

## The Connected Histories of the BBC

Provenance:	<p>The file reproduced here was provided by the BBC to be made publicly accessible through the Connected Histories of the BBC catalogue hosted by the University of Sussex. It was selected in 2021 from one of five collections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BBC Oral History</li> <li>• BBC History of North Regional Broadcasting</li> <li>• BBC Horizon at 50</li> <li>• BBC World Service Moving Houses Project</li> <li>• Alexandra Palace Television Society Oral History</li> </ul>
Clearance:	Interviews have been reviewed and edited to comply with GDPR and other requirements.
Copyright:	<p>© BBC</p> <p>© Alexandra Palace Television Society</p>
Conditions of use:	<p>This interview is available for private research. If you wish to use any of the interview in a published work or for a commercial purpose, permission must be requested from the BBC at</p> <p><a href="mailto:historyteam@bbc.co.uk">historyteam@bbc.co.uk</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:apts@apts.org.uk">apts@apts.org.uk</a> (for Alexandra Palace material)</p>
Partner:	The Connected Histories of the BBC research project was led by the University of Sussex, 2017-2022, funded by the AHRC.
More information:	The project's public resource including more information on terms and conditions of use are available at: <a href="https://chbbc.sussex.ac.uk/">https://chbbc.sussex.ac.uk/</a>

BBC History: Elizabeth Barker/Leonard Miall

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Her background, and entry into BBC	1, 2
Starting the News Information service	2
BBC News all provided by Agencies	3
Problems of pronunciation	3
Anecdote: BBC Librarian (Miss Milne) and H. Grisewood	4, 5
The "Foreign Report" series in 1938	5
Finding the speakers for live contributions	6
BBC pay for staff in late 30s	6
BBC and married women on staff	7
First use of her Balkan expertise	7
World War Two: editing official announcements	8
Row with R.T. Clarke, News Editor	9
Getting into European News Talks	10
Talks in Czech: Jan Masaryk	10
Talks by President Benes, in exile	11
Land mine explodes outside BH	12
Rescuing recordings etc from the damage	12
Writing sexy propaganda scripts for French poilus	13
French correspondents in London, 1939/40	13
Michel St. Denis	14
First BBC broadcast by De Gaulle	15 - 17
Subsequent De Gaulle broadcast	18
Maurice Schumann as De Gaulle's spokesman	19, 20
The French Honour she did not receive	20
Gifts from the Czechs	21, 22
Perils of working at Maida Vale	22
Glass discs recordings, and their handicaps	22
Misappropriation of BBC payments by Czechs	22, 23
Balkan Section moves to Bush House	24, 25
Bombing in road outside Bush House	25
BBC's controversial broadcasts to Yugoslavia	26
Her move to Political Warfare Executive	27
Role of PWE, very distinct from BBC	28
The "black" propaganda stations	29
"Black" broadcasts deceiving even BBC News	29

	<u>Page</u>
Political difficulties: some BBC staff suspect	29
The PWE directives to BBC	30
BBC and the Mihailovich-Tito struggle	30
The Prokop Drtina story; how BBC built him up	31, 32
Returning to BBC as European Diplomatic Correspondent	33
European Service and the Suez crisis	34
Reporting the Hungarian Revolution in 1956	34
Getting news from Hungary	34, 35
Iraq revolution: risk of incitement by BBC	35, 36
Congo war presents similar problems	36
Should News immediacy take priority over possible incitement at times of crisis?	37.

Under copyright

O R A L   H I S T O R Y

O F   T H E

B B C

ELISABETH BARKER IN AN

INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD

MIALL

Under Copyright

TRANSCRIBED BY: SOUND ORGANIZERS

ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC  
ELISABETH BARKER INTERVIEWED BY LEONARD MIALL

RECORDED ON MAY 9th IN RICHMOND, SURREY.

1983

MIALL: Elisabeth, you joined the BBC in 1934, how did you come to join it ?

BARKER: Well I think I'd better give a little bit of my life history here to explain. I had left Oxford in 1931 when I was 19/21 with a respectable though far from brilliant degree. I then spent two years with my brother Arthur, who was a Times correspondent, based on Vienna covering S.E. Europe and I drove his car round for two years. My great ambition in life then was to be a foreign correspondent. And my father who had good contacts tried to help me start at least at the bottom of the journalistic ladder. He tried with Reuters first and that was a total failure. My father then kindly got in touch with Sir John Reith with whom he was on quite friendly terms and being himself a fairly distinguished academic, I think was respected by Reith.

MIALL: Let me just interrupt to say, your father was Sir Ernest Barker who was Professor....

BARKER: Political Science....

MIALL: Political Science at Cambridge. And Sir John Reith had asked him at one stage to become the Director of Programmes for the BBC.

BARKER: That surprises me very much I never knew that.

MIALL: But he refused it and he got instead Colonel ~~Dorney~~ <sup>Dawney</sup>. Anyway your father had a close relationship with Reith, I'm sorry for the interruption.

BARKER: Well, it's closer than I knew it was, but nevertheless there was no possibility of my entering the BBC on anything except a clerical level. So, feeling highly honoured I joined

in 1934 as shorthand typist/clerk in the news dept., in order to start up News Information, which was the news cutting library which was then totally new.

MIALL: Well was that a job that had been advertised in the press, or did you apply to the BBC ?

BARKER: No as far as I can remember the BBC kindly offered to interview me and I was seen by a lady who was the head of the typing staff and then told that I could slot into this job which was a totally new one, certainly hadn't been advertised. The Head of News Information was Horatio Batchelor, who had done the same job in The Times and who had I suppose been invited to come to the BBC to start up the News Information.

MIALL: He was Batchelor with a 'T' in it wasn't he ?

BARKER: That's right, and he was always known as Batch, never known as Horatio, a name that embarrassed him very much.

MIALL: And what did the work consist of ?

BARKER: It consisted of cutting up several newspapers and filing the cuttings in boxes and the whole point of this was to answer queries, basically from the News staff (which was then very small) to help them background their news items which went out in I think the two news bulletins of the day at 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.

MIALL: This was the very start of News Information ?

BARKER: It was the beginning yes. Of course it expanded enormously but not during the four years when I was there. It expanded in volume of boxes not in staff.

MIALL: And you stayed with that until Foreign Report started ?

BARKER: That's right yes. And I would just like to say

that one's social position was a bit odd because if you were on the clerical staff there was no, none of this christian names business, which started up I think during the war and I was very firmly Miss Barker and the young sub editors in the News, quite distinguished people but younger than myself I addressed as Mr. Barkway, or Mr. Balkwill and treated with due respect.

MIALL: These sub editors were mostly aged about 23/4 at that time, as I recall, and they were carrying the responsibility of editing the national news on very young shoulders.

BARKER: Well, there was a senior news editor, I can't at the moment remember the name of the first one there but then R.T. Clarke who had been, I think, on the Glasgow Herald came and he was a very experienced journalist and he did sort of supervise what went in. But of course there were no BBC correspondents until I think about 1938, maybe 1937 and at the beginning of every bulletin reference was made to Reuters and Press Association and ...

MIALL: Exchange Telegraph and Central News.

BARKER: That's correct yes. And really all the information came from the News Agencies, it was just a question of selection and checking the facts insofar as was possible. Of course another duty that we had was pronunciation. I think I helped to start up a pronunciations index and spent a lot of time, say, during the <sup>Abyssinian</sup> ~~Abbasynian~~ War ringing up the Ethiopian Delegation and trying to discover how to pronounce Addis Abbaba, the number of different pronunciations which were produced by the Ethiopian Delegation was quite phenominal.

MIALL: And did you record them in a form of phonetics or how did you.... ?

BARKER: Ah I imagine ... wasn't there a Daniel Jones Pronunciation Dictionary or something or other ? I think we adopted whatever the phonetic system was in that.

MIALL: And did the announcers, newsreaders come and consult you a great deal on that or did they tend to ... ?

BARKER: No they did consult us. What I also remember was that <sup>Stuart</sup>~~Stewart~~ Hibberd who was then the Chief Announcer had a passion for giving a french pronunciation to English names if it seemed at all remotely possible and he had to be restrained somewhat.

MIALL: Yes I remember him announcing that an aircraft was attempting to land on the top of Helvethelin (sic).

BARKER: Yes he was a great one for local pronunciations whether genuine or not. But another little point, a slightly malicious little story. We had the responsibility <sup>for</sup> of allowing announcers to go into the Library proper after it had closed I think at 6 p.m. Now they had had in the past their own key given them by Miss. Milne, who was a rather formidable lady, I think a very efficient Librarian but very jealous of the rights of her Library. And I think she somewhat resented the arrival of the News Library, particularly because of its name.

MIALL: And it was not under her presumably ?

BARKER: No it was not it was under the News Dept., not under her and what happened was that she took away the key from the announcers and gave it to Batchelor. But if any announcer wished to go to the library after 6 p.m., either he or I had to accompany the announcer there and to stay there during the course of the .. the announcer's researches, in the books, which of course was very awkward. And I remember once when I was alone on duty, I had to accompany a young curly-headed announcer, whom I didn't know, to the library and he seemed to be doing a great deal of research and in the end I had to give up, leave him there alone and when I went back some ten minutes later and said "have you finished could I have the key," he went through a terrific pantomime searching his pockets and turning out all the books and looking behind and said "oh terrible thing"

I have lost it." And in the end I had to report to Miss Milnes that an announcer unknown to me had lost the key, and there was a sort of court martial and I had to give evidence and although I honestly didn't know the name of the announcer I had to give a description and he was identified as Harman Grisewood, subsequently a holder of very high office in the BBC.

~~MILL~~  
BARKER: Yes that was a strange incident.

~~MILL~~ Well now I mentioned Foreign Report, first of all could you just describe what Foreign Report was ?

BARKER: Well as far as I can remember it started up in the Autumn of 1938 as an attempt to have a hook-up on Sunday evenings about, after the 6 o'clock news I think, it was to last 20 minutes and if possible to include four live contributions from foreign capitals. And it was, I think, the first experiment in this field. And in those time you had post office lines or music lines, I think it was) and they were always breaking down because they went through a number of foreign exchanges and you were extremely lucky if the line was available at the correct moment and the man was on the other end of the line, and there were terrible constant crises. It was supposed to be not done to have recorded items because it was not so real in some mysterious way. It was run by Ralph Murray who had already done some live reporting from Geneva on the League of Nations and the unit consisted of him and me as far as I can remember. I was a sort of dogsbody. But of course when he was abroad himself doing reporting I was left with this ghastly job of hoping the lines would come through on time, which they quite often didn't.

MIALL: One of the jobs which Vernon Bartlett had, when he was engaged by the BBC with the title of Foreign Correspondent was to go round Europe and find a number of people who could contribute to this kind of a programme and one of the first people that he found was an impoverished young student called Ralph Murray and presumably it was a series

of stringers of people in different capitals that you were using to contribute to Foreign Report ?

BARKER: Oh it wasn't as highly organised as that, no we had some, yes we did have a stringer of a sort in the Netherlands and one in Portugal but otherwise for instance we had Cy <sup>Sulzberger</sup> ~~Saltzburger~~, I think, he happened, Cy <sup>Sulzberger</sup> ~~Saltzburger~~ was the New York Times roving correspondent in those days and he was spelt CYRUS SULZBERGER, he was then a young man he later became famous. We were allowed to record that but one incident in particular I remember was that when I think there was a question of Britain trying to negotiate a treaty with Turkey shortly before the war we tried to find out if there was an English speaking member of the Turkish Government and it turned out the Minister of Justice could speak English and so after great negotiations he agreed to record a piece on Turkish attitudes towards Britain & Hitler and this was duly recorded about two days before the programme was due to go out. And I was listening on headphone in Broadcasting House and everything sounded fine. But when I listened to the disc, (we used nothing but discs in those days no tape,) somehow or other between the post office and the BBC something had got across the line and there was another voice which more or less drowned the Turkish Minister of Justice. And so we had a terrible time trying to get him to re-record. So you can see there were very many pitfalls in the way of getting out an efficient programme.

REEL TWO

MIALL: This sounds a highly responsible job, what were you paid ?

BARKER: Well my memory is that I was paid £4.15s. a week This was a very high level for me because I started at £3.5s. a week and as far as I know had stayed on £3.5s. a week until 1938 when I had been advanced to £4.15s. When I got this job on Foreign Report I think it was because I was cheap. Any man would have had to be paid more and I took it gratefully remaining, as far as I know, on £4.15s. per week and that was the situation at the beginning of the war.

MIALL: The BBC was rather inclined to exploit women on its staff financially and in various other ways.

BARKER: Of course one of the things was that I gather that it was in the staff regulations that a woman was not allowed to get married and retain her job except in the most exceptional circumstances. Of course there were a few high-ups like Mary Somerville and Marjorie Wace and maybe one or two others....

MIALL: Mary Addams was one.

BARKER: Mary Addams yes, well these were famous women and I don't know how they did it I would love to know.

MIALL: They had some particular expertise I think that was in very short demand.

BARKER: Yes well my very limited expertise on the Balkans was naturally enough not very important to the BBC in the pre-war days. Actually the first thing I ever wrote for the BBC was just before the war started in August 1939 and this was for the European Service, I suppose, and at that moment Prince Paul of Yugoslavia had just at last managed to conclude an agreement with the Croat leader, Machek, which was thought to be very important from the point of view of having a united Yugoslavia on our side if war should start, and my brother Arthur who was then European News Editor or ....

MIALL: No, Overseas News Editor..

BARKER: Overseas News Editor, sent a message down saying please would I in 30 minutes, write a short commentary on the importance of this event. So never having written anything for the BBC before I sat down, and a kind friend took it down on the typewriter and I tried to explain a very complex subject which was of limited interest, if important, for the British public, no not the British public, of course, the overseas public.

MIALL: Right. Now let's move to the start of the war. What were you doing when war broke out ?

BARKER: Well the moment war broke out of course Foreign Report was called off because it was thought impossible to have lines from foreign capitals. And the whole of the News Dept., as I remember it, was housed in the Langham Hotel which was a very pleasant place where very much frequented by county families when they came to stay in London and there was very nice waiter service there in the evening at dinner and a very pleasant bedroom and so on, and there I lived for six weeks, and all I remember doing was editing a ten minute announcements bulletin which contained official announcements and also announcements from firms, say Cadbury's would announce that the price of a bar of chocolate had gone up from a penny to a penny halfpenny or something like that. And I enjoyed myself turning all these announcements into comprehensible language, because to me I thought they were all totally incomprehensible to the general public.

MIALL: They had been issued by the Ministry of Information presumably ?

BARKER: I suppose so yes, I mean a sheet of typewritten things would appear on my desk and I had no real idea where they came from and I just turned them into broadcasting English which I enjoyed very much.

MIALL: There were great complaints about BBC programmes in those first weeks of the war because they consisted of practically nothing except cinema organ music and official announcements.

BARKER: Yes well I think there was rather a long announcements period, most of them extremely boring mostly about gas masks and what to do with your gas mask but otherwise not of interest.

MIALL: But you soon moved onto something else ?

BARKER: Yes, unfortunately a crisis blew up in my relations with R.T. Clarke the News Editor, which before had been very pleasant and in fact he once hired me to do some research for him on a book he was supposed to write on the Writing of the History of the First World War, and attempting to iron out the discrepancies between British, French & German historians, that rather got lost by the wayside but still. Well there was a rather silly crisis blew up because he had promoted over the heads of older women a very charming young secretary called Lillian Duff and this was causing some disturbance among older women. I won't go into more detail than that. And although it didn't affect me at all I decided that I should warn him that there was trouble in lower ranks and I'm afraid he took this as a form of .. rebellion or even mutiny and told me that he was seeing that I should be transferred to the BBC Monitoring Service far from London, which was not my idea of how to spend the war.

MIALL: Operating then from Evesham or near Evesham ?

BARKER: That's right yes. And then very fortunately I don't quite know how, I found myself joining your unit where I was sent, as far as I remember, joining News Talks.

MIALL: My unit had started as German News Talks but as the different languages had and the output to Europe had expanded we'd had to take other talks into our bailliewick and I had no particular linguistic expertise in any other language than German and you with your knowledge of French and particularly of the Central European languages would have been most useful to me but I had a great difficulty in persuading the powers that be in the BBC to allow you to be appointed. Here were you, an Oxford graduate with a good degree experienced as a kind of foreign correspondent helping your brother the Times Correspondent, knowing a great deal about that part of the world and having these languages and it was almost impossible to get you to be allowed to be appointed. I think it was partly because your brother was frightened that it might look like nepotism that he ....

BARKER: That seems to me very likely indeed.

MIALL: But there was also a feeling that somebody who was basically a clerk in the News Information couldn't possibly be a Talks Assistant.

BARKER: No, the war did a great deal for the feminist cause I must say. I mean I should say here and now I was never a feminist, and I often think that any good feminist would regard me as a traitor and a wreck because I succeeded in getting on myself but by and large I failed to fight the cause of women. But never mind what you say is perfectly accurate I am sure.

MIALL: Anyway we were having to expand the European News Talks operation and it was by then the Autumn of 1939 was that when you ...?

BARKER: I would think it was about November, I can't tell you exactly but I am sure it was before the end of 1939.

MIALL: I know that one of our problems was broadcasting talks in Czech (ah yes) and you particularly looked after those.

BARKER: Yes I had quite a lot to do with the Czechs until I think about the Spring of 1941. Of course the Czech exile government was not at first recognised as a government, I can't quite remember when recognition came but they had close links with the BBC from an early time and of course their star broadcaster was Jan Masaryk who wasn't called foreign minister but was in fact the foreign minister to President Benes who had <sup>left</sup> Czechoslovakia after the German takeover in 1939 and no I think it was already in 1938 not 1939, and he had of course an American mother and had lived quite a lot in America and had a splendid sense of humour and he loved using the latest American slang and had great vitality and great charm, and was I think extremely popular in Czechoslovakia as a broadcaster, partly of course because he was the son of F.G. Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic but also because he had a very amusing and sparkling and

unusual personality. One usually thinks of the Czechs as being rather dour and solemn and highly moral and he was none of these things.

MIALL: Benes's broadcasts by comparison were pretty dull affairs I think.

BARKER: I thought they were dreary beyond compare and I suppose they did have an effect at home but on me I am afraid they had no effect at all. The one thing I remember with amusement was a time when the scare about the 5th Column was so great that everybody, I think, even including the highest ups, were searched by young Home Guard ~~officials~~ *officers* or whatever they were called as they entered Broadcasting House. ~~And~~ Benes appeared once accompanied by an enormously tall and blue chinned body-guard in a navyblue suit. And he was duly searched and produced various revolvers from his pockets which he had to give up before proceeding to the studio. Benes took all this in good part. ~~But~~ of course he never showed any emotion that I noticed.

MIALL: At this time of course the European Service, part of the External Services and part of the Overseas Service were still operating from Broadcasting House (yes) it was before Bush House.

BARKER: Yes it stayed there of course until the 2nd explosion let us say, I can't remember the exact time, you probably remember, it was the landmine that bounced off the top of Broadcasting House.

MIALL: Yes it came down by parachute and landed in Portland Place on the West Side of Broadcasting House, there was that classic story about the watchman who was on the roof of Broadcasting House with an open line down to the guardroom below saying "there's something floating down past me I could almost catch it" then there was this huge explosion which ripped open the Langham Hotel and the chap in the guardroom below said: "Butterfingers".

BARKER: I never heard that story. No at that moment when the explosion came I was on the lower ground floor standing outside the door of the Poles' Room, the Polish translators' room, immediately opposite the lifts and there was always the great story that if Broadcasting House was hit it was very dangerous to be near the lifts because the lifts would come crashing to the ground and knock one out. However the lifts did not come crashing to the ground and all was peaceful. As I remember it we went on broadcasting for an hour and a half or so until the place started being flooded and then we were evacuated weren't we ?

MIALL: I wasn't there that particular night, I was there on the night of the first explosion.

BARKER: But then we were evacuated and one thing I do remember was that ...

MIALL: We were evacuated to Maida Vale.

BARKER: Ah yes but before that, that particular night the BBC had a house in Great Portland Street and my secretary and I, against orders, went up to our office on the 2nd floor to rescue our precious records, discs of talks that had been pre-recorded and <sup>had</sup> not yet gone out, so that we could bear those with us into safety. We were then escorted by a Rumanian translator who knew how to go and where to go and who was extremely calm and took a bevy of us frightened women into safety. And his name was Cristea and I always regard him as one of my little war heroes.

MIALL: Before we moved out of Broadcasting House you were concerned essentially with the News Talks in Czech, Polish & French. (yes) What about the French ones ?

BARKER: Well of course this was the era of the phoney war, there were quite a lot of British troops in France and the Ministry of Information must have received reports that the British troops were getting very unpopular with the French troops because the British were better paid and they were getting the girls, a familiar story, it was what

happened later when the Americans were over here. Well the Ministry of Information suggested we should get hold of an Australian film actress who was extraordinarily popular in France though not known in Britain called Betty Stockfield, a very nice, healthy girl with a dragon of a mother who accompanied her everywhere. Well she couldn't really write talks addressed to the French Poilus so I had to try and write talks, in my not very good French of a sexy nature designed to appeal to the softer and warmer feelings of the French troops. And I found this an extraordinarily difficult job I had absolutely no qualifications for it, still, ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> did it and Betty amended them a little and put in a few little endearing English expressions of her own which would be understood, and this went on, as far as I can remember, for about 3/4 months. And I was just sort of getting down to it and Betty Stockfield sent me 6 or 12 bottles of vin rosé which was excellent stuff and not very easy to get in those days but at that identical moment the Minister of Information said that the talks should stop, I think that the real fighting had started and it was not sort of appropriate any more. So I had simultaneously to thank Betty Stockfield for the wine and say "I am awfully sorry your talks aren't going out anymore." But she took it in extremely good part and I kept the vin rosé which came in very useful indeed at that period of the war.

REEL THREE.

MIALL:           You were mentioning that the fighting had started in France.

BARKER:          Yes, I'm thinking really of sort of April/May 1940, working up to the Dunkirk evacuation. Now of course there were one or two French correspondents in London at that time, I remember particularly Jean Masson who was I think the sort of official French Radio correspondent. And during May he became really rather bitter against the British because of the refusal of Churchill to send over the entire RAF to try and save the military situation in France.

And it was not a very pleasant atmosphere as I remember. There was another French correspondent who had come over recently called Jules Ferry who took very much the same line. But what I remember with particular pleasure was Michel St. Denis, the, who was a very well known in Britain anyhow, French theatrical producer.

Now I had seen him acting in London shortly before the war in his Compagnie des Quinze a theatrical group and I thought he was marvellous. Well he had been in the French forces and attached as a liaison officer to a British Colonel who was in Belgium at the time of the fighting in Belgium brief as it was, he, Michel St Denis had been evacuated at the time of Dunkirk and he turned up in the BBC entirely calm and good natured, good tempered and he did a splendid little broadcast which I remember distinctly about his time in a Belgian chateaux attached to this French, to this British Colonel who would wander out in his lavender coloured pyjamas in the early morning dew and sort of survey the scene. And this very much reassured me about the future of Anglo/French relations and of course a few weeks later Michel St. Denis was recruited to the BBC and started off his famous programme Les Francais Parles tous Francais which I think everybody agreed was the best programme that went out in the entire European Service during the war and had a terrific impact in France.

MIALL: Let's move onto the end of the French fighting when it was clear that France was about to surrender.

BARKER: Ah yes then we get onto June 18th don't we ? Yes well the famous story of De Gaulle's first broadcast. I find it difficult to talk about this now because, as I, according to my own memory was the person who actually conducted him to the studio, after the war I was interviewed a number of times by the French Radio or finally French TV and in telling this story my memory of these ordeals was completely obliterated by the memory of the original event.

MIALL: Well let me just refresh your memory a little bit because I have been looking at the papers and I see that the Ministry of Information sent a message to the BBC — it came as a message from Lindsay Wellington, then in the Ministry of Information, a former BBC official and later again a distinguished BBC official, sent a message to J.B. Clarke saying that a French General called ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle would be arriving at the BBC and would we please put him on to broadcast to France in the BBC's 10 o'clock news. The message was received about 8 o'clock and a trail of the forthcoming broadcast was included in the BBC's French news bulletin at 8.15 that evening. But you were the one who was on duty and had the job of conducting ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle to the studio. I seem to recall a message, a rather odd message came to say that the script had already been passed by the censor and this was a surprising thing because we did our own censoring of, for policy, of talks in the BBC and the idea that it had been passed by the censor for policy was a very peculiar one. It was only subsequently that we discovered that really meant that it had been seen by the War Cabinet.

BARKER: Well I don't know if the actual script was but reading the War Cabinet minutes oh 2/3 years ago I was interested to see that there were two Cabinet meetings that day and at the first War Cabinet meeting Neville Chamberlain who was then President of Council presided and the question came up of ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle broadcasting to France. And the decision was taken that no he should not broadcast at that time because he was anti-Petain and Petain had not yet signed an armistice with the Germans and we were very anxious to get the French fleet over etc., etc. I am not sure if all these arguments were stated but this was in their minds. And Halifax of course was still Foreign Secretary and one could imagine that he would take this line. But then there was a second Cabinet meeting later in the day at which Churchill was present or in any case Churchill obviously .... No I think I'm wrong in saying a second Cabinet meeting, I could easily look it up but when Churchill heard of this

decision that De Gaulle should not broadcast he got onto various Cabinet Ministers and the decision was reversed. Therefore it was obviously Churchill's particular wish that De Gaulle should broadcast.

MIALL: De Gaulle had arrived the day before with General ~~Spiers.~~ *Spaars.*

BARKER: Yes, yes and I think Duff Cooper was then Minister of Information and was in favour of ~~De~~<sup>de</sup> Gaulle broadcasting and I would guess that Halifax was against. So I think that's why censorship because of a high political decision.

MIALL: Anyway this General arrived at Broadcasting House, what did he look like in those days?

BARKER: Well he was immensely tall and although I am fairly tall myself, I regarded him as immensely tall. I was very much struck with his boots because I wasn't used to French generals boots and they first hit my eye and gradually one travelled up. And at the top of this there was a face which was strange and in its way impressive but far from handsome, and when many years later I read of a comparison between ~~De~~<sup>de</sup> Gaulle and a dinosaur I thought that physically as well as perhaps politically this was an excellent description. But his voice of course was extremely impressive. I mean he had a very deep voice and although I don't know if he had ever broadcast before he declaimed the broadcast in a style which I should think would have been suitable for a Racine tragedy and it certainly was very impressive indeed.

MIALL: I remember one thing about that script, it ended with an announcement that he would be broadcasting at the same time the next day (ah) but he hadn't been invited to by the BBC but he was, it was in his script that he was going to do so.

BARKER: Well whether that particular thing had been passed at the highest political level, I don't know.

MIALL: I recall this because the DG of the BBC at the time, Frederick Ogilvie rang our office, or sent a message to our office to say that when this General turned up to broadcast the next day would we please take him along to the, to the DG's office because he would like to offer him a drink and shake his hand. And you and I took him along and I remember that at that time we had about six recording channels in the whole of B.H. on that day June 18th, and Churchill had made his famous "British & Commonwealth Empire will last for a thousand years people will say this is their finest hour" speech and all the recording equipment was involved. And General ~~De~~<sup>de</sup> Gaulle sipping a drink in the DG's office asked me whether his first broadcast had been recorded and I had to tell him it had not. And I then became the first British recipient of the famous De Gaulle temper, quite a scene as you recall.

BARKER: But he subsequently made a recording, didn't he, it has gone down in French history of having been a recording of the original broadcast ?

MIALL: No it wasn't in fact a re-recording of the first script. It was a broadcast that he made about four days later which repeated the same sentiments in almost exactly the same language.

BARKER: Oh is that it, that's very interesting I didn't know that.

MIALL: But that night you sat up translating his French text.

BARKER: That's right. The Press Association was ringing up urgently for a translation and I thought this was a terrifying job because his very classical French style does not translate all that readily into English. One day I must look at what I produced and see whether it was up to the original or not, it can't have been.

MIALL: It was an exciting moment of course there was this rallying cry for the French to carry on (oh yes) and ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle did broadcast the next night and he broadcast again about four days later but very soon he brought in Maurice Schumann to speak regularly for him.

BARKER: May I interrupt one moment before we go onto Maurice Schumann. The thing that I remember most vividly about ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle in those early days was the time when he appeared unannounced and unheralded shortly before I think the 9 o'clock news expecting to broadcast. Now by this time we had had instructions that we were not to put him on the air unless both the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information had said okay. And suddenly there he was about five minutes before the broadcast accompanied by a large number of French Officers, at least that was the impression I had down in the reception room, and you were upstairs, there was I downstairs having to tell the General that we could not put him on the air until ~~he~~ <sup>we</sup> had got an okay from the highest British authority. And in one of those little telephone boxes outside the reception room on the ground floor of Broadcasting House, I managed to get onto the Duty Clerk, the Resident Clerk at the Foreign Office and say please here is ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle what are we to do about putting him on the air from the Foreign Office point of view? I was told that I should ring Lord <sup>Vansittart</sup> at Denham and he gave me a Denham telephone number and I was desperately trying to get through to Denham which was very difficult in those days and then thank God you had some how or other got hold of Lindsay Wellington in the Ministry of Information and he came on the line to me in the call box saying "You may put ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle on the air I will take responsibility". So I then could go and face this phalanx of French Officers and say all right.

MIALL: This was a time when the British Government was still hivering in its attitude to ....

BARKER: Yes, yes I don't know the exact date, I think probably you do because you once produced a long memorandum that I wrote afterwards about this very painful

incident.

MIALL: Well let's move onto Schumann now.

BARKER: Yes let's move onto Schumann, yes well very soon, Schumann I think that he had just escaped from France hadn't he ?

MIALL: Yes I think so and he had been the correspondent of ~~Haras~~ in London at one stage.

BARKER: Ah hah, so his English was quite good and ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle appointed him as official spokesman in a regular five minute spot which was called what ....Honneur et Patrie Honneur et Patrie yes and he came along, a very amiable man, but he had a very high-pitched voice and his one idea was to seize the microphone and to shout into it at the top of this very high pitched voice with protests of course from all the technicians who said it was impossible he is far too, he'll blast the microphones. And so I kept on trying both to lower his voice in pitch and to lower the volume. And this was, he was a nice, kindly chap but he didn't take this all this well. I think he just found it very difficult, I mean he had the sort of parade ground voice and that was that.

MIALL: I remember one of the secretaries in our department speaking to him on the telephone calling him ~~Monsieur~~ <sup>Madame</sup> ~~Schumann~~ <sup>Schumann</sup>. We in a rather cowardly way urging him to pitch his voice lower in order that he should sound less excitable really, less excited, in a cowardly way we told him that we thought that his voice would go through the heavy jamming better if he pitched it lower. And I remember he did gradually work it down .... did have a splendid baritone voice but on one occasion ~~De~~ <sup>de</sup> Gaulle appealed to the French submarine commanders to bring their submarines to Britain and join him in the struggle and eventually some did and they came along to broadcast and Maurice Schumann brought along a enormous man with a very deep voice who was due to broadcast and I remember hearing Schumann telling him to

pitch his voice as low as possible in order to go through the jamming. We had to quietly countermand his instructions and say we thought it would be all right in his normal voice.

BARKER: I think that was probably after I had stopped looking after Schumann but I just remembered that one day he came into me brandishing a message saying that his voice had cut through the jamming extremely well, he said: "Ah hah you see I was quite right to shout as loudly as I did". But although my relations with him were brief and on the whole very friendly, he obviously bore me no ill-will over my attempts to get him to lower his voice, and I was really rather touched when in 1971 when Maurice Schumann had just become Foreign Minister of the French Government .....

REEL FOUR.

MIALL: You had a telephone call from ..

BARKER: I had a telephone call from the French Embassy (this was just after I myself had retired from the BBC) and I was asked by the French Embassy a number of questions about my wartime connections with broadcasts to France and I said well they were very brief if reasonably sweet. And in the end I got a bit puzzled why they were asking all these questions and the answer finally was well as a matter of fact you are being considered for the Legion of Honour and of course you will have to apply for it but we have to know first of all whether you are going to be offered it. And so I said "Thank you very much indeed, I certainly don't want a Legion of Honour I don't merit in any way. My contacts with French broadcasts were short." But then not long afterwards I got a letter from Charles Curran, then DG, and he sent me this letter he said: "Sometime ago the French Government made known its wish to <sup>confer</sup> ~~confirm~~ on you the Croix de Chevalier ~~de lauds~~ de Merit," I think an honour less distinguished than the Legion of Honour and Charles Curran's letter said: "This wish was the result of the direct and personal recommendation of Maurice Schumann." Well nothing happened because the Foreign Office said I was not to accept this honour, I mean

(l'ordre

*Conferred on*

it's not to be ~~transferred~~ to me and so I could never write to Maurice Schumann and say "Thank you very much for thinking of this I think it's very generous of you after all these years." I think it was really very touching of him that he'd remembered that I was the first person who put him on the air although it was not to last very long.

MIALL: And a monstrous thing that the Foreign Office should not have allowed you to accept it.

BARKER: Well really I'm rather grateful because I would have been embarrassed because I don't think I would have deserved it at all.

MIALL: Well talking about more tangible rewards, let's recall that occasion with the Czechs.

BARKER: Ah yes that was after the bomb had fallen and we had moved out to Maida Vale. I remember that first Christmas, the Christmas of 1940 I suppose yes. And the Czech official who was mainly responsible for the exiled Government Broadcasts, Josef Korbl, he had presented me as a Christmas present a volume of T.G. Masaryk's "Making of a State" which is the account of the way in which he had brought Czechoslovakia into being, a volume which I still possess.

MIALL: And a very handsome volume as I recall.

BARKER: It's a very large volume, yes handsome volume. Well I think that Jan Masaryk, the son, had been in America at this time and he came back and his first broadcast afterwards he said: "Well what did my people give you for Christmas?" I said: "Thank you very much, they gave me your father's great work 'The Making of a State' ". He said: "Oh you don't want that sort of thing. I shall send you a proper Christmas present". And the next thing was a dozen bottles of Fortnum & Mason's gin appeared, on which I sat I may say, I did not surrender it to the authorities, as I should have done according to BBC regulations.

MIALL: Well I remember you came to see me in some embarrassment at having received this handsome book which cost in those days I think about up to three guineas and by 1983 prices would probably be about £60. But you said you couldn't send it back but it was quite beyond the pencils and calendars category that one was allowed as a BBC official to accept. And I said you had declared it so that was the most important thing. But I remember you coming back and saying: "Now what do I do about the six bottles of gin?"

BARKER: Well I am glad I was honest enough to report it to you, I don't remember even that. Certainly I think we collectively, belatedly I myself, consumed the gin very happily.

MIALL: Working in Maida Vale was a rather frightening experience I thought because it had this glass roof that didn't give one much protection even from one's own shrapnel that was coming down.

BARKER: Absolutely not. And also the canteen adjoins this glass roof and we used to go and collect our food from the canteen and then take it into the under the glass roof where there was a large grand piano and sometimes somebody or other would play the grand piano so it was quite pleasant. But usually at the crucial moment the alarms would sound and at that moment the canteen would be closed, one had been queuing up to get one's food and there no food.

MIALL: I seem to recall that the only time one really felt safe was when one got in the armoured bus that the BBC drove you back home in.

BARKER: Yes that was very nice. I remember once going back in this bus and it must have been the night of the bombing of the City of London because the whole of the sky in the East was red and you couldn't actually see the flames as we passed Regents Park but it was a strange sight.

MIALL: I think that the morale of the European Service

was getting to a fairly tense point when we finally moved to Bush House. I think if people had told us earlier on that there was a safer, nicer place being considered that we would be able to move to sometime soon things would have been better but we were kept, no doubt for security reasons, under conditions of total ignorance as to what was our fate at any rate at my level and it was with some pleasure that we moved to Bush House in March '41.

BARKER: May I, just before we move to Bush House, one of my memories, my most vivid memories of the Maida Vale period was the discs that we had to use because at one point they ran out of proper discs made out of whatever proper discs are made out of and glass discs were produced and as we ourselves did our own jump cuts and whatever it was on the discs  
 ....

MIALL: Live on transmission !

BARKER: Live on transmission, this was pretty terrifying because the needle almost invariably skidded across the entire disc, sometimes when you put it down in the first place, whoosh it went right across the disc and some exiled politician of great note who you know just a ghastly squeak would come out and you then would have to say well go back. However a minor point but of some technical interest.

MIALL: In the domestic broadcasts at this time that kind of work was done entirely by trained people belonging to the Recorded Programmes Dept., but when it came to foreign languages we who were Talks Assistants had to take this job on as well.

BARKER: Yes well one thing I particularly remember the Czech exiled authorities instituted a thing called Czech military broadcasts. Now the Czech Army, such as it was it was fairly small, was at that time at Leamington Spa and a major called, I think, Koutnik used to come up once a week occasionally accompanied by some of the chaps, with stuff that they had recorded down there which had to be welded

together into a programme which always turned out to be far too long so that the series of jump cuts one had to do was entirely nerve wracking and another embarrassment which occurred somewhat later (after I'd in fact left the BBC) was that this poor major was court martialled if one can be court martialled by an exiled government on allegations that he had missappropriated the funds paid him by the BBC. This was something on which I was called upon to appear as witness, but I refused saying well I had paid the money to the only person I knew and what happened to it thereafter was not my business. I don't know what happened to the major, I hope that he was cleared. However let us return, we have now just moved to Bush House.

MIALL: You worked in Bush House, by this time you'd moved into the Balkan section ?

BARKER: Well I, yes at some point very soon after we arrived in Bush House I was in the Balkan section yes. And we were altogether, as far as I remember, in a not very large room in the S.E. wing with Newsome the European Editor sitting in a glass cubicle at one end and people like Hugh Greene the German Editor and <sup>Darsie</sup> ~~Darcy~~ Gillie and us lesser lights all sitting around in this sweltering place in a very hot summer.

MIALL: It was the S.E. wing was it ? My recollection of it was that it was the central block.

BARKER: No it was the S.E. wing because we only had the S.E. wing at first, at least that's my memory and I was interested when I was reading Bruce Lockhart's diaries the other day, I think the great problem was to get the Air Ministry to give up any more of Bush House because they were there first and they were having to be winkled out and one day a sort of team of high-ups were sent round to inspect us, I remember this very well, on a particularly hot day and somebody or other on our side turned off the air conditioning so that the atmosphere should be completely tropical at the moment when the high-ups appeared and there

we all were sort of sweating like mad. And I read in Lockhart's diaries the other day that they were deeply impressed by the ghastly conditions in which we all worked in and the Air Ministry were then compelled to yield up more space.

MIALL: Bush House had originally been chosen because it was the headquarters before the war of Radio Luxembourg's production operation and there was a radio studio there, which could form the nucleus of a broadcasting operation.

BARKER: Oh that was it was it yes ?

MIALL: That was one of the reasons for it.

BARKER: Well very soon after we moved there of course there was the big bombing raid of May 1941 in which a very large bomb fell on St. Clement Danes next door and whether it actually hit Bush House at all I don't know, I think only marginally. But there was generally sort of alarm stations and my secretary, Nora Robinson, and I decided we were not going to go home and we went and found a little place deep underground which seemed to be out of everybody's way, laid down and went to sleep. However in the middle of the night a furious engineer fell over us and said: "This is where the emergency transmitter is" or I don't know something or other we were right in the way, we were kicked out of the way so they could switch on whatever the emergency apparatus was so we could go on broadcasting. Then we went out in the morning, a beautiful May morning and there were all the burnt leaves of hymn books from St. Clement Danes coming down like sort of black smoke, you know, it was very strange.

MIALL: During that time it was so difficult simply to get programmes out and to survive if you were fire-watching or if you were having great difficulty in getting to a restaurant that was still functioning but most of us had no time to write any memoranda about the important things if you could get out a running order and a <sup>P as B</sup> ~~PSD~~ and get people paid that was about all one had time for. But it

always seemed to me that there were one or two people in Bush House who were under-worked at that time but who spent their time writing memos and these unfortunately are about the only things that survive in Registry.

**BARKER**

~~MIALL~~ Well this quite frankly struck me when I read Asa Briggs' very learned volume on wartime BBC, you know there seemed to be very little record of what we ourselves were actually doing and ~~a~~ rather interesting but not to me so interesting debates going on if not inter departmental disputes at a higher level which didn't seem to me all that important to war broadcasting.

MIALL: The essential thing was the output, the programmes that were going out and they were things that were not kept.

BARKER: Well that's what's so tragic; I mean even the bulletins that afterwards became so controversial. As far as, let alone any recordings I think are there any recordings that have survived ?

MIALL: I think very few.

BARKER But I mean take one small incident. Now in Yugoslavia there are still a great deal of debates about what terrible things the BBC did or did not broadcast during 1941 in particular and on into 1943. We are alleged, the BBC is alleged to have encouraged <sup>Michailovich</sup> ~~Mahled~~ who was then the Nationalist so called Resistance Leader in Yugoslavia, we are said to have encouraged him to collaborate with the Germans. Well I am sure myself that this is total nonsense but unfortunately as one cannot produce the actual bulletins it is impossible to prove one's point. I can only sort of say well this is what I remember happened and if any such thing ever did go out on BBC it was in the broadcasts by what <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ known as the military bulletin, I think, which was three young officers who used to come in at the last minute with illegible scripts and immediately put themselves on the air and I think they did put out some very strange things, but unfortunately no record survives so we cannot prove our point.

MIALL: You were looking after news ...

BARKER: Balkan News yes I am now ....

MIALL: You moved over from News Talks.

BARKER: Yes I wasn't in charge, I don't think, until Hubert Harrison, who had been Reuter's correspondent in Belgrade for many years, until he came (I think in the Autumn of 1941) there were a couple of sub editors and we just sort of did everything between us as far as I remember it, talks and all. I mean the bulletins and the talks.

MIALL: And then you moved away from the BBC and went to work for the Political Warfare Executive, I said moved away but only a very short distance physically that you moved, to another part of Bush House wasn't it ?

BARKER: Well except that the Political Warfare Executive had its country headquarters down in Woburn Abbey and so I spent most of my time in .. first of all it was in Berkley Square in Fitzmaurice Place off Berkley Square and then very soon we moved into Bush House, but the country end as it was always known was in Woburn Abbey and so I used to pop down there off and on.

MIALL: For visits or did you actually live down there ?

BARKER: No I didn't have a house down there but I used to spend two nights a week originally sharing a room in Woburn Abbey with Joanne Scott-Moncrieff who later became Womans Editor at the BBC but who at that time was a secretary, I think Francis Noel Baker's, subsequently a Labour MP, in Woburn Abbey and then later I used to go down at weekends to one of our secret houses where we were supposed to be conducting a freedom station to various Balkan countries.

MIALL: Was the responsibility for the freedom stations part of your responsibility.... ?

BARKER: Well I should say that when I first went to the Political Warfare Executive it was as a sort of dogsbody to Ralph Murray who by this time was head of the Balkan Region of PWE, [Ralph Murray I should say of course later on after the war joined the Foreign Office and ended up as ....

REEL FIVE

BARKER: Ralph Murray who sub, who after the war ... ]  
Ralph Murray who by this time was Head of the Balkan Region of the Political Warfare Executive and who of course after the war joined the Foreign Office and ended up as ambassador in Athens and then after his retirement became a BBC governor.

MIALL: Now what exactly was the function of the PWE ?

BARKER: Well at that time of course it was a bit vague and controversial. It had just been formed after various tussles between various ministers and involved the various pre-existing secret depts., but its basic function was to provide broad guidelines for propaganda in all its forms to Europe and later on other parts of the world to enemy countries and enemy occupied countries not neutral countries that remained with the Ministry of Information and of course policy had to be agreed between the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Information, that is Anthony Eden and Brendan Bracken and it produced weekly directives for the BBC European Services in various languages and also it was already running its own freedom stations to Europe, some of which were 'black' in the sense that they were pretty scurrilous and did not always deal in the truth, others of which were appealing to certain political groups in the occupied or satellite countries to try and stimulate anti-German resistance.

MIALL: This was an operational job of the PWE and nothing to do with the BBC ?

BARKER: No, no that was kept very distinct from the BBC I think the only time there was really friction over this was not, it didn't concern me but of course over Sefton Delmer's

'blacked' stations to Germany which sometimes produced such very convincing untrue stories that they were reproduced in the ~~usual~~ <sup>neutral</sup> press and then got back to the BBC <sup>and</sup> on certain occasions the BBC used them and then was terribly indignant to discover they'd been a product of their own, of British 'black' propagandist. But I wasn't concerned with that sort of thing really and it was, I was concerned with policy towards the Balkans and I spent most of my time trying to argue with the Foreign Office on one side and the Special Operations Executive, SOE, responsible for subversive activities in occupied enemy Europe and to reconcile these two with my own view, or not my own views but other views as to what was going on.

MIALL: This was a particular problem because there were the advocates for whole-hearted support for Mihailovic and whole-hearted support for Tito.

BARKER: Yes this was a long struggle that went on from, oh from late 1941, well certainly 1942 right up till well pretty well the end of 1943 and I think we were very pro partisan. I think I am still regarded to this day as an unrepentant Titoist whereas my SOE opposite numbers were much more pro Mihailovic and the Foreign Office was in a state of dither because they were having to deal with an exiled government and an exiled king and so the whole thing was rather tricky.

But of course that wasn't the only one, Greece there was an awful lot of trouble about. I didn't have very much personally to do with that because Dilys Powell the film critic, broadcaster and writer who had lived in Greece she, that was very much her personal responsibility and the Foreign Office was always getting agitated on the ~~proposed~~ <sup>supposed</sup> very Left Wing views of the Greeks in the BBC, and well the Yugoslav exiled government also got very agitated about supposed Left Wing views of the BBC Yugoslav announcers, all these sorts of things went on.

Oh and there were difficulties over Roumania and Hungary and even Bulgaria but of a political nature. But as far as the BBC was concerned what used to happen after Ralph Murray

went to Cairo in November 1942 was that I myself wrote these various weekly directives to <sup>convey</sup> ~~converse~~ to the Foreign Office, <sup>? go first</sup> got their approval and then I think took them to Kirkpatrick (Sir) Ivone Kirkpatrick who was then seconded from the Foreign Office as Controller European Service or his No. 2 Harman Grisewood and then I think finally to the section concerned the Hungarians or the Roumanians or the Yugoslav section and to get their agreement and of course they may or may not have been followed by the BBC but on the whole our personal relations were fairly good and maybe better than in the case of some other language services.

MIALL: These directives were in fact general guidance on how to treat the news but were also establishing a policy on cultural relations with that country.

BARKER: Yes well they started off with a sort of intelligence summary because we did have some intelligence which didn't reach the BBC as it was of a slightly more secret nature and then they went onto try and foresee the various things that were cropping up, likely to crop up during the next week and then well take the case of Mihailovic and Tito, how far one could go in not boosting Mihailovic. You see one great thing was that as a compromise during this whole Mihailovich - Tito thing the Foreign Office kindly agreed to praise the patriots<sup>of</sup> thinking that this would cover both Mihailovich and Tito's partisans, but of course Mihailovic immediately knew that we were backing, the patriots really meant the partisans and the partisans bitterly resented the fact that "patriots" could be taken as covering Mihailovic so it pleased nobody at all.

There's one question which I would love to have studied by somebody at some time and it's how far the BBC could and did build up individual personalities, say Mihailovich or even <sup>de</sup> De Gaulle, how far was <sup>de</sup> De Gaulle's subsequent political career based on what the BBC did for him in wartime, you know, certainly we didn't preserve Mihailovich, we built him up in the first place and then dropped him like a hot cake.

MIALL: Well a case in point would be the Czech who broadcast when the Masaryk I think made one of his first wartime visits to the U.S.

BARKER: Ah yes that is an interesting case yes.

MIALL: <sup>Drtna</sup>  
~~Dentner~~ was his name ?

BARKER: Well he was a Czech, his name was Dr. Prokop Drtina and he had been a relatively unknown government official but although I don't myself, I remember him very well I always had a great respect for him as a man of great integrity and who although he didn't broadcast in the witty and amusing way in which Masaryk did his broadcasts really were interesting and forceful and brief and to the point. And it appears from what he himself remembered that it was I who suggested that when Masaryk was in America Drtina should do, step in and do his regular weekly broadcasts, i.e. step into Masaryk's spot. And Drtina wrote to the BBC DG long after the war these broadcasts had made him so well known in Czechoslovakia that although he'd been totally unknown before the war he became a member of the government and a Minister of Justice in 1948 at the time of the Communist coup which resulted from him trying to commit suicide by jumping out of a window, he wasn't killed and had a very unpleasant time afterwards so perhaps the BBC, from one point of view, did not do <sup>him</sup> very much good.

The DG in fact sent me a copy of a letter which Dr. Drtina had written to him when he received a copy of Asa Briggs's book <sup>T</sup>the War of Words. He said: "Reading it has brought back to my memory the many events of the difficulties in broadcasting of the BBC during wartime and especially during the blitz in the Autumn of 1940 which I had the honour to share with the brave London people and the stubborn BBC staff. It was really a heroic achievement and I never ceased to admire how during the air raids the BBC staff was able to hold on and never stop broadcasting. Reading this excellent account I remembered also vividly many persons with whom I co-operated at that time who we here in Czechoslovakia owe up to now a great deal of gratitude". This letter was written in 1971. "As for example, Miss Elisabeth Barker,

N.B Charles Curran

Mrs. Sheila Grant Duff, Mr. Noel Newsome, the late Mr. Douglas Ritchie, R.R. Betts (the Czech editor in the latter part of the war) and others". And he then goes on: "I hope sir you will forgive me if at the same time I permit to draw your attention to my own case of Speaker in the Czech programme which is not at all mentioned in this book. Before the war I was not known to the public in Czechoslovakia, that is the difference in my case from that of the other BBC broadcasts as ~~Bennett~~<sup>Benes</sup>, Ripka or Masaryk. Their names were well known, I myself hadn't such an activity and therefore came to England as an unknown soldier. By chance I got the opportunity to speak in the Czech Broadcasting programme in May 1940. This talk was an extraordinary success both at home as well as among Czech emigres. Now in June 1940 it happened that Jan Masaryk left England for America and from the Czech side nothing was arranged to replace his regular talks. In this situation the then Chief Editor, (it's not quite accurate) of the Czech section Miss Elisabeth Barker asked for information, asked the information service of the Czechoslovak National Council to decide who could best replace Masaryk, and simultaneously suggested that I could be the right person. On this ground Dr. ~~Bennett~~<sup>Benes</sup> decided with my consent to the appointment of this task. That decision was evidently right because my broadcasting gained such popularity in our country that after the war I became one of the most popular politicians in consequence I had become even a member of the Czechoslovak government in the years 1945 - 48. So the BBC Czech programme during the war influenced Czechoslovak inner policy after the war at least in its personal constitution. Without the initiative of Miss Elisabeth Barker it is highly doubtful that I would get the possibility to speak in the Czech programme regularly and that regular broadcasting of mine demonstrates the exceptional political effect of BBC broadcasting in foreign languages during the war."

MIALL: Now when the war was over you didn't immediately return to the BBC what were you doing ?

BARKER: Well I was in fact invited by J.B. Clarke who was by then Controller Overseas Services, whatever he was called,

to become Balkan Editor because Hubert Harrison had gone back to journalism but one my one idea was to get away from everything I had done during the war and see what was actually happening in the Balkans. So with some difficulty I got myself taken on by Reuters and I spent well from August 1945 for about a couple of years in the Balkans, (except for Yugoslavia who wouldn't allow me in,) being a news agency correspondent which I enjoyed enormously. But then I came back and worked on Reuters diplomatic desk and then in 1949 I was asked to come back to the BBC and since they offered me a good deal more money I did.

MIALL: And you came back as diplomatic correspondent for the European Service ?

BARKER: Yees.. well I wasn't diplomatic correspondent for the first few months, I was a member of the diplomatic unit and I was supposed to be specialising on E. Europe. I had in fact been invited to join the <sup>newly</sup> ~~un~~iformed Foreign Office Information Research Dept., which was supposed to be dealing with slightly undercover information, but I said no, I wanted to go straight, as you might say and not get back into propaganda. And so I came back to the BBC and was diplomatic correspondent from sometime in 1949 until 1965 which was a period I enjoyed very much.

MIALL: Was that mostly writing scripts which were read by other people or were you broadcasting yourself ?

BARKER: I was mostly writing news items, you know which just went into the news. Occasionally I did commentaries too but not on a regular basis, I really like writing and I enjoyed too going to foreign, to conferences abroad you know NATO meetings the 1954 Geneva Conference, that sort of thing.

MIALL: You were there in Bush House at the time of Suez.

BARKER: Yes I was, and of course that was extremely hard work but also well even an emotional crisis you might say.

official?

I mean I personally was very anti the final Suez policy and I remember on the day on which the Anglo French troops invaded we had a meeting chaired by James Monahan who was Controller European Service at which he suggested that there should be first one commentary setting out the British Government case for this action and then a case for a second commentary stating the mood of British opinion. And I said, no I think we must have one commentary stating both the Government case and the state of public opinion which of course was pretty hostile at that time.

REEL SIX

MIALL: Immediately after Suez came the revolution in Hungary.

BARKER: Yes I think having the two things going at the same time was really a terrific strain particularly as it was difficult not to get emotional about both of these simultaneous crises. I was particularly interested in Hungary because I knew Hungary but I didn't know Egypt and it was difficult not to feel one was really part of the whole thing that was going on, particularly because we made a special arrangement with the Foreign Office to get our own independent supply of news through them. The thing was that the news agencies were finding it extremely difficult to get news out once the Red Army had moved in but the British Minister in Budapest Knox Helm had managed to preserve his diplomatic wireless and so was able to send out messages to the Foreign Office fairly regularly and keep them very well informed on what was going on, what the fighting was and where demonstrations were and so on and so through the Foreign Office we got this news fairly rapidly and could then put it out in the BBC European Service and so back to Hungary and of course to all the other interested countries, well every country was interested I think. At first we put this out as information coming from Budapest but then this became rather dangerous because I think there was a fear that the Hungarians or Soviet Authorities might try and confiscate the diplomatic wireless and so we had to try and disguise the source by saying that it came from a neutral country

or W. Germany or whatever or travellers arriving in the west you know that sort of thing.

While it lasted it was fairly strenuous because the resident clerk at the Foreign Office might sometimes ring me up at 1 or 2 in the morning to give me the latest news which I would then immediately phone through to Bush House and then they could use on the next news bulletin.

MIALL: He rang you at home ?

BARKER: Yes it worked very well and I think for a time we were virtually the only source of news of what was going on in Budapest for the rest of Hungary let alone in the rest of the World. I mean this was just to last for a few days.

MIALL: This must be a problem for Bush House when it is sending out news to a situation such as a revolution where the actual news that you send out can affect the turn of events.

BARKER: Yes there have been cases where of course I felt rather differently about all this. One case was the revolution in Iraq, I can't remember the exact year but it was in the late 1950s and there was still the king there, a young king as I remember it and Nury Pasha I think who was the ruler and who was very pro British. Well I was at home in bed and I was telephoned about 6 o'clock one morning by the Duty Editor in Bush House Newsroom to say that Baghdad Radio had put out news of a revolution and said that the people were being incited to go and storm the Royal Palace and so complete the revolution. There was no <sup>source of this</sup> other information other than Baghdad Radio and of course ~~for~~ <sup>from</sup> Baghdad Radio alone it was difficult to tell how successful the coup had been and since then we have had a number of coups which have started with people seizing the radio and saying the revolution had been successful when in fact it hadn't. But at that stage it was fairly new, the technique. And I really didn't know what to do but I think about 7 in the morning I rang the resident clerk at the Foreign Office and said "Look have you any information from Baghdad what do you think about all this ?"

And he said "oh well we needn't worry now, need we, it'll all be in the morning papers. I said <sup>no</sup> it won't be in the morning papers, but he gave me absolutely no guidance and so I rang back the Bush House Duty Editor and said: "Look I can't get any confirmation, I can't give you any guidance but this worries me because it seems to me that if we retransmit what is being put out by Baghdad Radio we are in fact inciting also the crowds to advance upon the Royal Palace and seize the king, etc." Well all I could think of to say was please for heaven sake emphasise that they'd no confirmation of this report from Baghdad Radio. Well anyhow the revolution was successful, the Royal Palace was stormed, and I can't be sure of this, I think the King was killed in the general melee. I am still sort of left wondering quite what one should do in this kind of situation when a coup d'etate or a war in embryo is just starting up and by broadcasting what is being said by the aggressors let us call them roughly speaking, the BBC is in fact taking part in the events and causing the situation to escalate. One other situation when this sort of problem cropped up was during the Congo War. At that time Lumumba the Left Winger was in charge in, theoretically in the Congo but in Katanga where of course the British and others had very big mining interests and this strong character Tshombe was in charge, in what was then Elisabethville.

Now one Sunday I had invited the Controller European Service, Tangye Lean and his wife and small daughter to lunch, and during lunch again the Bush House Duty Editor rang up saying we have just heard from Elisabethville, the capital of the Katanga Province that Tshombe is declaring the <sup>see</sup> secession of Katanga from the Congo and is relying on support from S. Rhodesia as it then was, now Zimbabwe. Do you know anything about this ?

Well I then rang the Foreign Office news dept., while my Controller was listening and got onto a friend and he said "Well as a matter of fact we just have heard from the Consul in Elisabethville, the BBC Correspondent in Elisabethville happened to be sitting in his ante-room and saw Tshombe, and saw the Consul coming out who told him what had happened and <sup>he</sup> phoned this through to London.

Can you possibly hang onto this news ? The Foreign Office man said: "Until we have had time to get a statement out of the Foreign Secretary who is out of London, but we think it's important to get over the fact that the British Government is not in any way supporting the secession of Katanga." So I said: "Well I can't promise anything but I'll pass on what you say".

So I passed this information onto Bush House who said yes we'll hold on an hour or so, <sup>BS\*</sup> and that meanwhile the Home News who'd also rung the Foreign Office and got no information, and was in touch with Bush House, Bush House told them what I had told them what the Foreign Office said, and the Home Service then put it out and then inevitably Bush House followed suit.

And then we got the secession of Katanga and a lot of fighting and you know maybe it would have happened anyhow but that again sort of letting a certain problem, when you are actually influencing the course of fighting is your first duty to put out the news as you know it regardless of what the circumstances are in which you have been given the information, or should you pause and think ?

It's a problem that I can't settle in my own mind and I have never been able to induce anybody else to consider very seriously.

MIALL: It's a very nice note on which to end this discussion, thank you Elisabeth Barker.