the politics of the war. They both wished to travel to Cairo to cover the desert war but knew they were not in a position to tell their editors where they should go. So they came up with a clever ruse to exploit the rivalry between their two London newspapers: Moorehead told his home office that Clifford had gone to Cairo and Clifford told his editors the same about Moorehead, both hinting that there was something afoot. In this way they were each able to gain permission to head for Egypt – travelling together, unbeknownst to their employers, and cementing what became a lifelong bond.<sup>495</sup> At times their travels around the varied nations might have seemed like an adult version of a Boy Scout camping adventure, with camaraderie and roughshod road meals (such as eggs and whisky) fuelled by the spoils of war. Moorehead described he and Clifford enjoying “a day's looting” on the Cape Bon peninsula of Tunisia in 1943:

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>495</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, p. 7.

We selected a German Volkswagen, piled it high with wines, cameras, tinned food, typewriters, binoculars and clothing (all of which we were subsequently obliged to surrender), and then set off on the three days' drive down to the coast to Algiers. We were alone. When it was hot we stopped and dived into the sea. At night we slept in farmhouses and cooked extravagant meals. In the morning in the bright sunshine we went on again.<sup>496</sup>

Charles Lynch, in his memoir, spoke highly of his fellow Canadian correspondent Matthew Halton, whom Lynch described as having an outsized personality when they covered the Second Front in France alongside each other. Like Moorehead and Clifford, they worked for competing news organisations – Lynch for Reuters and Halton for the CBC – but still became comrades in the field. Lynch said of his reporting companion:

Matt Halton continued to be fascinated by my lack of knowledge of military matters, and I soaked up as much as I could from him and the others, all of whom had covered the Italian campaign.... Each night, we would decide where we were going the next day to get near the fighting. As Matt would put it, "We leave at sparrow fart, and we will face death." He really did talk like that. Between his own dramatizations, he would recite Shakespeare or Keats, especially the lines from "Ode to a Nightingale" that go: "Darkling, I listen, and for many a time, I have been half in love with easeful death." He would repeat the words "Darkling, I listen" over and over again with awe, as though in wonderment that anybody could write better stuff than he himself.<sup>497</sup>

This account not only expresses Lynch's admiration for Halton, but reinforces the detail previously discussed that the correspondents, in addition to being newsmen bent on acquiring facts, were also educated and literary, which is why they were able to produce some of the most impressive and florid descriptions of war in modern times. And undoubtedly, as Lynch's recollection of Halton also suggests, they buoyed each other's spirits. Doon Campell, recounting a letter he wrote home, mentioned the affability of the men with whom he shared an office in Naples: "Other correspondents

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>497</sup> Charles Lynch, *You Can't Print That!: Memoirs of a Political Voyeur* (Edmonton, Canada: Hurtig Publishers, 1983), p. 58.

here include Alan Moorehead of the *Daily Express*, Alex Clifford of *Daily Mail*, Basil Gingell of *Extel*, H. R. Knickerbocker of *Chicago Sun*, Frank Gillard of BBC. As at Algiers they are a great lot, good company.”<sup>498</sup>

Camaraderie of this sort was extremely important for the correspondents, for it added a sense of community and normality to their otherwise hectic, and often dangerous, lives. It was very likely the closest thing they felt to home, and perhaps might have helped maintain their sanity to some degree in a world otherwise gone mad. Talbot described some of the nights in Italy, during which he was managing the group of BBC correspondents there, when the war seemed to fade away in the company of his colleagues:

I have rarely known such hilarious evenings as when this group of men, when their paths to and from this or that sector of the front crossed, sat after a meal in some B.B.C.-camp tent or billet, with the vino flowing and the tent’s air near-lethal with dense tobacco fumes, and told tale after backstage tale from their professional pasts or embroidered the lighter adventures of the last few days of battle.<sup>499</sup>

Talbot added that he was ostensibly the chief of this group, which meant he held a degree of responsibility these men of such individual temperaments did not always recognize (“I failed to ‘manage’ any of them”) but noted that through a sense of shared mission they made their operations work: “They were agreeable and stimulating coadjutors. Stints and movements up and down Italy were arranged between us amicably enough: ructions of artistic temperament were only a routine preliminary to getting down to the job.”<sup>500</sup> Even the military conducting officers, who were there to police the correspondents as part of the censorship apparatus, were sources of enjoyment at times. Talbot recalled why they were good to have around: “My own party was frequently embellished by one or other of these aristocrats and landed gentry as time went on, and I

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<sup>498</sup> Campbell, p. 37.

<sup>499</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>500</sup> Talbot, *Ten Seconds From Now*, pp. 88-89.

recall a marquis and three baronets, valuable fellow travellers – they had endless supplies of whisky and cigarettes. Really, you could not help liking them.”<sup>501</sup>

There was still a line, however, to be drawn between friendship and work. Print publications wanted to generate original stories from their own correspondents, giving the public a reason to purchase their newspaper over another. One exception, outside of publications that subscribed to the Reuters service for use of its wire copy, was the arrangement under which the *Manchester Guardian* purchased stories written by correspondents for *The Times* and, as they did in *The Times*, carried the by-line “From Our Special Correspondent”, but at the bottom were labelled “Times and Manchester Guardian Service”. This seeming anomaly in the aggressive newspaper business was allowed to occur, explains *Guardian* biographer David Ayerst, because the two papers were not really competitors – neither was read to any great extent in the other’s home market.<sup>502</sup> Otherwise, newspapers as well as the broadcasting outlets expected the correspondents they deployed in the field to bring them distinctive – if not exclusive – stories, even if reported from the same battlegrounds. Therefore, despite their camaraderie, the correspondents maintained a high level of professional competition.

Edward Ward wrote of how he and Harold Denny found the *Oberburgomeister* (mayor) of Leipzig in the city hall, where he and his family had committed suicide. Other correspondents, who surveyed the city hall but were not aided by a local caretaker, as Ward and Denny had been, incorrectly identified another dead man as the mayor in their own dispatches and photographs while the pair hid the true facts of the story: “When it was discovered that Harold and I had seen the real *Oberburgomeister* and had locked the doors behind us, we came in for a good deal of hostile criticism from our colleagues.”<sup>503</sup> Earlier in the war, Moorehead and his travelling companions had chosen not to accompany Australian troops to the Libyan port of Derna on 30 January 1940, thinking the Italians would resist being driven out. “The first Australian patrols entered the town the following morning.... We did not ride with them,” he wrote. “We missed

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<sup>501</sup> Talbot, *Permission to Speak*, p. 52.

<sup>502</sup> Ayerst, pp. 547-549.

<sup>503</sup> Ward, p. 204.

all this. It was one of those wrong decisions, inevitable sooner or later. We had thought Derna would hold a day or two longer, and while the town, unknown to us, was actually being evacuated by the enemy, we were driving far southward across the desert to visit the armoured division at Mekili.” Moorehead was still in his sleeping bag the following morning when he received the news of the fall of Derna from a soldier who had just heard it in a BBC broadcast. He was astonished and angry at himself for not being on hand to chronicle the breaking story of another Italian defeat: “We could not believe it. It seemed impossible that the B.B.C. thousands of miles away had beaten us to the news of something only fifty miles from us – something which we had waited for days to happen.” He added that, in addition to being disappointed with himself, he felt shamed by being beaten to the story by rival reporters: “We were met in the town by the other correspondents who had been there for hours. Competition among us was strong. It was, in a way, the most galling moment of the whole campaign.”<sup>504</sup>

While the competition was intense, it was healthy, and the correspondents became a professional and at times personal fraternity. Competing reporters frequently travelled together, albeit due to transport necessities, but there was little animosity and in numerous personal accounts the correspondents refer to their rivals as colleagues. The camaraderie found in their shared journalistic adventures, and recreation, manifested into very real concern for one another’s lives. This was illustrated, for example, in Moorehead’s recollection of the departure of Clifford and Ward to cover Greece, which was expected to be not only a difficult battle for the Allied forces of approximately 60,000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops, but also a very dangerous one for anyone there, including correspondents. Moorehead believed he was also headed to Greece and he, his wife, Clifford and Ward were in a very sombre mood when they “gathered gloomily” in a hotel the morning they were to deploy from Alexandria in April 1941. “None of us were optimistic about the campaign ahead,” Moorehead wrote. “We ordered champagne and drank a toast to ‘the new Dunkirk at Salonika’. I don’t know how far that feeling went through the army, but we had it pretty strongly at the time.” At the last minute Moorehead was instead ordered to Addis Ababa in Abyssinia

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<sup>504</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, pp. 96-97.

(Ethiopia), which brought a conflicting emotional mix of relief, disappointment and fear for his colleagues. In this moment, the correspondents were not competitors, but friends.<sup>505</sup>

Moorehead had logged many hard days during the Desert War and admits that during his coverage of the Second Front he and his friend Clifford “became more cheerful and yet more selfish, more materialistic than we were before.” He also says they were more cautious; after four years covering battles they did not want to ruin their streak of good fortune as the war came to a close. Moorehead wrote, “We were bound of course to expose ourselves at the front for a few hours every day, but we tended now to let other vehicles run to the head of the column and explore the unknown bend in the road ahead.” He added that they were still covering the war as professional journalists, but they were “more concentrated upon ourselves than upon the war. We tended to be more sickened by ruins than stimulated by danger, and skirmishes at the front which once would have filled our day’s horizon now often seemed to us repetitive and useless folly.”<sup>506</sup> At the end Moorehead and Clifford lost interest in covering the war altogether, speaking to the weariness and personal toll some correspondents suffered, the same as actual soldiers. Moorehead said he and Clifford even opted to skip covering the Allied entry into Berlin. He wrote, “When ruins are piled on ruins, when the end is inevitable and the battlefield becomes a vast camp of inert and desperate refugees, there is not much excitement in victory, merely a desire for rest.... We could not bear to see another ruined city.”<sup>507</sup> Yet Moorehead might have summed up best the draw of a job that presented so many difficulties and dangers as that of war correspondent:

It was days before we reached the front. For ever the forward troops vanished ahead of us as we sat stranded in our broken vehicles. Messages went astray for days or were lost altogether. We scraped what food we could from the desert or went without. We hitch-hiked when our vehicles broke down. Often we abandoned sleep in order to catch up. None of this, of course, was comparable to the difficulties the

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid., pp. 147-148.

<sup>506</sup> Moorehead, *A Late Education*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., pp. 170-171.



soldier in the line was putting up with. But it was a new kind of reporting: exasperating, exciting, fast-moving, vivid, immense and slightly dangerous. And what we had to say had such interest at the time that our stale descriptions were published fully when at last they did arrive in London and New York. It was a job that was for ever a little beyond one's reach."<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, p. 60.

## The Correspondents' Stories

Having analysed the various facets of the professional lives of the war correspondents, it is important to also consider the product of these many factors by looking at a cross-section of the news stories they produced from a selection of important battles fought by British and Dominion forces in the Western European and North African theatres.

The 8 March 1944 edition of the *Daily Express* reported that Minister of Information Brendan Bracken spoke at the Press Club in London, located off Fleet Street, and lauded the work of the war correspondents then in the field. The story quoted Bracken as saying:

The British Government and the public owe them a very great debt. A despatch from a war correspondent on the battlefield is a hundred times more valuable than all the hand-outs of the Ministry of Information or the War Office. The stuff from the field of battle bears the mark of truth. There is no sign of Government sub-editing and it keeps the public far more in touch with the troops than our palatial building in Bloomsbury or the War Office.<sup>509</sup>

Yet Angus Calder notes that in the early years of the war the British prospects looked grim: "In the middle of February, Lieutenant General Rommel had arrived in North Africa. From then until October 1942, the British public was not to hear of one victory on land (in the Middle East or anywhere else) which seemed at all meaningful. There was a monotonous process of evacuations, sieges and defeats."<sup>510</sup> As a result, people in Britain were increasingly less inclined to closely follow the media reports on the war. Calder writes:

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<sup>509</sup> "First-hand beats the hand-out: Bracken praises war reporters", *Daily Express*, 8 March 1944, p. 4.

<sup>510</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 242.

Along with this venial apathy [toward government appeals regarding public behaviour] went a growing lack of interest, or professional lack of interest, in the war news. In May 1940, only one person in eleven had told Mass Observation that he or she was not following the news, or was uninterested in it. By the autumn, this proportion had more than doubled; in May 1941, no less than four out of ten returned such answers, though perhaps they meant that the respondents had some idea what was happening, but had no stomach for hearing or reading about it.<sup>511</sup>

A Mass Observation report of 22 May 1940 entitled, “Report On The Press”, noted that war news at the time was taking a back seat to more domestic stories that fell under the category of “sensational” news: “Murders, divorces, etc., fall under this category, when there are exceptional circumstances about them. Typical observations... on what people read, show that in April this year, in the middle of the Norwegian campaign, people were glancing at the war news in evening papers and then turning immediately to the Campbell Divorce case.”<sup>512</sup> However, the report adds that did not necessarily mean a lack of interest in the conflict, but rather that there were other reasons including the arc of the war, censorship, and the handling of the news by the press itself:

Newspapers are now full of information about the war; that is what people want to read about. In fact, this report shows... that people complain of not getting enough straight, informative news about the war. Why should this be? Partly because for many months nothing much happened of a military kind; partly because the censorship suppresses some news, but also because the press often does not report news in a straightforward way. It tries to give it ‘human interest’.... Too many ships have been torpedoed or sunk since the beginning of the war for a sinking now to be considered good, straight ‘news’. But it can be made news by getting a story from one of the survivors.<sup>513</sup>

Another Mass Observation report that surveyed Londoners between 21 and 25 April 1941 stated that a total of twenty-one percent of those polled did not read a

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Mass Observation, “Report On The Press”, Report No. 126, 22 May 1940, pp. 1-2.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

newspaper regularly, and of those thirteen percent were male and thirty percent were female. Among the respondents who did usually read a daily newspaper, only thirty-seven percent said the part they read the most was the news. The report states: “The category ‘news’ contains references varying from the headlines only, to distinctions between war and other news. A considerable number of those making these answers mentioned specifically ‘headlines’ or ‘front page’. This does not of course mean that is not read so carefully.”<sup>514</sup>

Regardless of the numbers of those reading the papers on a regular basis, the headlines and the news stories regarding some of the major battles of the war provide interesting insight to the news that the people were receiving in the days that the history we now study was being made.

### **Dunkirk**

In his critique of war journalism, Phillip Knightley writes, “It is worth looking at Dunkirk, because it became the first great myth of the Second World War, perhaps the greatest, the origin of the ‘Dunkirk spirit’ that many believe was crucial to victory, and the way it was reported at the time was a major factor in establishing this myth.” He added about the rosy reporting of the event, “One reason for this was that there were no British war correspondents writing from Dunkirk. They covered the whole of the evacuation second-hand, from the south-east-coast ports where the troops landed.”<sup>515</sup>

Ian McLaine discusses how the famed retreat and rescue of Allied troops from the French shore holds a special place in the British psyche and that many historians appear reluctant to write about wartime morale that was buoyed by the Dunkirk myth, which was largely created by the coverage of both the print and broadcast media of the time:

For a subject which appears to occupy so important a niche in the national consciousness, one might also say the folk memory, surprising

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<sup>514</sup> Mass Observation, “Newspaper Reading”, Report No. 682, 2 May 1941, p. 1.

<sup>515</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2003), pp. 252-253.

little has been written about wartime morale.... As if fearing that too close an inquiry might erode the foundations of the myth, many writers have been content to assert that the nation won through because the morale of the population was indestructible. Of course the difficulty for anyone interested in the nature and quality of wartime morale is the very imprecision of the term and, more importantly for the historian, the ephemeral and diffuse character of the sources to which he must turn. The risks of producing a compilation of random impressions and reminiscences are considerable.<sup>516</sup>

As previously discussed in the chapter concerning censorship and self-censorship, the news coverage of Dunkirk was largely focused on the miracle aspect of the rescue of the troops, specifically as represented by the BBC. Yet the broadcaster was far from alone in that respect; the British newspapers gave very similar treatment to the Dunkirk rescue. While not a correspondent's story, the following is an excerpt from an opinion article published in *The Scotsman* in June 1940 that serves as a good example of the overly positive spin the British newspapers worked to put on the events of Dunkirk:

Already spoken of as the most glorious retreat in our military history, the withdrawal from Dunkirk has aroused as much admiration across the Atlantic as here. Full recognition of this great exploit must await more propitious times, although it has been suggested that London should mark the occasion as it did the victory over the Graf Spee, by giving an official welcome to men of the B.E.F. When the time comes to commemorate the events of the past week the precedent of the retreat from Mons by the Old Contemptibles will surely be borne in mind. Just as the Mons Star was awarded to the men of 1914, so should there be a Dunkirk Star for the men of all four services – the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Merchant Service – and the heroic band of nurses who took part in the withdrawal.<sup>517</sup>

*The Scotsman* changed its tune in an editorial two days later following Winston Churchill's speech about Dunkirk to the House of Commons. The editorial stated, "Mr. Churchill was right to tell the nation bluntly yesterday that thankfulness at the escape of

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<sup>516</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>517</sup> "Dunkirk", *The Scotsman*, 3 June 1940, p. 4.

our army at Dunkirk, the evacuation of which has now been completed, must not blind us to the fact that we have suffered a colossal military disaster.”<sup>518</sup> Yet the British people were still engrossed by, as *The Scotsman* originally termed it, “the most glorious retreat in our military history”, and the stories in other media outlets reflected, and undoubtedly magnified, that public feeling.

*Daily Express*, 1 June 1940, page 1: headline – “Four-fifths of B.E.F Home, Still they come! More thousands snatched from Dunkirk beach, Ammunition by parachute for rearguard, ‘Corunna holds’”; story – “Nearly four-fifths of the B.E.F. who were trapped in Flanders have now been snatched by the Royal Navy from seemingly certain annihilation. All last night ship after ship burst through the storm of steel outside Dunkirk to bring their troop cargoes to south-east ports.”

*Daily Mirror*, 1 June 1940, page 2, by Bernard Gray: headline – “Nothing could break B.E.F.’s Discipline”; story – “Some of them singing – and with death all round them – Gort’s Unbreakables swam, rowed and paddled from the sandy beaches round Dunkirk as the most epic evacuation in military history went steadily forward yesterday. Off shore, waited a motley collection of ships. Overhead screamed Nazi bombers, dropping bombs or swooping down to machine-gun.”

*The Scotsman*, 1 June 1940, page 9, From Douglas Williams, Our Correspondent recently with the B.E.F. in France, At A South-East Coast Port: headline – “Ferrying the B.E.F. Home, Navy Continues Its Glorious Work, Rearguard Heroes”; story – “Undeterred by heavy German gunfire and constant bombing, which increased as the day wore on, the Navy to-day continued the stupendous task of ferrying the B.E.F. home to Britain across the Channel under the very noses of the encircling German army. As the German forces thrust impatiently against the British rearguard, an amazing flotilla of boats of all sizes and descriptions assembled in haste from every available port, inlet, and waterway, shuttled to and fro across the 45 miles of water in an intensive effort to evacuate the large body of soldiers still remaining on the beaches around Dunkirk.” The correspondent took the step, not the norm for newspaper reporters then and even today, to place himself in the story; this was more often done by radio reporters who did not

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<sup>518</sup> “Dunkirk and After”, *The Scotsman*, 5 June 1940, p. 6.

have the benefit of a dateline on a page to explain the location from which they were reporting. It seems, however, that Williams found the Dunkirk story to be important enough – even going so far as to call it a “miracle” – to require a mention of his first-hand account: “From dawn this morning I stood for hours on the dock and watched a succession of vessels unloading endless columns of tired, hungry, dirty, but cheerful British and French soldiers, rescued as by a miracle at the eleventh hour from what had, a couple of days ago, appeared to them inevitable elimination.”

Another newspaper reporter also put himself in the story, in this case describing the evacuation through his own experience aboard one of the boats. *Daily Mirror*, 3 June 1940, page 1, By Ewart Brookes: headline – “How Little Ships Rescued the B.E.F.”; story – “For seventeen hours we have been pulling aboard members of the B.E.F., just some of the many thousands at Dunkirk. I was one of the volunteer crew of a motor yacht which left a south-east coast port. We were the Harry Tate navy. Open motor-boats, slick varnished motor-cruisers, hard-bitten tarred fishing boats, Thames barges and the ‘shilling trip around the lightship’ pleasure boat of the peace-time beach. Everything that could move and float. It looked like a holiday cruise. Then we closed up to the Flanders coast.... When the coast-line was only a grey smudge, above us was heard a deep drone. Bellowing German machines flew over the bigger ships off the coast, ships we were to load from our trailing string of small boats.”

The reporting of *The Times* was more tempered than some of the other papers, with less excitable and religious language speaking of a miracle, but still positive in its tone and with much praise for the military even in its hour of defeat.

*The Times*, 1 June 1940, From Our Military Correspondent: headline – “Rapid Flow of Troops Through Dunkirk, Withdrawals Far in Excess of Expectations, Operations By All Allied Arms, Weather Hampers German Pilots”; story – “British and French troops are being steadily re-embarked at Dunkirk, and the number already withdrawn has surpassed the most optimistic expectations. The operation of retreat and embarkation in view of the enemy, the most difficult in warfare, is being carried out with success to the ably coordinated action of the three arms of the Allies. The losses, though

inevitably heavy in numbers, have been unexpectedly small in proportion to the effectives involved.”

*The Times*, 1 June 1940, From Our Special Correspondent, A South-East Port: headline – “Homecoming of B.E.F., Men Weary But Undaunted, Steadiness Under Cruel Test”; story – “Protected by the ceaseless patrol maintained by British warships and aeroplanes in the English Channel, a steady stream of khaki-clad figures is pouring on to the quays of our south-eastern ports. The British Expeditionary Force is returning home from Flanders, pending its transfer to other battlefields. The cruel rearguard action against overwhelming odds which the King of the Belgians imposed by his defection is yielding results that justify the sacrifices endured. Fighting back with tireless determination, French and British troops have held open the Dunkirk corridor, and the number of men who have been withdrawn already from the theatre of war in Flanders is much greater than was thought possible earlier this week. The aim of the German High Command to encircle and annihilate the British Army has been frustrated.”

*The Times*, 1 June 1940, From Our Military Correspondent: headline – “Enemy Checked By Floods, B.E.F. and French on ‘Corunna Line’”; story – “The flow of British and French troops to British and in some cases to French ports has already surpassed the most sanguine expectations, but it still continues. The numbers withdrawn have increased enormously in the last 24 hours, though the precise figures cannot yet be revealed. A line of defence covers the withdrawal, and has hitherto prevented the entrenched camp of Dunkirk itself from being assailed by the enemy. This line is known to the British as the ‘Corunna Line,’ but French troops fighting by their sides and in friendly rivalry are taking part in its defence in spite of its name.” As previously discussed in the chapter regarding censorship, this mention of a “friendly rivalry” ignores the animosity and confrontations that occurred between British and French soldiers who were desperate to board the ships that would take them away from the deadly Dunkirk beachhead.

For the media as a whole, this was an extraordinary manner in which to report a resounding defeat, although the press apparently wanted to give the public some good news at a time when the war abroad was not going well and the Battle of the Atlantic



was being scored in the number of ships sunk by German U-Boats. Knightley writes, “It would be wrong to suggest that in the face of the disaster of Dunkirk an organised campaign now began to change the evacuation into a victory. But the newspaper reader of the day could certainly be forgiven for thinking that something wonderful had happened to British fortunes in the war.”<sup>519</sup> Some correspondents even felt remorseful over their Dunkirk coverage. According to Knightley, “Alexander Werth, a war correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*, writing after the collapse of France, described his feeling of guilt at the ‘soft soap’ he had been feeding his readers.”<sup>520</sup>

While the people may have rejoiced at the great escape from Dunkirk, the British and Dominion nations together would soon experience a long period without much to celebrate in the war when their forces deployed to North Africa.

### **The North African Desert**

The campaign to sweep the Italians out of the seaports of northern Libya initially seemed to be a resounding success, and the correspondents’ dispatches trumpeted the accomplishments of the British military.<sup>521</sup>

*The Times*, 2 January 1941, page 4: headline – “British Armoured Units Near Tobruk, Patrols 70 Miles Into Libya, R.A.F. Raids On Harbours In Southern Italy, Warships Bombed At Taranto”; story – “While Bardia is being shelled and bombed, British armoured car patrols have penetrated 70 miles beyond the frontier to a few miles south of Tobruk, and are occupying points on the coastal road between Tobruk and Bardia.”

*The Times*, 6 January 1941, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent, Outside Bardia: headline – “Final Break Through, Enemy Defences Crushed, Surprise Attack By Navy”; story – “Bardia, reeling and broken by the mightiest British onslaught of the war,

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<sup>519</sup> Knightley, p. 252.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> It should be noted that stories are listed by the date when they appeared in their respective publications for the sake of continuity, although nearly all of them also report a dateline of a previous day or days when they were dispatched from the field.

began to crumple a few hours ago. In the crimson glow thrown up by many fires and shell explosions isolated groups of Italians are fighting in the semi-darkness.”

*The Times*, 7 January 1941, page 4: headline – “Onward To Tobruk, British Advanced Forces In Action, Concentrated Bombing By R.A.F., More Than 30,000 Prisoners At Bardia”; story – “The British communique from Cairo yesterday announced that the advanced elements of our forces were already approaching the Tobruk area. More than 30,000 prisoners have been counted at Bardia. Quantities of tanks, guns, equipment, and stores of all sorts have been captured.”

*Daily Express*, 7 January 1941, page 1, Daily Express Special Correspondent: headline – “Wavell’s panther tanks reach Tobruk defences”; story – “Advance units of General Wavell’s panther tank columns have reached the outer ring of Graziani’s defences at Tobruk, the great Italian naval base in Libya, it is learned in Cairo tonight. It is at Tobruk, seventy-five miles from the Italian frontier that the Italians are expected to put up their strongest resistance. There is no indication yet, however, that Tobruk is cut off anything like Bardia was for some time before the frontal assault.”

*The Times*, 8 January 1941, page 4: headline – “British Nearer Tobruk, Italians Abandon El Adem Aerodrome, Forty Aircraft Captured, Blackshirt Commanders Desert At Bardia”; story – “The British forces in Libya are continuing satisfactorily their advance towards Tobruk. The enemy has abandoned El Adem, the aerodrome for Tobruk, which lies 15 miles south of that port, and 40 aeroplanes which had been rendered unserviceable by R.A.F. bombing have fallen into British hands.”

When the Germans joined the fray to bolster their Italian allies the tenor of the news stories became less triumphant and more wary; there were still positive reports of British and Dominion victories, but the sense of victory had gone and was replaced with a more tempered outlook in the reporting.

*Daily Mirror*, 12 April 1941, page 1: headline – “Battle Starts Near Tobruk”; story – “News that a battle near Tobruk may be expected was given in a War Office communique last night. It stated: – Libya: Our troops are in contact with the enemy west of Tobruk.”

*The Times*, 12 April 1941, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent: headline – “How Generals Were Captured, 2,000 British Lost”; story – “Official silence, which has been unbroken all week concerning the situation in the Western Desert, was slightly lifted this evening when authoritative circles here described briefly the present situation, and gave a lengthy explanation of the manner in which the three British generals were captured.<sup>522</sup> It was emphasized, as Mr. Churchill said, that it was not originally our intention to advance farther than Tobruk, and thus the forward posts were very lightly held, so that they had to be withdrawn when the Germans attacked.... During our withdrawal, which has been along an extended line from Agheila, we have lost, all told, 2,000 men, which considering the circumstances and compared with the Italian losses in withdrawing in the other direction, is remarkably small.” The story is not only notable for the manner in which the tone changed since three months earlier when the British were rolling through Libya, but also the way in which the correspondent attempts to mitigate the loss of 2,000 men by suggesting that was small “compared with the Italian losses”, proffering shades of Dunkirk. Additionally, as discussed earlier in the dissertation, the reporter employs personal wording that casts the correspondent himself as part of the British fighting forces with the phrases “our withdrawal” and “we have lost.” (As explained by Allan Little of the BBC in 2007, this type of personal wording associating a correspondent or the news outlet for which he works directly with the fighting forces is no longer used in modern reporting.<sup>523</sup>)

By mid- to late-May 1941, the siege was officially on and the news outlets began to admit that the opposing sides had come to a sort of stalemate, although fighting continued.

*The Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1941, From An Australian Correspondent: headline – “Slugging Match In Western Desert, Artillery Duels from Wrecked Forts”;

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<sup>522</sup> Lieutenant General Philip Neame and Lieutenant General Richard O’Connor, along with members of their staff, were taken prisoner after running into a German night patrol ten miles west of Derna. Major General Michael Gambier-Parry was captured separately at Mekili.

<sup>523</sup> See Footnote 313 in the chapter titled, “The Correspondent and Censorship”.

story – “Both sides in the Western Desert are looking for weaknesses in the other’s defence.”

*The Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1941: headline – “The Stand At Tobruk”; story – This was not a full story, but rather a photo of an entrenched piece of artillery with the caption, “A British gun at Tobruk, which is besieged by enemy forces.”

As the year went on, however, there were still those who attempted to continue reporting the situation in the greatest possible light.

*The Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1941, page 6, With The British Forces In The Western Desert: headline – “Nazi Tanks Knocked Out In Libya”; story – “Eight German tanks were destroyed when two columns of German armoured units attempted to force their way through Halfaya (‘Hellfire’) Pass, near the Egyptian border town of Sollum. This brings the German tank losses to eleven in forty-eight hours.... This is the heaviest defeat for General Rommel’s Panzer units since the Nazis made their appearance in Libya.”

*The Observer*, 30 November 1941, page 5, by A Naval Correspondent: headline – “Navy’s Help in Libya, Fine Co-operation By All Services”; story – “Since the opening of the offensive into Libya, attention has naturally been chiefly centred on the progress which the Army has made and is making. Yet there has never been a better example of the co-ordination of the three Services or of the access of strength that that co-operation brings with each. For instance, it has been customary of late to speak of the ‘siege’ of Tobruk; yet Tobruk has never been beleaguered, since sea communications with it have, thanks to the Navy’s dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean, been open without interruption.” This is a clear example of propaganda via the media, by saying that Tobruk was not at all a siege simply because the forces holding Tobruk could still speak with naval forces using wireless communication. This seems more a matter of wishful thinking by the reporter in that some positive facts are reported rather than the whole situation; perhaps this was a case of censorship by a military that did not want the full nature of the situation to be revealed, but in the use of a phrase such as “there has never been a better example of the co-ordination of the three Services” there seems to be

willing co-ordination with the reporter as well. The next month, the newspaper printed verbatim a press release from the military.

*The Observer*, 12 October 1941, page 6: headline – “Tank Battle at Tobruk, Close-Range Fight in Darkness, Cairo”; story – “To-day’s communique from British G.H.Q., Middle East, states:– Libya: During Thursday night the enemy deployed an even larger number of tanks in the areas outside the perimeter defences of Tobruk. After putting up a stout resistance a small post manned by nine British other ranks was overpowered and only two of our men managed to withdraw.” This is not an indication that the newspaper and its correspondent were taking their marching orders from the military, but more likely that there was no further information available or that the correspondent was not able to personally observe the incident and simply had to run with the press release. Yet it supports the argument that the correspondents were extremely reliant on the information the British military provided them and could not always give first-hand knowledge of its veracity.

By the early days of winter, it was widely agreed that 1941 had largely been a siege year for British and Dominion forces at Tobruk, and the war reports reflected that, even as the Australian forces left the siege and were replaced by other Allied troops.

*The Times*, 25 November 1941, page 3, From an Australian Correspondent with the A.I.F.: headline – “Navy’s Tobruk Exploit, How Garrison Was Changed”; story – “Most of the men who wrote the name of Tobruk in glowing colours in the history of Australian courage and determination were relieved before the present offensive began, after fighting one of the most notable sieges of this or any other war. The story of how the 9th Australian Division was withdrawn by sea over a period of four months, beginning in August, has a dramatic flavour. It is also the story of another inspiringly efficient operation by the British Navy which snapped its fingers at Axis aircraft and submarines to enter the harbour of the beleaguered town and carry off about 15,000 fighting men. The whole operation was carried out under the noses of the Axis besiegers surrounding Tobruk—the removal of the greater part of the original garrison and the replacement of them by fresh, eager English and Polish troops.”

With the fight in Libya resuming heavily in the spring of 1942, the tone of the war correspondents' reports was far more sober and realistic, focusing on hard facts of battle rather than sounding triumphant or propagandistic.

*Daily Express*, 28 May 1942, page 1, Express Staff Reporter Eric Bigio, who is with the British Army in Libya, sent this despatch, first of the new Libya war: headline – “Libya: Three Big Tank Battles, Rommel attacks British in north, centre, south”; story – “Three tank battles are raging on the Libya front tonight. Rommel has sent his forces against the British and Empire troops at the northern, coastal end of the line across the desert; against four strong points near the centre; and against Bir Hakeim, strategic water-hole in the south.”

*The Times*, 2 June 1942, page 4: headline – “Battle For Gaps In Libyan Minefield, Enemy Effort To Extricate Armoured Forces, Over 100 Tanks Out Of Action, Afrika Corps Commander Captured”; story – “The battle in Libya has now resolved itself into a struggle for control of the gaps which the enemy made through the British minefields, and our Special Correspondent in the Western Desert states that the position is considered satisfactory.”

*Daily Mirror*, 4 June 1942, page 1: headline – “Fresh tank units smash at Rommel”; story – “Fresh British tank units thrown yesterday by General Ritchie into the battle raging round the ten-mile gap forged by the Nazis in our desert minefields between Gazala and Bir Hacheim, forced Rommel to fight on British terms.... The battle, in which the Eighth Army is using entirely new tactics, is being fought out in blazing heat amid whirling sandstorms which choke and blind the combatants.”

At times correspondents provided eyewitness accounts of a battle, giving the people on the home front a direct conduit to the combat in foreign lands. Although it was not considered standard operating procedure in print journalism to insert oneself into a story, as previously discussed, in an account of this type it provided the most effective and visceral method of reporting the news. *The Times*, 12 June 1942, page 4: headline – “Eye-witness's Account”; story – “The British United Press Correspondent, writing from outside Bir Hakeim, says: – From the top of a riddled German bomber I watched 100 German dive-bombers swoop on Bir Hakeim. It was the greatest dive-bomber raid ever

unleashed in the desert. Rommel had to make this mighty assault on Bir Hakeim because he had been held in the Cauldron by a ring of British ‘iron boxes’—something new in desert fighting. He had to get round the southern flank and the result was the attack I was watching. I could see the smoke rising in clouds from Bir Hakeim. One moment it was bombs—the next an avalanche of shells. The Germans had dragged forward their 88mm guns and massed them north and north-east of the point.... The battle went on all the afternoon in torrid heat. The throb of engines made our eyes turn to the sky. They were our Kittybombers. A few seconds later we saw spirals of smoke as they dropped their loads on the enemy. Our fighters and fighter-bombers then kept up relays of attacks against the enemy’s batteries.”

Alaric Jacob also provided his own observations of the ongoing combat, but refrained from using any first person language or references, as he also admits in his report to having received supporting information from Reuters. *Daily Express*, 27 June 1942, page 1, Express War Reporter Alaric Jacob: headline – “Panzers Mass For Battle Of Matruh, Rommel forces join along coast front only five miles wide”; story – “An advance column of Axis troops is in the neighbourhood of Mersa Matruh today. This column consists of armoured cars, some lorried infantry, and motor-cyclists of the Bersaglieri, Italian shock troops. It was engaged on the coast road outside Mersa Matruh by a famous North of England regiment.... [A Reuter message says that Rommel appears to be concentrating most of his forces on a five-mile front between the breach and the railway....]”

In late June Tobruk fell to an attack by German forces, with *The Times* announcing on page 4 of its 22 June edition, “Fall of Tobruk, Perimeter Breached By Air And Tank Attack”. On page 4 of its 24 June edition the paper noted that the first eyewitness reports were coming in, but were confused and contradictory, thus leaving readers unsure as to the fate of their countrymen. It seemed that even with correspondents on the ground the full story was not yet to be had, giving an example of how news at the time of an event, especially during war, could clash with the historical record that was compiled in hindsight. It was not until weeks later that *The Times* correspondent was able to obtain and dispatch a version of events from a Tobruk

eyewitness. *The Times*, 9 July 1942, From Our Own Correspondent: headline – “What Happened At Tobruk, Indian Army Observer’s Story”; story – “An Indian Army observer cabling from the Middle East gives an account of the German assault which led to the fall of Tobruk. The observer was in Tobruk until the day before the Germans completed their investment by cutting the Tobruk-Bardia road. By that time the British main armour had taken up positions within the perimeter in the triangle south-west of Tobruk.”

In July, there were savage battles in Egypt, especially between Allied and Axis tanks, and the correspondents provided a running tally of the gains made by the British forces against Rommel’s forces in Libya and especially at El Alamein in Egypt. By the end of the second summer in the Western Desert the Allies had learned not to underestimate their German opponents, especially the Desert Fox Rommel, and even with a break in the fighting the newspaper correspondents were telling their readers that the silence did not necessarily mean victory had yet been achieved.

*The Times*, 13 August 1942, From Our Special Correspondent: headline – “Rommel Prepares To Try Again, Lost Axis Supplies”; story – “The lull which has now lasted several weeks in the desert fighting is doubtless the lull before the storm. It is hardly to be expected that Rommel will dally here, with the rich country of the Nile delta and the port of Alexandria almost within sight, without making another determined attempt to reach them.”

Yet the lull in day-to-day combat gave the correspondents the opportunity to provide retrospective analysis and laud various arms of the British and Dominion forces for their efforts up to that point.

*The Times*, 20 August 1942, From Our Special Correspondent with the Middle East Forces: headline – “Stemming Rommel’s Advance, The Role of Three Empire Air Forces, Concentrated Bombing Attacks”; story – “As the months have passed the air arm has assumed an ever-increasing role, and nowhere has this been so strikingly demonstrated as in the Libyan campaign. Under blazing blue skies, usually devoid of cloud cover, and over an almost featureless and roadless desert, pilots of the Royal Air Force, the South African Air Force, and the Royal Australian Air Force are writing



history as surely as their comrades did in the Battle of Britain, the first decisive air battle.”

*The Times*, 3 September 1942, From Our Special Correspondent, page 4: headline – “Gen. Montgomery’s Statement”; story – “Speaking to correspondents at battle headquarters to-day, General Montgomery, Commanding the Eighth Army, said: ‘In no part of the front have the enemy penetrated our organized defended areas.’ There was little activity over the entire front to-day, and it is still too early to obtain any clear picture of the fighting in the Western Desert.”

The historical record shows that by the end of 1942, the Allies were gaining the upper hand against the Axis in the desert. Enough so that Alaric Jacob’s dispatch for Christmas Eve told readers how the British army was too focused on routing the enemy to make merry on the holiday.

*Daily Express*, 24 December 1942, From Alaric Jacob: headline – “M. and V. for Christmas dinner, 8th Army too busy to celebrate”; story – “The spearhead of the 8th Army will eat Christmas dinner of tinned meat and vegetable stew (the famous “M. and V.”), biscuits, tinned fruit and tea as they continue the pursuit of the enemy this Christmas Day. Everything that could give a little suggestion of festivity has been sacrificed so that that pursuit may go on.”

### **Cassino/Anzio**

Monte Cassino Abbey, according to David Hapgood and David Richardson, was chosen by Saint Benedict as the site for a monastery in the year 529. “The Roman road passing below was then ten centuries old; the Romans had built a citadel upon the crest, which in Benedict’s time had become a temple to Apollo.... Over the centuries the Abbey of Monte Cassino grew to be the largest and most important of Western monasteries.”<sup>524</sup> Yet neither the Allies nor the Axis were interested in Monte Cassino and the surrounding area for its historical or religious legacy, but rather for its strategic value. Hapgood and Richardson write: “There was only one practical way from Naples

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<sup>524</sup> David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino: The Story of the Most Controversial Battle of World War II* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2002), p. 4.

to Rome through the mountains of central Italy.... The key to the road to Rome was the great mountain ridge on which the abbey stood. The Germans would have to defend that keystone; the Allies would have to attack it; the abbey would be engulfed in the battle.”<sup>525</sup> To get through Cassino and onto the road to Rome, however, the Allies also had to hold the Anzio beach-head where they had landed their forces. And that is exactly as it was reported, in dramatic fashion, by the British media on a daily basis. The 8th of February in particular presented a particularly busy day for dispatches of events.

*Daily Express*, 8 February 1944, page 1, From Norman Smart, Near Cassino: headline – “Little Rubble Forts, Wily Germans Using Disappearing Guns”; story – “This struggle for Cassino, keystone to the centre of the German Gustav Line, becomes more fantastic every day. You can sit about the five-mile-square amphitheatre in which it is being fought and see it almost like a man watching a rather slow chess game. My jeep winds up the narrow track on the opposite side of the valley to that where the Germans are entrenched. It is only three miles across that valley. Since yesterday we have split open the side of the castle which stands at the back of Cassino, right underneath the mountain. It is laid quite bare, as if somebody had cut it open with a knife.”

*Daily Express*, 8 February 1944, page 1, Combined Press Reporters, Anzio: headline – “Kesselring big guns pound beach landings, New Panzer Rushes Halted”; story – “Tightly ringed by growing German forces on land, and with their sea communications under air and artillery attack, Allied beachhead troops threw back two German attempts to break through their outposts today.”

*Daily Mirror*, 8 February 1944, page 1: headline – “Italy battles near crisis: new German attacks are held”; story – “Crisis point is likely to be reached in the next thirty-six hours in the two big battles raging in Italy. More strong counter-attacks are being made against the British and U.S. troops on the Anzio beachhead. So far, all have been beaten back, but reports from the front indicate that the peak of the German assaults has not yet been reached, says British United Press.”

*The Manchester Guardian*, 8 February 1944, page 5, From our Special Correspondent: headline – “Cassino Battle Goes On, Americans Near Crest of

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<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Monastery Hill”; story – “The struggle for Cassino, key-point in the German defence of the road to Rome, is not yet over. United States troops of the Fifth Army north of the town have pressed on beyond Monte Majola and captured three more heights to the west, thus threatening the main road, that by way of Castilina, on that side of Cassino.... During recent fighting in the beachhead sector the British have taken 300 more prisoners.... Ahead of the British forces north of Anzio Allied bombers attacked enemy positions along the railway at Campoleone.... Beaufighters of the City of London squadron the previous night destroyed one Dornier 217 which was encountered over the beachhead and chased thirty miles north of Rome. Since the Anzio landings the squadron has shot down ten enemy aircraft at night. On the main Fifth Army front, apart from the Cassino sector, there has been active patrolling, and an attack against British forces in the hills north of Suio, in the Garagliano river area, was beaten off.”

*The Times*, 8 February 1944, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent, Algiers: headline – “Struggle for Cassino, More Heights Captured, Prisoners Taken at Beach-Head”; story – “The grim struggle for Cassino, the keypoint in the German defence of the road to Rome, is not yet over. American troops of the Fifth Army north of the town have pressed on beyond Monte Majola, and have captured three more heights to the west, thus threatening the main road, the Via Casilina, on that side of Cassino.... In the Anzio-Nettuno beach-head area the Germans are continuing their attack along both the British and American line of advance. Two miles north of Carroceto enemy infantry and tanks which were forming up to attack the British were dispersed by our artillery fire.”

As in the previous large conflicts, *The Times* would also supplement its own reports from correspondents in Italy by printing the text of communiqués directly from the military and adding a headline to them, such as: 11 February 1944, page 3: headline – “Battle In Streets of Cassino, Pill-Box Defences”; story – “The following announcement was made yesterday by Allied Headquarters:– Fifth Army troops continued to fight fiercely in the streets of Cassino against determined enemy resistance from pill-boxes and emplacements. The enemy launched counter-attacks elsewhere on the main front, which were repulsed. On the Anzio front the enemy continued to probe

our defences, and there was hard fighting in the process. Very bad weather on the Eighth Army front limited activity to patrolling.”

*Daily Express*, 10 February 1944, page 1, Express Military Reporter: headline – “Attacks on Beachhead Still More Violent, Pressure from all sides: Some contraction”; story – “On this 19th day after the Anzio landing the bridgehead is touching its crisis. On all the surrounding hills the enemy has drawn up heavy guns which range from our perimeter to the seas.”

*The Times*, 12 February 1944, page 4, From Our Military Correspondent: headline – “Defences Holding, Germans’ Propagandist Tactics”; story – “On Thursday afternoon there was a pause in the fighting round the Anzio beach-head. It may have been in part due to the weather; for the country was swept by heavy showers which created a great deal of mud and made large-scale movement of vehicles difficult. Some correspondents speculated as to whether the Germans had become exhausted by their efforts to reduce the beach-head and stated that the enemy’s losses had been heavy, many dead visible from the allied lines. It is hard to believe that the enemy will abandon his attacks while they offer any prospect of success. A victory would be invaluable to him from the military point of view, and would also provide a great moral stimulus.... [T]he Germans are using the same propagandist tactic as at Salerno, trying to create alarm by the confidence of their tone and their reports of unceasing successes.” This report was obviously born of a somewhat slow news day, as it states, due to a pause in the fighting. However, it is notable for taking a departure from a straightforward war dispatch by employing the somewhat unusual tactic of using the assessments of other war correspondents to evaluate the situation for the reader. *The Times* military correspondent then offers his own opinion that the speculation offered by the other reporters regarding the state of the Germans’ energy and morale was likely wishful thinking and overstatement and that the Germans must be fortified by their need for a victory. He also does a quick evaluation of German propaganda, another departure from the typical dispatch, perhaps as a way to explain that while other correspondents were being too optimistic in saying the Germans were on the brink of defeat, the German propagandistic reports of “unceasing successes” were also hugely overstated. Of course, since it has

already been shown in the example of Dunkirk that the British media were willing to engage in their own propaganda to aid their country, it should not be wholly unexpected they would try to undermine the German attempts to do the same, although it would be more likely for that to be the focus of editorials, such as those that tried to reduce the impact of the pro-German broadcasts of William “Lord Haw-Haw” Joyce.

The BBC, for instance, conducted discussions early in the war both with the government and internally regarding how best to counter Joyce, since he drew listeners away from their own broadcasts. Among the British public Joyce was considered comical in his grand proclamations of German ultimate superiority, but also could be accurate in his reports, occasionally beating the BBC to important news due to the embargo against the BBC broadcasting developments before the morning newspapers came out, as previously discussed in the dissertation. The BBC even made occasional propaganda broadcasts of its own and considered developing shows to that end, but the Ministry of Information counselled that the Corporation’s best tactic to counter Haw-Haw’s overblown claims of German superiority was to accurately report the facts. J.S. MacGregor, who had been seconded to the MoI from the BBC, wrote: “A prompt and regular supply of significant news will be far more effective at home and overseas than the desperate effort to contradict every false story from Germany, which seems to be an obsession with so many people.”<sup>526</sup> For its part, the *Daily Mirror* encouraged readers to cut out a registration form that was printed in the newspaper and read in part, “Please register me as a member of the Anti-Haw Haw League... and may Heaven help the rumour-mongers I meet”, and mail it back to the paper.<sup>527</sup>

The slow news period ended in Italy when the Allies began to gain the upper hand. *The Times*, 14 February 1944, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent: headline – “Enemy’s Forces Divided, Landings Part of Combined Plan”; story – “The news from the Italian battlefronts again centres in the bitter struggle for Cassino, where our forces are making gradual progress against extremely stubborn existence; and in the Anzio

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<sup>526</sup> M. A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 89-90, 101-102.

<sup>527</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1940, p. 2.

beach-head, where the main fighting has been in the area near Carroceto, held by the British. The position in the Anzio beach-head sector as a whole is described as 'generally satisfactory.' That phrase is apparently used as a corrective to impressions which have been given at home and are re-echoed in the Mediterranean theatre: first, that all was going superlatively well, and then that the initial success was dwindling to something approaching failure." This dispatch, then, was intended not only as a "corrective" to rumours but also reassurance to those fighting The People's War on the home front that the war on the continent was not being lost.

*Daily Express*, 15 February 1944, page 1, Express Special Correspondent, Allied H.Q.: headline – "Leaflet-guns Warn the Monastery, 'Italians, go at once! Batteries are ready'"; story – "Eleven thousand leaflets were fired last night into the Benedictine Monastery on the hill overlooking Cassino – the monastery we would not shell. They gave a last warning that this German-transformed fortress, guarding Highway Six, the road to Rome, will be blasted to rubble. The leaflets, addressed to 'Our Italian friends', said:– 'We have been especially careful to avoid shelling Monte Cassino Monastery. The Germans know how to benefit from this. But now fighting has swept closer and closer to its sacred precincts. The time has come when we must train our guns on the monastery itself. We give you warning that you may save yourselves. Leave the monastery at once.' The message was signed simply, 'Fifth Army.'" By sharing this leaflet with the media, the army headquarters may have been making an attempt to use the media to broadcast a message much further afield than the Germans holed up in the monastery and the monks and residents in the immediate vicinity. With such a historical location at stake, this story could have been intended to bring Italian political and even international pressure to end the siege. One of the great uses of the media, especially during the war, was to not only spread information but also to help manipulate situations in favour of those controlling the flow of information: the Allied military. Regardless of the intent, however, ensuing headlines told of the result.

*Daily Express*, 16 March 1944, page 1: headline – "Cassino Wiped Out, Then Fierce Fighting; Massed bombers drop 1,200 tons on one small town in 3½ hours: Infantry go in and through after greatest softening up ever; Eaker: 'We fumigated it and

melted it down”); story – “Fifth Army infantry – with British forces predominating – went into action in an all-out offensive towards Rome in the Cassino sector yesterday afternoon, following the greatest front-line air bombardment in history, which wiped the town of Cassino off the map.”

*The Times*, 17 February 1944, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent: headline – “Monte Cassino Bombing, German Defence Shattered, Abbey Destroyed”; story – “The bombing of the abbey of Monte Cassino has shattered the Germans’ strongest defence of the road to Rome and of Cassino itself.... It is now confirmed that we hold roughly one-third of the town of Cassino. Allied air force reconnaissance photographs are reported to show the complete destruction of the abbey.... Americans in the Cisterna area repulsed two enemy patrols, and British troops drove off a patrol in the Carroceto area; Carroceto itself is reported to be in enemy hands. On the Eighth Army front a small-scale attack by German infantry with tank support, which was advancing against Indian troops, was smashed by our artillery fire.” As with earlier examples discussed including Tobruk, this correspondent is making use of the personal wording linking himself to the forces with the phrases “we hold” and “our artillery fire.”

In addition to writing as if the correspondents themselves were part of the force facing the enemy, at times the correspondents could actually become part of the story being reported. In this report, it is unlikely that the general originally intended for his words to go beyond the correspondent briefing from which it originated, but clearly it was able to pass the censors. *The Times*, 17 February 1944, page 4, With Fifth Army, Feb. 14 (delayed): headline – “Gen. Alexander’s Confidence, ‘Second Round Being Won’”; story – “In a talk with Press correspondents after he had toured the Anzio beach-head, General Alexander said that the first round of the battle for the beach-head has been won and the second is now in the process of being won. He said he was surprised at the amount of rubbish about the beach-head that he had been reading. General Alexander toured the beach-head by jeep and on foot, and came under shell-fire during part of his journey. ‘I found morale and confidence extremely high,’ he said. ‘It was a pleasure to meet men and officers in the field. I am full of confidence in this beach-head. I feel that what I have been reading in the Press has been rubbish: there can be no comparison to

Dunkirk'.... Correspondents replied by stating that they felt their reports to be objective and not alarmist, and that alarmist reports must have come from other sources.... General Alexander continued: – 'It's no use blowing hot and then cold, first saying that we'll be in Rome in 24 hours and then swinging round. You are responsible people. Your work is vital because it is meant to give the people at home a true picture, but I have received an urgent telegram that reports from the beach-head are alarming people. I beg you not to take that attitude.'" This could be considered another example of the military asking the war correspondents to employ self-censorship, in this case so that their dispatches would not upset the news consumers on the home front and hurt morale with reports that had a defeatist tone.

For the readers and listeners, after the long months of the Tobruk and El Alamein stories of sieges and slogging desert warfare, the events in Italy must have been playing out like a thriller, as is shown by the continuing storyline the month after Cassino was reportedly "wiped out".

*Daily Express*, 3 April 1944, page 4, From Norman Smart: Overlooking Cassino: headline – "Cassino is 'tougher than Second Front will be'"; story – "The town of Cassino, held, as it is, by really good German troops, is reckoned to be tougher than anything we shall have to meet on the Second Front. Because air attack has not broken the German defences here, it does not mean that it will fall against the kind of fixed German which we shall meet in Western Europe." This is interesting for the fact that it is trying to predict the resistance that will be met throughout the remainder of the war, once the anticipated Second Front is launched, based on the experience of Cassino and Anzio. Norman Smart makes a sweeping prediction, which was not normally found in factual articles by war correspondents. Their expertise and opinion were called upon to analyse situations, but usually not on such a large scale that involved making future predictions. Although, in this case, the prediction was not far off, as it proved to be one of the toughest battlefields of the war.

*Daily Express*, 3 April 1944, page 4, From James Cooper, Advanced Air H.Q., Italy: headline – "Allies Begin Bomb Blockade of Germans in Italy, Round-Clock Drive"; story – "An experiment in air strategy second only to the Harris Plan to bomb



Germany into near defeat has begun in Italy. Mediterranean Air Force operations of the last few days make it obvious that attempts are being made to cut rail, road and sea lines to the German forces at Anzio and Cassino, the Adriatic front, and even across the Adriatic in Yugoslavia. It is a blockade by bombers. And it has been intensified by the failure of the experiment to blast the Germans out of Cassino.”

*Daily Express*, 3 April 1944, page 4: headline – “Anzio Drive ‘Imminent’”; story – “Germany’s news agency said once again last night that a big Allied attempt to break out of the Anzio beachhead is ‘imminent.’ According to the Germans, General Clark on Saturday night brought up considerable reinforcements of troops and material and at mid-day yesterday ‘these reinforcements continued under cover of a smokescreen.’” This type of story, reporting what the German news agency was saying, was likely not only an attempt to help people understand the mind-set of the enemy, but also simply to add another angle to the story which was at the time the main focus of the war correspondents and their readership.

*Daily Express*, 17 May 1944, page 1: headline – “Pitched Battle Rages For Cassino Mile, Half buried tanks and fanatical young Nazi paratroops fight to keep Allies from cutting off Cassino, Germans flood Liri Valley to stop 8th”; story – “British troops and tanks in the Liri Valley bridgehead were last night fighting the most savage battle of the Italian offensive for the Cassino Mile – the last 1,760 yards of the desperate struggle to get across Highway Six, which leads westward up the valley to Rome. A front-line despatch received early today said that the Germans had now begun to flood the valley in the area of the Eighth Army bridgehead, in a desperate attempt to save Cassino from being cut off.... The road across the valley southward from Cassino has already been cut and a little further down a famous British division has gone into action and is threatening to sever it again at Pignataro. The advances of the French and American troops of the Fifth Army in the mountains between the Liri and the sea make it clear that the Gustav Line has not only been breached but turned, cables Daily Express reporter James Cooper.”

Meanwhile, Anzio had proved just as difficult to crack as Cassino. CBC correspondent Peter Stursberg, while waiting for Allied troops to regroup for an

offensive on Cassino in April, visited Anzio. He could not reveal the full facts of the situation at the time due to military restrictions, but described it years later in his memoir, *The Sound of War*:

In a letter home I observed that the beachhead was a “very interesting and exciting place – almost too much like a story book to be real.” Actually, Anzio was a disaster: the only Allied landing since Dieppe that had failed. When they went ashore at this seaside resort on 22 January 1944, the British and American forces caught the enemy completely by surprise, there was no opposition whatsoever. But indecisive leadership allowed Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, to rush up troops from as far away as France and Germany and almost drive the attackers back into the sea. The Allies hung on grimly to a coastal strip no more than six miles wide: and Anzio became as Gallipoli.<sup>528</sup>

As the historical record shows, both Anzio and Cassino were eventually conquered by the Allies in May 1944, with the war correspondents on hand to document the finale of this monumental battle for a key sector of southern Italy.

BBC, 18 May 1944: “The Polish flag is flying over the ruins of an ancient Italian monastery which has been a symbol of German resistance since the beginning of the year. Polish troops entered the hill-top abbey this morning, six days after the latest attacks began on this strategic stronghold at the western end of the German defensive position known as the Gustav line. British troops have taken control of the fortified town of Cassino at the foot of ‘Monastery Hill’.”<sup>529</sup>

*The Times*, 19 May 1944, page 4, From Our Special Correspondent: headline – “Desolation Of Cassino, Visit After The Battle, A Tortured Town”; story – “Here is a scene of utter desolation such as only this war can produce. It is nearing noon, and the last Germans left this relic of a tortured town some few hours ago; they were prisoners. Their last stronghold—Hotel Continental—had gone up with a bang a little while before

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<sup>528</sup> Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 156.

<sup>529</sup> *BBC Online*, “On This Day – 1944: Monte Cassino falls to the Allies”, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/18/newsid\\_3544000/3544047.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/18/newsid_3544000/3544047.stm)> (accessed 18 May 2010).

that; it was the final retreating blow that the Germans in Cassino struck. There were fewer than 30 prisoners taken in Cassino itself. Our men felt bitter about that. ‘This is the first time I have ever been able to stand outside in the open air,’ said one of them, ‘and now I have only seen 10 Germans.’”

For all the difficult and deadly fighting of Cassino and Anzio, however, they were both a prelude to the greater battle that was to come: the opening of the Second Front, which provided some of the most dramatic reporting of the entire war.

## Normandy

BBC, 6 June 1944, Frank Gillard: “Astern of us, the assault craft have assembled. You know that they are neatly marshalled there, in formation, but you can only make out the leaders. The loud hailer checks them over. Voices reply faintly out of the darkness. The Naval Commander is looking at his watch. He puts the microphone to his mouth. ‘Off you go then—and good luck to you.’”<sup>530</sup>

*The Times*, 7 June 1944, page 4: headline – “The Great Assault Going Well, Allies Several Miles Inland, Battle For Town of Caen, Mass Attack By Airborne Troops, Continuous Fighter Cover Over Beaches”; story – “The Allied Expeditionary Army was fighting last night several miles inland from the beaches... where it had landed in the morning in the greatest operation of its kind in history. Mr. Churchill announced last evening that the... operation was proceeding ‘in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.’ Mass airborne landings have been made behind the enemy lines, and the Germans report landings in Guernsey and Jersey.”

*The Times*, 7 June 1944, From Our Military Correspondent, page 6: headline – “Gamble On The Weather, Invasion Postponed For A Day, Difficult Coast”; story – “The landing of British, United States and Canadian forces on the Normandy coast has so far met with less opposition than was expected. The concentration not interfered with; convoys were not heavily attacked; the sweeping appears to have been extremely successful; hostile ‘air’ was not very active. Above all, the coast-defence artillery has, it would seem, been put out of action or neutralized in the target area by the terrific attacks carried out during the night of Monday and early Tuesday by the allied heavy bombers, later by the Tactical Air Force, and subsequently by naval bombardment. But in other respects the absence of strong resistance at the first stage means little. It means only that the enemy held back his Luftwaffe and had not brought his main land forces into action.” The previous two *Times* stories were important because they explained the vast

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<sup>530</sup> Donald Boyd and Desmond Hawkins (eds.), *War Report: A Record of Dispatches Broadcast by the BBC’s War Correspondents with the Allied Expeditionary Force 6 June 1944 – 5 May 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 60.

scope of the invasion, but the analysis in the second story also let the people on the home front know that the fight was far from over.

*Daily Express*, 7 June 1944, page 1: headline – “Tanks 10 Miles In, No longer any opposition on the beaches, Luftwaffe Is Still Absent”; story – “Allied invasion troops, surging into France in mighty non-stop waves, have fought their way into Caen, town ten miles from the coast. Heavy street fighting is going on. The Germans are saying that the defenders are being ‘sorely tried.’ Along the whole front of between 80 and 100 miles from Cherbourg to the mouth of the Seine the offensive is gaining momentum. Already terrific convoys have been assembled on the one-time holiday beaches. Our tanks are well inland.” The story was headed by a map showing the Normandy coastline with arrows pointing at the points of invasion, as well as a caption that read, “The invasion dispositions on this Daily Express map are based on news received yesterday from Germany. From Germany, too, came the claim that paratroops had been landed in the Channel Islands.”

*Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1944, page 1: headline – “We Hold Beachhead”; story – “Within a few hours of the mightiest assault in history Allied troops established a beachhead on the Normandy coast yesterday. Airborne troops are fighting some miles inland. More than 640 naval guns—from 4 to 16 inches—had practically silenced the German coastal batteries. The Allied air force was in absolute control. All through the day, from the 7 a.m. landings until dusk, Allied fighter-bombers were dive-bombing, glide-bombing and strafing German defences and communications. They flew into the mouths of guns and dived within feet of the bridges.”

In contrast to the historical works – including written and cinematic versions – on the invasion that came later, the news stories focused on the encouraging progress of the Allies and did not provide death and injury tolls or delve into any of the gruesome details that have come out in historical accounts. This is undoubtedly due to a professional sense that particulars of such a dramatic nature should not be released both for the sake of decorum – this was during a time when the gore that is regularly described and viewed today would be unthinkable – and simply so as not to upset the relatives of the men who lost their lives. The closest that correspondents might have

come to such writing and broadcasting might be seen in the example of Guy Byam's report in which he describes a point at which a plane "disintegrates" in the air.

BBC, 8 June 1944, Guy Byam: "The whole sky is a fantastic chimera of lights and flak, and one plane gets hit and disintegrates wholesale in the sky, sprinkling a myriad of burning pieces all over the sky. The job of the unit with which I jumped was to occupy the area and prepare the way for gliders—we were to rendezvous near a copse, but I can't find it, so I go to a farm-house and ask the way of a farmer and his wife standing on the porch of their house. It's a tricky business this moving about the enemy countryside at night. But we are well in hand and at the most I shall only meet my own patrols. I find the unit after having been sniped at once and challenged a number of times. They are assembling under a hedge."<sup>531</sup> Rather than simply give an update on the progress of the forces, this story gives a glimpse into how close Byam was to the action and the type of activities that war correspondents were conducting and difficulties they were encountering during the invasion and ensuing battles, giving the public more insight to the job of a war reporter. Also, his use of the language, "The whole sky is a fantastic chimera of lights and flak", provides a descriptive narrative and demonstrates how BBC correspondents often engaged in more florid language than newspaper correspondents who usually had stricter space restrictions in their print publications. This sort of description was frequently demonstrated in the reports by Richard Dimbleby, and is one of the reasons he became one of the most famous of the war correspondents.

BBC, 11 June 1944, Richard Dimbleby: "I saw the shining, blue sea. Not an empty sea, but a sea crowded, infested with craft of every kind: little ships, fast and impatient, scurrying like water-beetles to and fro, and leaving a glistening wake behind them; bigger ships, in stately, slow procession with the sweepers in front and the escort vessels on the flank—it was a brave, oh, an inspiring sight. We are supplying the beaches all right—no doubt of that. We flew on south-west, and I could see France and Britain, and I realized how very near to you all at home in England is this great battle in

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

Normandy. It's a stone's throw across the gleaming water."<sup>532</sup> This narrative reporting very likely caught the imagination of the people on the home front more so than straight news reporting of facts or regurgitating of dry military press releases. And the mention of the closeness to England, with its coast in sight, undoubtedly made the British public feel more connected to their military forces battling in Normandy.

Yet straight news reports could still be just as stirring as personal narratives, as exhibited in the following story. *Daily Mirror*, 12 June 1944, page 1: headline – “Our Forces Hold Unbroken Line of 51 Miles”; story – “With the fighting around our invasion bridgehead becoming heavier hourly the Allied forces continue to widen their grip on Normandy. Outstanding feature of the fighting is the terrific intensity of our air assaults on the Germans’ gun emplacements and supply columns. Marauders, which formerly bombed from medium heights, are now sweeping the country-side at the hitherto unheard of altitude of 200ft., playing havoc with their heavy-calibre machine-guns, and the enemy can do nothing about it. The Luftwaffe has been afraid to commit itself even at night. A barrage from ships and shore batteries almost as heavy as London’s greets every German plane which approaches the beachhead, while swarms of night fighters, both 2nd Tactical Air Force and Air Defence of Great Britain, are ready to shoot them out of the skies.” As with Dimbleby’s report mentioning the proximity to England, the comparison to London’s air defences against the Luftwaffe gave those at home a direct connection to their own experiences in The People’s War.

*Daily Mirror*, 1 July 1944, page 1: headline – “Wedge Troops Maul The Huns”; story – “Rommel flung fresh troops into the Normandy wedge battle yesterday, but the British troops, which had already withstood forty-eight hours of continual counter-attacks, not only held on but made the salient firmer than ever. Our bridgehead over the Odon is now solid. English and Scottish troops who held a big panzer blow against the west bank of the wedge resumed their drive to broaden the corridor.” Besides specifically featuring the actions of “English and Scottish troops” rather than calling them “Allied” or even “British”, the article is somewhat noteworthy for its large, boldfaced headline using the word “Huns”. This is an example of how news coverage,

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

even of wars, has changed dramatically since the Second World War; in the coverage of modern warfare, such as the Afghanistan and Iraq wars or other conflicts in the Middle East, a slang term as inflammatory as Huns would never be allowed in the media, even about the enemy, although it is widely known that both soldiers and the public use such negative sobriquets.

As with previous battle reports such as the 11 February 1944 story from Cassino, *The Times* printed another Allied press release as its 5 July 1944, page 3 story with the headline, “Two Major Attacks In Normandy, Capture of Carpiquet and Verson”, followed by, “Communique No. 58, issued from Supreme Allied Headquarters last night...”<sup>533</sup> While the military press releases provided valuable information that informed the public of its progress, the stories of the movements and observations of the war correspondents – whether reporting danger to themselves or lighter moments – still provide far more compelling reading.

BBC, 9 July 1944, Frank Gillard: “The patrols which we sent forward last night towards Caen have reported that it was almost impossible to find an entry into the city. Every roadway was completely blocked. So, when our infantry and tanks went forward down the slope from Hill 64 just before eleven o’clock this morning, they had bulldozers well up with them. It was close on two o’clock when the commander received a message which made him turn to us and say, ‘All right; if you want to go in, you can go.’ Feeling very much like a military target, we shot over the open brow of the hill in our jeep, until we reached a cross-roads beyond which there was so much German fire that it was obvious that the only way was to continue on foot, ‘playing musical chairs from slit trench to slit trench’, as one officer on the spot put it.”<sup>534</sup>

BBC, 11 July 1944, Robin Duff: “Yesterday they were at work routing out the Germans themselves. They were searching a deserted farm-house, when one of them saw a boot sticking out of a corner of an attic. They fired through the floor and nineteen German soldiers, fully armed, surrendered to four soldiers of the Resistance.... While he

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<sup>533</sup> N.A., “Two Major Attacks In Normandy, Capture of Carpiquet and Verson”, *The Times*, 5 July 1944.

<sup>534</sup> Boyd and Hawkins, pp. 140-141.



[the Maquis commander] was in the courtyard of his headquarters a report came in that a German parachutist had been seen near by.... As we went along, searching as best we might, three small children joined us. There was a boy of fifteen and his two little sisters. They asked us whether they could help us look for les Boches. Armed with some chewing gum, some toffee, and a cigarette, they tagged along. And suddenly, we wanted to laugh.”<sup>535</sup>

Overall, the reporting from the Normandy landings and the weeks that followed gave the correspondents an opportunity to provide some of the most exciting and perhaps most encouraging coverage of the war to that point, as was befitting the greatest operation of the entire conflict.

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.

## CONCLUSION

The second great war of the 20th Century marked a new era in conflict journalism, and in some ways in journalism in general. The increased role of the reporter as a credible observer of a clash that engulfed multiple countries resulted in improvements of existing procedures and even some innovations in a progressively vital profession. Despite the difficulties of balancing bureaucratic restrictions, state and military censorship, changing technology, and the inherent dangers of reporting from battle zones, the Second World War combat correspondents were able to flourish in their assigned task of delivering to the public news of this prodigious struggle. They showed courage, creativity and fortitude, and many of the correspondents who covered the British and Dominion forces in the Western Theatres proved themselves to be among the finest in this rarefied club.

At the same time, the media organisations themselves matured in their methods of enabling the reporters to gain access to the most important events of their time in terms of monetary support, equipment, and other substantial services that maintained the journalists in the field. This was coupled by changes in the overall British media environment, in which a settlement between the government, the press and the growing medium of broadcasting was negotiated and subsequently changed the rules of the news business in Britain. The press still remained a major player, but also had to make room for the swelling popularity and respectability of the upstarts in radio news. The interaction between the government and the news organisations was changed in the same way, with Whitehall having to recognise the BBC as an equal to Fleet Street. Meanwhile, the effect of the government on the media, especially in the wielding of censorship, changed in a way that, while the flow of information was still controlled to a great degree, the public was assured more access to the facts than the favourable government and military assessments of the First World War. The government and the news organisations also collaborated more closely on endeavours such as Operation Spartan that ensured the correspondents would be better prepared not only to work with the military in collecting the war news, but to return it to the home front in a timely and

accurate fashion. This proved to be ground-breaking when the biggest military assault in history, and subsequently the biggest news operation, occurred with the launch of Operation Overlord on 6 June 1944.<sup>536</sup>

The Second World War provided an unfortunate opportunity for combat reporters to continue the work as it was developed by the correspondents who reported on previous conflicts, but also to use new approaches developed to meet the monumental task of covering a war that was far beyond the scope of all those that came before it. In terms of reporting technology and technique, the correspondents of the Second World War straddled the past and the future: while telegrams, letters and even carrier pigeons were being used to deliver the news of the war back to Britain, radio reporters were utilising the latest developments in recording and communication including the Midget portable recorder and transmitter trucks that could beam recordings from the continent back to Britain. However, regardless of the medium in which they reported, all war correspondents still relied on typewriters, notebooks and pencils.

There were many notable war correspondents in the Second World War, each of whom had somewhat different reasons for taking on such an enormous assignment full of danger and deprivations. Alaric Jacob summed it up well: “Somebody has to write up wars in the newspapers. It’s an essential job of work, but not one of transcendental importance. And the men who do it aren’t figures of romance. Just reporters in uniform. Some turn out to be brave and resourceful, others ought never to receive the army’s license.”<sup>537</sup>

Subsequently, the selection and training of war correspondents was obviously of the greatest importance to the correspondents themselves and the media outlets that employed them, but also had a high level of significance for the people at home who relied on the media to deliver the daily news from the battle theatres. Without

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<sup>536</sup> Tom Hickman, *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-1945* (London: BBC Books, 1995), p. 180; William Grierson, Mark Jones, and Humphrey Walwyn (prods.), *D-Day Despatches: Original Recordings from the BBC Sound Archives June 1944*, BBC Radio Collection, BBC Audiobooks Ltd., 2004.

<sup>537</sup> Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller’s War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), pp. 1-2.

correspondents who were able to cover all the fronts of the war and to distill their importance, as well as give more than grey descriptions of both the fighting and the conditions of the troops, the public would be left with an incomplete understanding of what was happening. The connection with the war on foreign soil was vitally important to those fighting The People's War in Britain in that it gave them reason, beyond mere survival, to maintain their great fortitude. Had the news companies simply chosen whichever members of their reporting staff were most senior or were simply available first, the level of reporting could have suffered. With the public hanging every day on the printed and broadcast words of the war correspondents, ensuring the top people were not only chosen but, as much as possible, properly prepared for the monumental job set before them was key. As it was, the correspondents who hailed from both the UK and Dominion nations had among their ranks some of the finest to work in wartime and as a group kept the public as fully informed as possible, which in the end was what the people really desired. During the dark hours of their war at home, they wanted to have as much light as possible shed upon the war abroad. The BBC understood this, reminding their war correspondents that their reporting "must include a good deal more than battle news; for broadcasting must link families at home with the men at the front by interpreting them as human beings and not only as soldiers... war reporters must not get so steeped in Service knowledge that they forget that civilians, the majority of them women, form the bulk of their audience."<sup>538</sup>

The BBC's careful selection of its roster of correspondents and thorough training regimen proved a great success in the long term for the Corporation. D-Day marked the official debut of the wholly formed War Reporting Unit and the launch of the BBC's flagship programme of the latter part of the conflict, *War Report*, whose first broadcast at 9:15 pm on the day of the Normandy invasion was heard by an estimated 17- to 20-

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<sup>538</sup> Engineers were excluded from certain training activities. BBC WAC R28/280/2, "Front Line Reporting", 31 March 1943; BBC WAC R28/280/3, "Notes on the B.B.C.'s War Reporting Unit", 20 July 1943; "Note of Meeting in Mr. Foot's Room at the B.B.C. on March 31st", 1 April 1943.

million listeners.<sup>539</sup> With an average civilian audience of between 10- and 15-million, there were a total of 235 *War Report* programmes, comprising between 1,500 and 2,000 dispatches. *War Report* broadcast several war journalism milestones, including the first British report of the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life; a live recording of the French liberation ceremony at Notre Dame, where snipers tried to assassinate Charles de Gaulle; the first news of Heinrich Himmler's suicide; the announcement of the German army's surrender in Italy and the fall of Berlin that same night; and an exclusive recording of the meeting in which General Montgomery accepted Germany's unconditional surrender.<sup>540</sup> Despite these historic moments in broadcasting, for the BBC correspondents on *War Report*, the Normandy invasion produced what are likely their most memorable reports. Stanley Maxted recalling tracer fire zipping over his head during a skirmish led by a torpedo boat skipper: "That man's a fire eater..."; Guy Byam recounting his leap out of an airplane with British paratroopers: "The whole sky now is a fantastic chimera of lights and flak..."; Chester Wilmot aboard a glider: "We virtually crash landed in the plowed field..."; Howard Marshall on a barge: "Soon the air grew heavy with the smell of cordite and loud with the sound of explosions, and looking along the beach we could see the explosions of our artillery creating a great cloud and fog of smoke..."; Richard Dimpleby describing the scene below his Mosquito aircraft: "Fires are burning in every direction, there's smoke going up in clouds..."<sup>541</sup> These are the broadcasts that made household names of some of these BBC correspondents, and a handful of them went on to enjoy prosperous post-war careers in radio, television, and books.

As with the BBC, newspapers and wire services also put a premium on selecting and supporting their war correspondents because they understood the enormity of the mission they faced. Without well-chosen correspondents, for example, *The Times* would

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<sup>539</sup> Richard Havers, *Here Is The News: The BBC and the Second World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2007), p. 251.

<sup>540</sup> Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 216-217; Hickman, p. 181. The report on the Notre Dame assassination attempt was made by correspondent Robert Reid, who was the grandfather of Dr. Jeremy A. Crang, Edinburgh University senior lecturer in history and one of the supervisors of this dissertation.

<sup>541</sup> Hickman, p. 180; Grierson, Jones, Walwyn, *D-Day Despatches*.

not have been able to print a morale-boosting story from the Anzio beachhead in Italy with the headline, “Great Stand By Grenadiers: 18 Hours’ Fight in Beach-Head”, as well as a piece critiquing military tactics headlined, “After the Anzio Landing: New Developments In Amphibian Operations: Problems Which Must Be Solved”, both from February 1944. During the First World War, when correspondents relied heavily on government press releases that provided favourable estimates of the military situations, the first story most likely would have been allowed by censors while the next very likely would not. Yet in this new war both these stories reached the public eager for information not only due to a more permissive censorship, but because of the abilities of the correspondents to get the stories and, in the second example, to explain military techniques to a lay audience. Also like the BBC, a handful of those print journalists skilful enough to provide this sort of information to the public – Alaric Jacob of Reuters and Alan Moorehead of the *Daily Express*, for example – also went on to well-deserved renown.

As A.P. Ryan told his BBC correspondents shortly before they deployed to Normandy: “Field service is no picnic.”<sup>542</sup> The reporters across all the different news agencies experienced that colloquialism to varying degrees; from sticking out their thumbs and hitching rides with military vehicles, trying to sleep through desert sand storms or frigid Belgian winters, to being shot at and bombed. Describing the Second World War for an eager public at home was an extremely difficult job for the correspondents with numerous factors that played upon their lives every day, and in unfortunate cases even cost them their lives.

However, it is unlikely any of them would have traded their position for another. Because despite all the factors that contributed to field service being no picnic, at times they did in fact have literal picnics, lounging in deserted villas or supping on the pilfered stocks of German officers who had gone on the run only hours earlier. They were able to move with a relatively large amount of freedom around the war theatres, gain access to important military personnel as far up as generals, take leave as they wished (or as allowed by their employers), enjoy billets in hotels and have dinner with officers that

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<sup>542</sup> BBC WAC R28/280/5, Ryan to Maxted, 8 May 1944.

they then charged to their company expense accounts, and appropriate numerous spoils of war such as large amounts of alcohol and food while the troops lived on canned rations. Robert Capa, the famed war photographer, summed up the combat journalist's life this way: "I would say that the war correspondent gets more drinks, more girls, better pay and greater freedom than the soldier."<sup>543</sup> Clearly the correspondents had experiences that put them in a different category from the soldiers with whom they often shared the dangers of the battlefield; they were both part of and apart from the soldiers they covered.

Yet it was obviously far more of an endeavour – and far more important – than going out and taking part in adventures, both perilous and pleasurable. The People's War in the United Kingdom benefited greatly from the work of the war correspondents covering the British armed forces, keeping those on the home front abreast of the events of the conflicts, as well as maintaining a connection to their family members and countrymen involved in the fighting abroad, and perhaps by doing so giving them the strength and hope to keep up their own struggle. The Dominion nations undoubtedly benefited in the same manner from the work of these British correspondents, as well as the reporters from their own nations such as those from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and newspapers in Australia and South Africa.

Historical works often use information from war correspondents as grist to help analyse and explain the war, and in doing so quote news stories or recall anecdotes involving reporters. Historical works that focus on the media as a whole or large media companies, such as *The Power of News: The History of Reuters* by Donald Read, often do so in a big-picture fashion rather than drilling down to the details of the practice of reporting. Meanwhile, there are books such as the memoirs of correspondents that provide more small scale, intimate perspectives, but focus on the individual experiences of those writing them.

This dissertation attempts to fill a gap in the historiography of the Second World War by supplementing both the generalised views of the workings of journalism at the

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<sup>543</sup> As quoted in Harold Evans, *War Stories: Reporting in the Time of Conflict From the Crimea to Iraq* (Charlestown, Massachusetts: Bunker Hill Publishing, 2003), p. 36.

time as well as the personal stories of the practitioners. In broad ways, the dissertation is intended as a study of the media in general during the conflict. Radio became as big as the printed media, ending the pre-war dominance that Asa Briggs and Peter Burke called “the age of the press barons”.<sup>544</sup> Ground-breaking new broadcasting technology was developed. War news was brought to the home front on a far wider scale than in previous conflicts, ensuring the public was not only better informed, but that its expectations changed about the breadth of future media coverage of wars, and perhaps politics and society as well. Censorship grew into a giant, machine-like entity the likes of which had not been seen before, but press freedom grew along with it. Despite examples of self-censorship, such as with the reporting of Dunkirk, as correspondents got closer to the war and emerged with a greater amount of information than had been previously collected in war reporting, the news organisations seemed to acquire an increasing willingness to publish and broadcast more news with a greater scope, not just communiqués from the military. The welfare of troops had always been a concern, as shown as far back as the reports of neglect and mistreatment of foot soldiers written by William Howard Russell, but the human stories of the fighting men became commonplace topics alongside those of policy and strategy and military outcomes. As stated in Mass Observation’s “Report On The Press” from May 1940: “Ordinary war-time events, such as soldiers arriving on leave, or setting sail for France, are given ‘human interest’ in this way. Thus, after the news of a battle has been printed and become stale, it is usually followed up by accounts of interviews with those who took part in it, what they said, what they felt, etc.”<sup>545</sup> These are all important topics in British war reporting that, when taken together, should contribute to media history.

Yet the specific focus of this dissertation – and the prism through which the media is analysed – is the corps of war correspondents on the front lines. The correspondents of the Second World War who covered the British and Dominion forces did not recreate journalism, the path of war reporting had already been laid before them, but they did

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<sup>544</sup> Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005), p. 169.

<sup>545</sup> Mass Observation, “Report On The Press”, p. 3.



help redefine the direction that the profession would take for years to come. The manner in which correspondents were chosen, and the new methods used to train them, developed along with the modern warfare they covered. The infrastructure to support them – not only through salaries that were markedly higher than the general public, but also equipment and financial safety nets such as life insurance and payments to those who were captured – was improved to deal with the greater expanse of this war over others. In discussing these subjects as they relate specifically to the war correspondents as a group and as individuals is where the previously untapped value of this dissertation lies.

As stated in the introduction, the intention of this work has been a gathering of many disparate sources that together enabled an analysis of how the war correspondents did their jobs, including personnel files of BBC reporters that had never before been viewed for academic study; various memoirs of war correspondents that had previously stood alone rather than collected and compared; and numerous news stories that had not formerly been subjected to close analysis together. These sources were crucial to a study of how the everyday work of these correspondents not only provided the immediate information of the war but also subsequently updated and even changed the genre of war reporting, as well as how in some respects the Second World War dramatically changed the landscape of journalism in general.

Yet the work could be expanded further. With additional sources and related topics available upon which to enlarge this study – such as the war correspondents in the Pacific Theatre and the female correspondents, each group having had its own unique experiences and issues in the course of their jobs – the research specifically focused on the working lives of war correspondents with both an institutional and personal focus could go forward and make more contributions to the field of Second World War media history. There is still much to learn and tell from the story behind the stories.

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## APPENDIX

### Notable Figures

The following is a list of noteworthy people who practised or somehow affected the development of British war reporting in the western theatres of the Second World War. The list is far from complete, especially regarding correspondents, but is representative of the figures who played an important part in gathering and organizing – and in the case of military and political actors, those who attempted to closely control – the war news disseminated to the Home Front.

#### Correspondents, Editors and Managers

##### Print

##### *Associated Press of Britain*

Godfrey H.P. Anderson – Notable because the Italian government made requests to the British government to arrange a prisoner exchange for Anderson, the AP's Middle East correspondent, for one of three Italian correspondents being held in India. The British refused, invoking a policy that was also used in the case of captured BBC correspondent Edward Ward.

##### *The Daily Express*

**Alan Moorehead** – Moorehead, an Australian, worked for the *Melbourne Herald* while he was still a student and then continued with the paper after receiving a degree in law. He joined the *Daily Express* and covered the Spanish Civil War from the British outpost at Gibraltar and then was moved to the Middle East and North Africa, where he made his name covering the British Eighth Army. He later wrote books about his experiences in the Desert War, which were compiled in his *African Trilogy*. He was in Normandy for the opening of the Second Front and continued covering the Allies through the liberation

of Paris, Belgium and Holland. He continued to write books through the 1950s and 1960s but suffered a career-ending stroke in 1966. He died in 1983.

### ***The Daily Mail***

**Alexander Clifford** – Clifford was initially with Reuters covering the Spanish Civil War and then as its Berlin correspondent until the Second World War commenced, at which time he went to France as an eyewitness representing the British press. In 1940 he was a *Daily Mail* staffer in Greece and Yugoslavia, and then in North Africa in 1941. From 1943-1944, Clifford was on the Italian front and was cited for “gallant and distinguished services”. In 1944 he joined the Allied forces in France and covered the liberation of Paris, and then reported on their progress through Belgium, Holland and Germany.

### ***Reuters***

**Alexander Massy Anderson** – A Royal Navy correspondent for Reuters, he drowned in the Mediterranean when a U-boat torpedoed his ship near Alexandria, Egypt, 15 December 1941. He was one of the small number of Reuters reporters killed on assignment during the war.

**Archibald Doon Campbell** – A correspondent who enjoyed a long career with Reuters, Campbell became a standout reporter for the wire service after working for newspapers in Scotland, including the Edinburgh *Evening Dispatch*. He came to be considered one of the best discoveries to be recruited by the famed Reuters editor and manager, Walton Cole. He was the youngest journalist accredited to Allied headquarters in Algiers and was at the infamous battle of Monte Cassino in Italy. He later became the first war correspondent to touch the beach on D-Day, famously giving his dispatch the dateline, “A ditch 200 yards inside Normandy”. He also survived the crash landing of an American glider along the Rhine. All of this with only one hand due to a birth defect. Following the war he covered China, where he obtained a rare interview with Mao Zedong, and India, where he reported the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. He stayed

with Reuters as an editor until 1973 and in 1984 was awarded the OBE. He died in 2003 at the age of 83.

**John Chetwyd-Talbot** – A fifteen-year Reuters veteran at the age of 33, Talbot had already covered military action in the Arctic, Russia, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East before moving to the Balkans, where he was escorted to Josip Tito's secret mountain hideout in what is now Bosnia by Major Randolph Churchill, son of Winston. He subsequently became one of only two reporters providing coverage of the Partisan forces for the rest of the world media. In May 1944, he was captured by the Germans and slated for execution before the intervention of an American news photographer saved him. Talbot spent several months in captivity, but remained with Reuters as a European and African correspondent until 1975.

**Walton A. Cole** – The editor and joint news manager of Reuters during the war, “Tony” was famous for spotting talent; some of his recruits, including Doon Campbell and Charles Lynch, were ranked among the most distinguished Reuters journalists of the war and beyond. He was also the main point of contact in London for combat reporters in the field, making him a critical piece of the machine that disseminated news to numerous print outlets and, subsequently, provided information about the war to the rest of the world.

**Alaric Jacob** – Born in Edinburgh, Jacob lived in India and the Middle East as a child before being educated in England. He was a Washington reporter for Reuters in the 1930s until deployment as a war correspondent in France in 1940, later enduring a close escape from the country during the German invasion. He wrote in his memoir that having “run into a German ambush at Evreux without damage and come safely away from Brest a good twelve hours ahead of the enemy, I had no illusions about the ‘glory’ of the profession.”<sup>546</sup> Yet at age thirty-two he once again volunteered for war correspondent duty and left London's King's Cross Station in May 1941 to embark upon

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

a journey to Egypt to cover the war in Africa, a job which he stated in his memoir would be “an enormity”. He then covered the Middle East and Africa, including the fighting in Tobruk in late summer 1941 and the battle of El Alamein in 1942. Jacob left Reuters for the *Daily Express* and went on to cover Burma in the Pacific theatre and then Russia in 1944.

**Charles Lynch** – Recruited by Cole from Canadian newspapers, Lynch went on to a long career at Reuters that included war coverage on the Western Front and, after the war, a position as a well-known and highly regarded political commentator. Lynch was immortalized in war correspondent lore when the film *The Longest Day* – based on the 1959 book by Reuters and *Daily Telegraph* war correspondent Cornelius Ryan – re-enacted the moment when Lynch tried to send a message from the Normandy beach back to England via carrier pigeons and the birds instead turned and flew toward the Germans inland, prompting Lynch to shout, “Traitors! Damn traitors!”

**Stewart Sale** – He was a war correspondent killed by a shell near Naples, Italy, on 28 September 1943. Before joining Reuters, Sale worked for English newspapers including the *Daily Telegraph*. He accompanied a bombing raid over Berlin and then was posted in August 1943 to North Africa, from which he reported on the invasion of Italy.

**Desmond Tighe** – Desmond Tighe began working as a Morse code operator in London in 1930, but then took a position working for the Reuters commercial service in Egypt in 1935. He subsequently became a Reuters war correspondent and had a series of close escapes from the Germans, first in Oslo in the spring of 1940 when he had to flee to Sweden to avoid the Nazi invasion force. He later travelled a very roundabout, 7,000-mile route through Moscow, Odessa and Bucharest to reach Paris, where he took the last plane out to London before the arrival of Nazi troops. He was Alexander Massy Anderson’s replacement covering the British navy in the Mediterranean after Anderson was killed. Tighe was on a ship off the coast of Italy in 1943 reporting on the Allied invasion there; he also stood on a British ship at dawn on 6 June 1944, resulting in the



sort of vivid description of the Normandy landings that have been invaluable to historians: “Guns are belching flame from more than 600 allied warships. Thousands of bombers are roaring overhead, fighters are weaving in and out of the clouds as the invasion of Western Europe begins.... It is the most incredible sight I have ever seen....” After the D-Day landings, Tighe was cited in a Reuters internal report as filing “the best published descriptive dispatch of the invasion”.<sup>547</sup>

### *The Times*

**Robert Cooper** – Cooper, a Canadian, took a post as a sports writer at *The Times* in 1924. Then in 1939 he went to France to cover that nation’s military as a war correspondent. After Dunkirk he worked again in England before reporting from India and Burma, but returned to Europe for the D-Day invasion. He later covered the Parisian liberation, the end of the war in Belgium and then moved to Germany to observe the Nazi surrender. Following the war he covered the Nuremberg trials for the newspaper and became its chief Germany correspondent.

**Ralph Deakin** – The paper’s Foreign News Editor, Deakin was perhaps the most direct point of contact for *Times* war correspondents on the continent. He had helped choose them, stating that “young men who are steady, experienced and wise” were the best sorts to cover the war, although this was not always the case. Deakin contacted the Foreign Office in 1944 in an attempt to regain the services of Kim Philby, who had previously worked as a war correspondent for *The Times* in Spain and France, but the government would not relinquish Philby.

**Christopher Lumby** – His 4 November 1946 obituary in *The Times* summing up Lumby’s long reporting career stated, “During the last war, in the Middle East, in North Africa, and in the reoccupation of Italy, he was numbered among the most efficient and trustworthy of allied war correspondents.” A graduate of Cambridge, Lumby began as a

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<sup>547</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters 1849-1989* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 220, 224.

teacher but then joined *The Times* in 1913 as a Paris correspondent. When the First World War broke out he worked as a combat reporter for a time but then joined the ranks as an officer. After the war he returned to his former employer and took assignments in Poland, Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Italy, the Balkans and then six years in the Middle East. At the outbreak of the Second World War he went to Holland until the Wehrmacht invasion forced him to escape. He then became *The Times*'s senior war correspondent in North Africa. In his mid-fifties he was temporarily prevented from frontline coverage due to ill health, but returned to the battle zones in 1943 to report on the liberation of Italy. Iverach McDonald notes that for a man of advancing age, Lumby was a very active reporter:

Christopher Lumby had been on the battlefields of North Africa from the earliest days of fighting in the Western Desert.... Illness and tiredness – he was in his late fifties – had prevented his accompanying the British armies in their victories in Tripolitania. Nothing could stop him from returning to the war to witness the final collapse of Italian Fascist power and the rolling back of enemy forces in Italy from the Campania beach-heads northwards.<sup>548</sup>

Lumby was in Milan in April 1945 when partisans came to see him to announce that Mussolini had been captured and killed and asked if the reporter would identify the body, as Lumby had known the Duce while working as a Rome correspondent. Lumby filed a report that was published in the paper on 30 April describing the body of the Italian leader “heaped together in ghastly promiscuity” with that of his mistress, Clara Petacci. “Lumby returned to Army Headquarters to tell an amazed American general that the city which his soldiers were so carefully surrounding had already fallen.”<sup>549</sup> Lumby continued to work in the Mediterranean but ill health got the better of him and he died following an operation.

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<sup>548</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times, vol. V, Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London: Times Books, 1984), p. 89.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

**George Steer** – After receiving his education at Oxford, he began work with *The Times* in 1935, covering the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and subsequent war, from which he was later expelled by the Italians for unflattering reports. Steer then covered the Spanish Civil War and gained international renown for his eyewitness report of the bombing of Guernica, which insinuated that the Luftwaffe had assisted the Spanish Nationalists in destroying a village with no military significance, killing many civilians. His searing account of the decimation of Guernica could be considered the first widespread revelation of Nazi atrocities and was the impetus for the iconic, eponymous painting by Picasso. In 1938 Steer joined the *Daily Telegraph*. He was killed in a car accident in 1944.

## **Radio**

### ***British Broadcasting Corporation***

**Guy Byam** – Guy Frederick Byam-Corstiaens was educated in France, including the Sorbonne, and was fluent in French and proficient in German and Spanish; he also had some freelance journalism experience. This made him an attractive candidate to the BBC after his career as a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) ended when cordite from a high explosive shell blinded him in one eye. In October 1942 the Corporation took him on as a temporary sub-editor in the French section of its European division. He transferred to the War Reporting Unit in 1944 and participated in coverage of the Second Front. Byam was in a U.S. Air Force bomber that was shot down over Germany on 3 February 1945.

**Richard Dimbleby** – One of the best-known and most distinguished reporters of his generation, Dimbleby was one of the deans of radio war correspondents. The scion of a newspaper family that owned the *Richmond and Twickenham Times*, Dimbleby worked for small publications in England and then as the youngest editor of a Fleet Street paper before joining the BBC as a Topical Talks Assistant in 1936. After garnering a

reputation as a solid reporter on stories around England, including Chamberlain's return with his promise of "peace in our time", Dimbleby first encountered the Nazis at the handover of the Sudetenland. He surprised the officials of the German Ministry of Propaganda in Aachen (to his great amusement, no doubt) when he greeted the contingent with his arm extended in the Nazi salute, saying "Heil Hitler" and clicking his heels. Dimbleby covered the Spanish Civil War and was the first person to make a live broadcast of the sounds of battle from his nearby position across the border in the French Pyrenees. He served a frustratingly uneventful deployment with the British Expeditionary Force in France before moving to cover events in Greece and the Middle East. In 1942, he re-joined the British forces for the Desert War in North Africa, where he did memorable reporting that solidified his position as one of the most famous correspondents of the war. After being recalled to Britain for a time, Dimbleby was present for the D-Day landings at Normandy and thereafter remained with the forces as the Allies pushed east into Germany. He was the first correspondent to pass through the gates of Belsen concentration camp, producing an historic broadcast describing the horrors within that shocked the world, and was the first Allied correspondent to enter a fallen Berlin. Dimbleby left the BBC for a time after the war but returned to become the original host of the BBC's flagship television news programme, *Panorama*, as well as serving as the network's voice for historical events such as Sir Winston Churchill's state funeral. He died in 1965.

**Charles Gardner** – Making up the other half of the team, along with Dimbleby, that provided coverage of the BEF in France in 1940, Gardner was one of the original "observers" in the Second World War for the BBC. He had already made a name for himself with his sensational and somewhat controversial broadcast as he watched a German plane being shot down by the RAF over "Hellfire Corner" in Kent during the Battle of Britain in July 1940; some said it sounded like a play-by-play for a sports match and was beneath the dignity of the esteemed state broadcaster.

**Frank Gillard** – Gillard was another one of the BBC correspondents who gained experience of war reporting in the early years of the conflict before joining the War Reporting Unit formed to cover the Second Front. He was with the British forces at Dieppe, a report he said was so heavily edited it did not allow for the truth of the great loss. He also provided extensive coverage of the fighting in North Africa and Italy, as well as the Second Front in Western Europe.

**Denis Johnston** – A successful writer and playwright from Ireland, Johnston got his first experience of war reporting for the BBC during the 1941 German bombings of Dublin and Belfast. A year later, the 40 year old with no military training arrived in Cairo to replace captured correspondent Edward Ward and was reporting from El Alamein two weeks later. He then aided Frank Gillard in covering the war in Italy before also joining the War Reporting Unit and covering the fighting in Normandy and the Allied push across Western Europe; he was one of the first correspondents to report from the liberated Buchenwald concentration camp. Johnston went on to become a director of the BBC television service and then a university professor in the United States.

**Howard Marshall** – Marshall was the head of the War Reporting Unit, helping to recruit and organize its correspondents, as well as serving as one himself. Marshall began his on-air work in the early 1930s as a commentator on cricket matches, and later moved to the BBC's home news service in London in the early 1940s. In 1943 he was appointed a special correspondent for frontline broadcasting and deployed to North Africa. He reported from Normandy for the first time on 6 June 1944, as he described it, sitting in wet clothes with no notes as two of the boats in which he travelled during the invasion had capsized. He was one of the correspondents who covered the liberation of Paris and was at one time suspended by the military for broadcasting messages from a Parisian radio station that had not yet been cleared by SHAEF. In his administrative capacity for the WRU he had direct dealings with General Bernard Montgomery, who was not always pleased with the unit's work, as well as arguing with the War Office over matters such as accrediting sound engineers.

**Stewart MacPherson** – Born in Winnipeg, Canada, he moved to England in 1936 and by the next year his experience with his national sport and his Canadian accent helped him acquire a position as a BBC commentator for ice-hockey games. In 1942, when the BBC turned its attention inward in search of experienced broadcasters who could join the war reporting team, MacPherson's name was put forward and he jumped at the opportunity. He trained with the Grenadier Guards, at first reluctant to take the assignment alongside men with whom he believed he had nothing in common, but he said they eventually found great mutual respect; he also took part in the War Reporting Unit's large-scale training exercise, Operation Spartan. MacPherson participated in the BBC's coverage of the Second Front from RAF raids over Germany to reporting on the ground war from Normandy to Arnhem. After the war he became a renowned figure on BBC radio entertainment shows, but later moved back to Canada where he remained until his death in 1995.

**John Snagge** – After leaving Oxford in 1924 he joined the BBC, four years later becoming a regular broadcaster for rowing events such as the annual Oxbridge race. During the war Snagge was one of the anonymous news announcers conveying the latest events in the conflict and was instrumental in changing the policy that allowed broadcasters' names to be aired. He was the first to introduce what became the War Reporting Unit's flagship programme, *War Report*, and most famously delivered the first news of the landings at Normandy, reading the official announcement of the invasion from Supreme Commander Eisenhower. Before reciting the communique, Snagge began the broadcast with a simple declaration that has been etched in journalistic history: "D-Day has come."

**Kent Stevenson** – The BBC hired Hugh Francis Kent Stevenson at the beginning of April 1941 as a broadcast presentation and production assistant. He was troublesome and clashed with his superiors regularly regarding his salary, but was kept on and promoted throughout his BBC career due to what were considered superior broadcasting skills.

The RAF Lancaster from which he was reporting during a bombing raid went down over Germany on 22 June 1944. He was reported missing and presumed dead.

**Godfrey Talbot** – Talbot was a key player for the BBC in covering the Second World War and might be considered – along with Dimpleby, Gardner, Gillard and Edward Ward – one of the pioneers of the Corporation’s war reporting. He joined the BBC in 1937 after working for the *Yorkshire Post*, the *Manchester City News* and the *Daily Dispatch*. During the Desert War he was at the second battle of El Alamein from its onset in October 1942, and later covered the Allied invasion of Italy and the push toward Rome, observing the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and heavy censorship of the story to prevent revealing the extent to which the event held up Allied forces. He also covered the fighting in Greece and then France in 1944, although not until two months after D-Day. After the war he became the BBC’s first official royal correspondent accredited to Buckingham Palace and wrote popular books about royalty and the queen in particular. He died in September 2000 at the age of 91.

**Wynford Vaughan-Thomas** – The Welshman born in Swansea attended Oxford and joined the BBC in the mid-1930s, in time to provide Welsh-language commentary for the coronation of George VI. Recruited as an experienced broadcaster to become a war reporter, Vaughan-Thomas reported with the RAF on bombing raids over enemy territory and was the first to field test the revolutionary new Midget field recorder from the beach at Anzio in March 1943. He took part in the Operation Spartan training exercise as part of the War Reporting Unit and then participated in coverage of the Second Front in Western Europe. Other notable broadcasts included one from the desk of Lord Haw-Haw and another from Belsen concentration camp. He was appointed an OBE and then CBE before his death in 1987.

**Edward Ward** – Ward, who eventually succeeded to the title seventh Viscount Bangor, was educated at Harrow and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and later became a Reuters correspondent in China and other spots in the Far East. He began working as a

BBC announcer in January 1937 and then became a reporter who achieved great renown for his coverage of the Winter War, where he was the first correspondent to take recording gear to a front line and later obtained the exclusive story on the peace treaty between Finland and Russia in March 1940. He transferred to North Africa to cover the Desert War but was captured in November 1941 during a Panzer attack, leading to his captivity in both Italian and German POW camps until almost the end of the war. He was released in time to be present for the link-up between American and Russian forces at Torgau in April 1945.

**Chester Wilmot** – Born in Melbourne, he joined the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1940 and covered his country's fighting forces in the Middle East and Greece. He then covered the war in North Africa, including the siege of Tobruk. During his coverage of the Pacific theatre that followed, Australian General Thomas Blamey revoked Wilmot's accreditation due to personal clashes between the two men. The BBC, however, had taken notice of Wilmot's Tobruk broadcasts and hired him as a correspondent for the remainder of the war. He was the first to record the frightening sound of incoming German Nebelwerfer mortars with a Midget recorder as he lay in a ditch. Wilmot also broke the news of the German surrender to the Allies. He was killed in a plane crash in 1954 while on assignment for the BBC.

### ***Canadian Broadcasting Corporation***

**Matthew Halton** – Halton was a teacher before going to the University of Alberta, where he became a reporter and editor for the school newspaper. In 1929 he took up study in London and wrote over 200 articles for Canadian newspapers. Upon returning to Canada in 1931 the *Toronto Star* hired him and sent him back to London as its correspondent and he eventually covered the Spanish Civil War and the Russo-Finnish War. After a brief stint in Washington, the *Star* deployed him to North Africa to cover the Desert Rats; he also made recordings for the CBC, which hired him in 1943 as its senior war correspondent. He was present during the Sicily and Italy invasions, on the



beach in Normandy, and reported the push through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. His last war report came from Berlin on V-E Day. He remained a CBC foreign correspondent until his death in 1956.

**Peter Stursberg** – The CBC’s best-known war correspondent, Peter Stursberg began at Canadian newspapers and the *Daily Herald* in London and then reported in Canada for the CBC before the state broadcaster moved him abroad. He covered the war in North Africa and then recorded the sounds of battle at such famed clashes of the Italian campaign as Monte Cassino and Coriano Ridge, as well as an eyewitness account of the Allied entry into Rome, the only live broadcast he was allowed to make during the war. Afterward he moved on to coverage of the Second Front, from southern France to Holland and into fallen Berlin. After the conflict he found himself on a speaking tour to describe his experiences for audiences across Canada, not realizing his radio work had made him a national celebrity. In the post-war years he has worked for the Canadian prime minister’s office and as a television commentator, as well as a writer. At the time of this dissertation he still lives in Canada, age 99.

## **Military Figures**

**Harold Alexander** – Field Marshal Harold Alexander commanded the British 15th Army in Italy and later became supreme commander of Allied forces in the Mediterranean. He was in direct contact with reporters such as Godfrey Talbot, willing to discuss the Italian campaign over dinner in his field headquarters. Yet he was still a strict military commander when it came to perceived misconduct by any correspondent travelling with his troops: Alexander tried in December 1943 to cancel Frank Gillard's accreditation, wrongly accusing the BBC reporter of using a secret transmitter to circumvent army headquarters in Italy and forcing an investigation involving Minister of Information Brendan Bracken and BBC Editor-in-Chief William Haley. After the war Alexander was named governor general of Canada and then served as defence minister under Winston Churchill from 1952 until his retirement in 1954.

**Thomas Blamey** – The commander of Australian forces perhaps made his best contribution to war reporting in the European theatre by clashing several times with Chester Wilmot of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the last being when Blamey took over in New Guinea. Blamey rescinded Wilmot's war correspondent accreditation and sent him back to Australia, which led to Wilmot being loaned to the BBC for the remainder of the war, a serendipitous occurrence for the British broadcaster as Wilmot became one of its most esteemed correspondents.

**Dwight D. Eisenhower** – The supreme commander of Allied Forces and later president of the United States, Eisenhower was the ultimate authority on Allied military policy, including censorship and other controls over war correspondents. He told reporters that while they wore their official war correspondent uniforms he considered them a member of his staff and welcomed them, but also warned that if they strayed too far from the official story line and their copy regularly became covered in the blue pencil marks of the censor, then he would make sure they were cut off from the sources of information they needed for their stories.

**Bernard Montgomery** – “Monty”, as he was popularly known, was the commander of the Eighth Army, the main British force fighting in the Desert War, including El Alamein, and in Italy. He helped plan the D-Day invasion and was given charge of all ground forces for the offensive. Field Marshal Montgomery continued as the primary Allied ground commander for Western Europe through the end of the war, including the failed Operation Market Garden, and personally received the unconditional surrender of the German military on 4 May 1945. He was known to be very congenial with the media and held numerous press conferences or small meetings with war correspondents, although he was still a military man and reporters often came under what some called “Monty’s lash”. His judgments could be strict but in the end fair: Montgomery expelled the BBC’s Chester Wilmot for broadcasting a private speech he wanted unpublicised, but invited Wilmot back upon learning his order for a news blackout had not been conveyed to the reporter by the military staff.

### **Political and Government Figures**

**Neville Chamberlain** – Prime Minister of Britain from 1937 until he was replaced by Winston Churchill in 1940, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain considered doing away with radio broadcasting altogether over complaints from Fleet Street that the BBC, which could broadcast whenever it wished, would always be able to beat the newspapers to stories due to their morning publication times. This quashing of British wartime radio never came to pass, largely because of a decrease in the availability of paper for print publications and an increase in the popularity of broadcasting among the public, with approximately seventy of 100 homes renting or owning a radio.

**Winston Churchill** – Prime Minister of Britain for the bulk of the Second World War, from 1940 through 1945, he was previously an army officer while concurrently working as a war correspondent. During the 1895 Cuban uprising, Churchill reported for the *Daily Graphic*; while posted with his regiment in India he sent dispatches to the *Daily*

*Telegraph* that were criticized for being overly political but resulted in a book, as did his observations accumulated during his assignment in Khartoum in 1898. In 1899 he fought in the Boer War while at the same time covering it for the *Morning Post*, circumventing the rule against officer-correspondents that had been established as a direct result of his own work in the Nile Campaign of 1898; he bypassed this censorship by writing letters home addressed to “my dear”, with his dearest actually being the editor of the *Post*. This is ironic because after becoming an established politician, and especially during his time as prime minister during the Second World War, he was a strong proponent of censorship. Churchill admitted in the House of Commons in February 1944 that he had directed censors to be more austere with accounts of the fighting during the Italian campaign beginning in summer 1943. “I myself sent the telegram asking for a stricter censorship on alarmist reports,” he said, specifically objecting to the use of vocabulary that made the British military’s position seem untenable. He stated, “Such words as ‘desperate’ ought not to be used about a position in a battle when they are false. Still less should they be used if they were true.”

**Hugh Pattison Macmillan, Lord Macmillan** – The first minister of the Ministry of Information, appointed when the war began. A former judge from Scotland (educated in part at the University of Edinburgh), he was ineffectual in the post and only lasted four months.

**Sir John Reith** – The second Minister of Information, appointed 5 January 1940. He also only lasted a matter of months. Having been refused additional powers by Prime Minister Chamberlain and unable to achieve much, he was sacked by the incoming Churchill government.

**Duff Cooper** – The third minister of the Ministry of Information, appointed 12 May 1940. Ian McLaine writes of him, “though creating a good impression in the House of Commons, managed to alienate the press and, worn down by attacks upon the Ministry of Information and Churchill’s indifference, merely wanted to be left in peace.” Cooper

resigned his post a little over a year after his appointment, on 20 July 1941, “with a sigh of relief.”<sup>550</sup>

**Brendan Bracken** – The British Minister of Information under Churchill beginning in summer 1941 until 1945, the Irish-born Bracken, who tried to hide his Republican family roots, was the chief conduit and arbitrator between the wartime media organizations and the government. Media administrators and editors exercised a direct link to Bracken and it was during this time that the BBC rose to prominence as a news organisation, surpassing the near-monopolistic control of the press over the dissemination of news. Previously, in 1940, then-Minister of Information Alfred Duff Cooper assured new Prime Minister Churchill that MoI could exert “complete control” over news reporting. Bracken came to understand this was not true and focused his efforts on media management rather than complete suppression, although in keeping with wartime standards the censorship rules remained strict.

**Cyril Radcliffe** – Director-General of the Ministry of Information, Radcliffe fought the military service departments over their excessive censorship practices. Radcliffe commented in 1939: “It is not an answer to the Press to say ‘We censor this because the War Office wanted it out’. This is partly the Departments’ fault, because they as for much too much to be kept out. But it is certain that neither now nor later in the war are the Press or the public going to be satisfied with something simply because some department or official in it thinks it is necessary in the interests of the war.”<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 6, 239.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.