The Connected Histories of the BBC	
Provenance:	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: • BBC Oral History • BBC History of North Regional Broadcasting • BBC Horizon at 50 • BBC World Service Moving Houses Project • Alexandra Palace Television Society Oral History
Clearance:	Interviews have been reviewed and edited to comply with GDPR and other requirements.
Copyright:	© BBC © Alexandra Palace Television Society
Conditions of use:	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 historyteam@bbc.co.uk apts@apts.org.uk (for Alexandra Palace material)
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: https://chbbc.sussex.ac.uk/

File: **LR001160-001 - INTERVIEW WITH FRANK GILLARD.wav**
Duration: **0:50:57**
Typist: **683**

START AUDIO

Frank Gillard: So, it wasn't difficult for me to make some sort of a mark in London with my dispatches, my reports from the Home Forces.

0:00:11

Interviewer: Who were based…?

Frank Gillard: They were based on Salisbury Plain, mainly, and in that part of the southern part of England, ranging, really, from Salisbury Plain right down to Land's End. It involved every form of military activity, from major exercises down to the kind of things that quite small units were doing.

For instance, I remember a Royal Engineers unit operating in Plymouth Sound, working out how on earth they could devise techniques for clearing sunken wrecks and that sort of thing in case, when we did landings on enemy-occupied coastlines, the enemy sank ships and otherwise obstructed ports.

I remember putting on a diving suit, taking a microphone with me down to the depth of Plymouth Sound, and walking about on the seabed, and watching the Royal Engineers at work down there, and recording it all as I did it, which was really a quite unique sort of thing. There really were some very dramatic stories to do.

0:01:06

Interviewer: I am always a little bothered by reading autobiographies where somebody says, “And so they asked me to join the BBC and I did.” What talents did you exploit that changed you from being a producer to being the sort of war correspondent which would wander round the seabed, and make recordings, and was able to go on the Dieppe Raid?

Frank Gillard: I'm not sure that I was ever really much of a producer. It’s certainly true that for three days a week, for six months, I produced talks of one kind and another. I think, if I had a talent as a producer, it was simply due to qualities that I'd picked up from other producers who'd been producing me during my freelance days. I think the talent that I had to offer the BBC was a talent that any good schoolmaster has got, and that is a talent to communicate in simple, straightforward terms.

I honestly believe that the best regular staff-type broadcasters are people who've got either a journalistic background or a schoolmaster background, possibly a clerical background, because these are all people who, in their various ways, have to convey information in ways that will be accepted readily by people they're talking to.

I felt that I certainly had that to offer. I've always felt that 10 years of school mastering was a very good preparation for the job I came in ultimately to do, but there I was, just about 30, I suppose, or 31, something like that, coming into the BBC from the school-mastering profession in the early 40s, in the early stages of a war. You might well ask me, “What was the BBC like in those days?” Are you going to ask me that?

Interviewer: I am, yes, but I was interested in that point because I don't know about you, but I do get rather shocked when people say, “And so I went in to become [Principal Private Secretary 0:02:59] [Crosstalk] Civil Service.”

Frank Gillard: Yes, that’s a very good point. Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about the BBC in those days when you knew it, first of all.

Frank Gillard: I’d know it, of course, pre-war, as a contributor. I always enjoyed the work I did for the BBC, and I liked the people I met there. They were interesting and intelligent, stimulating people. I always felt there was something of a barrier between them and me. I mean they were it and I was not it. I found the BBC, to that extent, rather detached; perhaps, in a way, slightly cold, slightly clinical, certainly very ivory towered.

Actually, I could never conceive myself as a member of the BBC staff. I didn't think that I had the kind of qualities that those figures had. I was not able to detach myself, and be aloof and that sort of thing. It’s not my nature, but, by the time that this proposal was put to me to join the BBC staff, the BBC was a different body altogether already because, you see, the war had brought in a great infusion of new people.

The ordinary activities of showbiz in Britain, and the ordinary activities of journalism, to some extent, had been greatly changed by the war. All sorts of people in those professionals had come into broadcasting because it was really their only

outlet by then. They had brought in a completely new spirit into the BBC, and they'd knock the stuffiness out to the organisation. It was gone by the time I came in, and it was stuffiness I really complained about in the earlier days.

It was a new BBC, and it was a BBC now, I found, that was, I would say, totally identified with the life of ordinary, everyday people. Every day – twice a day, in fact – you had these sessions of ‘Music While You Work’ for workers in factories. Every day, you had ‘Workers' Playtime’ broadcast from factories at factory lunch hours, a variety of styles, entertaining workers and so on. The emphasis was all that way. The BBC was with the people.

This made it a quite different BBC, and it was quite exhilarating to be in it. Yes, we were working under improvised conditions. We were working with makeshift equipment. We were working under all sorts of crazy conditions. We were worn out because we got no sleep at night, because of air raids and that sort of thing, but we were doing something that was important for the morale of the country at the time of war. We were part of the great national war effort, and this gave you a tremendous lift so that it was a totally different BBC. The BBC, in a couple of years, became an absolutely revolutionised institution.

I did find, however, and this dismayed me very much, in Bristol – and don’t forget that a large part of the BBC was in Bristol at this time – that there were pockets of real despair. I remember, shortly after joining the BBC, at a party – I don't mean a gay party, a lively party, I mean a dinner party, a group, a gathering of a dozen or so BBC people at somebody's home one evening – where there was a lot of sober talk about what was going on at the time.

The Germans were obviously trying to knock out our ports. Every night, there was a major raid on a major British port. One

after another, they were being immobilised. The Germans were clearly doing this on a systematic basis, and they were going around the country, knocking out port, after port, after port.

The discussion turned on, “What the hell are we going to do when all the ports are knocked out? We’re at the mercy of the Germans. They'll just come and invade us, and we shan’t be able to stop them.”

There was a lot of sense in that, but what worried me was to hear some very respected BBC people saying, “If they come – if they come – I'm not the sort of stuff that heroes are made of.” I remember that phrase: “I'm not the sort of stuff that heroes are made of. If they come, I shall be prepared to work with them. They’ll want changes in the broadcasting system. Okay, I'm ready to change. I'm ready to do what they want.” That upset me very much.

Then, six months later, I was moved to London, into the News division the whole time, ceased being a talks producer. Here, I found a very different attitude, I must say. Here, there was a calm and realistic daily appraisal of what the war was meaning to Britain.

Pat Ryan – Patrick Ryan, who was the Editor, News – was one of a small group of people who, every morning, first thing, went to a briefing held in Whitehall for government ministers and heads of government departments, on the war situation. He used to come straight back from that and met with us at 10:30 in his room, a small group of us.

Pat would sit there, leaning back in his desk chair, with his feet up on his desk, and his pipe in his mouth, and gazing at the ceiling. He’d say, “Well, the situation is very serious. If these ports go on being knocked out, we really can't see quite what the outcome is going to be.”

I remember one day when he said, “Malta is a very, very big problem for us. Malta probably can't hold out for more than five days. If we lose Malta, the whole Mediterranean becomes a German-Italian sea. The effect of that on our military operations in that sphere is just incalculable.”

Then another time he said, “The Germans, Rommel forces, are advancing across North Africa. They seem to have our people on the run. God knows if we can ever stop them. It looks as if they might well get to Cairo. If they get to Cairo, they'll take the Nile Delta. We’d have to retire. We'd have to retreat. We don't know where we can stop it. Nobody can tell what the outcome of that is going to be.”

But always this was said in a calm style of assessment, without any note of capitulation. It was just making us realise, for background purposes, what the truth of the war situation was, so that everything we did about news broadcasting that day would be done against a very sober background of realisation of what it all meant and where we might all finish up. There was never any talk in London about giving in and about, “I'll work with the Germans if they come,” but certainly in the outposts of the BBC, there was something of that feeling.

Interviewer: Let's pick up, then. You got your chance in the field in North Africa. This was because Richard Dimbleby was recalled. Perhaps before we go on to the whole area of war reporting at that time, we could talk about why Richard Dimbleby came back and what that meant to you.

Frank Gillard: Richard had done a splendid job. He was our first correspondent out there and he had done a splendid job. There's no doubt about that, looked at from a broadcasting

point of view. You see, the broadcaster, the war reporter in those days, had to take his choice. He could, every day, go to a place where action was likely to be happening, and report what he saw. He may have made a misapprehension and gone to the wrong place, because you never knew where action was going to take place. You could only guess.

Or the war reporter could base himself at a headquarters, an Army headquarters, or a divisional headquarters, or a corps headquarters, where he would not see what was happening, but he would be told. He could build his reports from what he was told. Richard tended to do the latter. This is no reflection on Richard. He wanted to give a broad canvas, a broad review of what was going on.

Now, the Army very soon tumbled to the fact that this was Richard's style of broadcasting. The Army began to use Richard. They began to feed him all sorts of information that was half true, that wasn't totally true, that was rather misleading.

There was, at this time, a good deal of conflict between the War Office here in London and the military command in the Middle East. Naturally, the military command at GHQ in Cairo wanted everything it could get in the way of resources, equipment, men and so on. But back here in London, consideration had to be given as to how the total resources available could be distributed not only between the Middle East front, the North African front, but also between other fronts, and also sent off to Russia, for example, or also kept in reserve for a second front landing and so on.

Now, the Middle East command realised that Richard, in his nightly broadcasts, because that's what they really amounted to, was commanding a very large audience in Britain, and therefore, if fed with the right sort of information, could sway

public opinion in Britain in favour of the Middle East. The War Office detected this in London and began saying to the BBC that Dimbleby was the tool of the Middle East command, and this could not go on.

At the same time, Richard was caught in the trap that he was reporting stuff that he'd not actually seen himself, which other people had told him. It wasn't always exactly accurate. The people on the spot, when they heard Richard's voice coming back over there air within a few hours, got gravely dissatisfied because his reporting wasn't totally accurate. He was not describing something he'd seen himself. It was second-hand material.

0:12:19

Interviewer: Could I ask you to elaborate on that, as you did with me before, which was that they may have advanced a couple of miles? By the time they heard this, they had, in fact, been in retreat because, you were telling me before, in fact the fortunes of desert battle were such.

Frank Gillard: This was due to the fact that, of course, there was a time lag of some hours between the time that Richard made his recording in the desert and sent it back to Cairo for censorship. Then it had been to London and so forth, until it was on the air again, on shortwave, coming back to the forces on the spot.

In that period of time, which might be 12 hours or might be as much as 24 hours, the fortunes of battle could very well change. Particularly in desert conditions, which are very fluid fighting conditions and where an Army appears to be advancing at one moment, not knowing that it is

simultaneously being outflanked, deep in the desert, by an armoured column from the other side, which is getting around the back of it, so to speak. They wake up the next morning and find, by God, they're in a trap, and then the hasty retreat wherever they can find a gap to pour through.

This happened all too often and so poor Richard's very optimistic account of, “The battle is going fine and we’re advancing on,” and so on, would be coming across to the troops in the desert, just at the very moment when, in fact, they were fighting a rear-guard action, and desperately trying to get out of the trap and recover the situation.

Of course, they were always looking for a scapegoat, as is natural, and it would be only understandable that the radio reporter should be the scapegoat. So, poor man, innocently enough, he found himself in rather bad odour with the Army.

So, on both these counts, both the feeling of the War Office here in London and the fact that credibility had been lost on the spot in the Middle East, Richard had to come back. Of course, he never again was properly accepted by the Army. He never again became an Army war correspondent.

0:14:24

Interviewer: Then you went out to take his place. What did you learn from him? Would you then go on to talk about the freedom of the reporting of a radio correspondent, because you've talked, in a way, of the Army manipulating a correspondent? Then can you, conversely, talk about the freedom you had?

Frank Gillard: What I learnt from Richard, of course, was that, if you've got any sense, you'll describe what you've seen with your own

eyes and you can account for. Really, there was no need for the correspondent with the Army to do anything other, because we always had a man back in Cairo who could do the broad, general picture.

There was a briefing from GHQ in Cairo, just as there was a briefing at Army Headquarters, so I always left it that whoever was doing the job back in Cairo – and for most of my time it was Godfrey Talbot – would do the broad-canvas picture and that I would do the snapshot of what I had, myself, seen on that particular day. That was how I operated, and I learnt that lesson from Richard.

Now, as to the freedom of the reporter, of course, everything that you said, like everything that was broadcast during the war, whether it was from a war correspondent on the battlefront or the compère of 'Workers' Playtime' in a factory, had to be censored. Everything was censored.

Even back here in London, every word that went on the air, even the sermon in a church service, was censored. It was censored by two groups of people: it was censored by military censorship and it was censored by policy censorship. The censors were based in Broadcasting House, and all scripts had to go through them.

Of course, the Correspondent in the Field script couldn't be censored by somebody in Broadcasting House. It had to be censored by the censors on the spot, so there was no question of any word being allowed on the air that might in any way have been critical of the war effort.

I was not at liberty, even if I thought a general in the field was incompetent – and some of them were, as the results showed – I could, perhaps, be extremely subtle and imply this in ways that would get by, but even that wouldn't be spotted by 99% of

the listening public, but I couldn't say so outright. I could not make any sort of affirmative statement that General X clearly should be removed from his position, or that this disaster was due to mismanagement on the part of the Army or anything like that. There was this censorship, which was complete and absolute.

It's like everything broadcasting being broadcast from, in the way of news today, having to start at Moscow. We had these fantastic problems, but the BBC, in the desert case, had time reserve, block bookings, on a shortwave beam circuit out of Cairo, at two o'clock every afternoon Cairo time, and at midnight Cairo time. Sometimes the circuit worked, and sometimes it didn't. More often it did. Then that's the means by which the stuff finally got back to London. Eventually, it was rebroadcast, if it was worth rebroadcasting.

Interviewer: Let’s just go into those separate parts of your role so that the ordinary listener could understand them. When you talk about this special circuit, you had a recording van with you.

Frank Gillard: Yes.

Interviewer: You recorded, you went through the sensor. Then you transmitted. If you could say how that worked.

Frank Gillard: Yes.

0:17:57

Interviewer: I mean did it go from the same van at these special times? Then will you go on to talk about the actual news information you were sending back, which was much more like the newspaper correspondence but to more tighter deadlines and to a wider field, in that you were serving Bush as well?

Frank Gillard: The actual procedure was this: there you were, up in the desert with the Eighth Army, and Cairo was hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away, but it was to Cairo that your staff had to go if it was going to return to London.

Now you, in the field, recorded your dispatch. It might be that you'd already written it out and that it was a description, an eyewitnesses account of something you'd seen. Or it might have been a spontaneous description, a commentary on something that was happening, a barrage and an infantry advance, or tank advance, or whatever.

The censorship was not conducted with the Eighth Army in the field. The censorship was conducted back in Cairo, so you took your material, your recorded material. You took it back to an agreed point, a map reference, where all the press stuff was assembled.

From there, the Army was responsible, by some means or other, for getting it back to Cairo. It was sent by a dispatch rider on motorbikes. It was sent by aeroplane. It was sent by whatever the Army could assemble, and there were arrangements in Cairo for getting it through to the right reception points.

Now, when it reached Cairo, it had to go through censorship. It had to go through four separate sensors: military sensor, naval sensor, air sensor, and Egyptian Government sensor, because the transmitter you were using belonged to the Egyptian

Government. The Egyptian Government wasn't going to allow anything to go out on one of its transmitters which might be provocative to the Germans – unduly provocative.

The sensor in Cairo, who was a long way away from you, so you couldn't argue with him, would carve up your recording, would take his penknife and gouge out bits that he didn't allow to go through. The rest, the mutilated remains, would ultimately be beamed to London and then, if usable, would be retransmitted.

Now, this was where, of course, the radio man was at a tremendous disadvantage with the print man because you had to go through this enormous process of getting your stuff back in the voice. Getting it back in the voice was a great disadvantage. What was the rest of your question there?

Interviewer: There was an additional role which you played, which was, in fact, simply supplying news information which was much nearer that of the newspaper correspondent but with tighter deadlines, and also supplying-

Frank Gillard: That was in Italy. It wasn't here.

Interviewer: It wasn’t, fine.

Frank Gillard: We’ll come to it presently.

Interviewer: In fact, that leads us very easily on to whether the military authorities regarded the BBC correspondent as a special case in any way.

Frank Gillard: No, the military authorities, at this stage in the war – and I'm talking about 1942 – gave the BBC no special privileges at all and gave the BBC no special recognition at all. The BBC correspondent was just one more correspondent. Just, as it were, the representative of one newspaper.

There we were, in fact, serving not one newspaper but scores of newspapers, because we were serving the Home Service, which had its style of programme. We were serving the Forces Programme, which had its style of reporting. We were serving Bush House, with all its outlets, and we were continually being requested to send back material which would go into this documentary, or this children's programme even, this religious programme even, and so on.

The Army, at this stage in the war, refused absolutely to give the BBC any special kind of privilege whatever. This put us under, unquestionably, a very great handicap. We did the best we could.

Interviewer: It seems incredible, even in 1942, that they didn't do it, when, as we've already seen from the Richard Dimbleby affair, that the Army were well aware that that information was coming back to the troops, whereas the newspapers, of course, were weeks behind.

Frank Gillard: They interpreted this, you see, very much to their own advantage. I mean they were very blind in this respect, and I

suppose was they never seriously thought about it. Although people like myself were always trying to argue with them, no, we were just brushed aside.

0:22:46

Interviewer: So, we go on to, really, at what stage, then, was the famous War Reporting Unit set up?

Frank Gillard: I can't give you a precise date for that, because it was set up while I was in the field as a war correspondent overseas. The BBC didn't think of consulting the people who had some experience of this matter before they set up the War Reporting Unit. It was sometime in 1943, and I would think towards the end of 1943. It was set up as it became clear that, before too long, there would be operations in North West Europe, the so-called Second Front, and that the BBC had better be ready for it.

Howard Marshall was brought in to be the director of it. Now, Howard, before the war, had been a BBC announcer and he'd been a very well-known and excellent cricket commentator. He was quite a radio personality. He'd spent the first part of the war as Director of Public Relations at the Ministry of Food, and he now saw himself as an ace correspondent. He didn't see himself as soiling his hands with the administration of a unit or anything like that.

He was given, as Deputy Director of the War Reporting Unit, Malcolm Frost, who was a very energetic character who had been in the Monitoring Service and all sorts of other services. Malcolm, unfortunately, was a rather neurotic sort of chap who,

just at the most crucial time, soon after D-Day, had a mental breakdown and had to be out of action for quite a long while.

We relied heavily on Dudley Perkins, who was the Administrative Officer and who was awfully good at looking after the nuts and bolts but had no ideas at all about policy, or standards, or anything like that. We just had a couple of secretaries, and that was what this famous unit consisted of. No more than that.

When, I'm sorry to say, Howard Marshall, unfortunately, was put out of action – and I must explain that Howard, Howard Marshall, covered D-Day – he went to France, to Normandy, in a Destroyer, landed in a landing craft, had an hour ashore, came back in the landing craft, got back to the Destroyer, was brought back to Portsmouth and did a broadcast, a very good one, the same evening.

He did one or two other Normandy broadcasts, and he was around when the armies broke out of Normandy and swept around in a great arc to advance on Paris. This, of course, was a job for the ace correspondent. He went into Paris with the armies. In Paris, he found a transmitter that would claim to be in touch with London and so, misguidedly, he did a dispatch over this transmitter, which he neglected to submit to censorship, as a result of which, I'm afraid, he lost his accreditation.

So, he wasn't any good as an ace correspondent any longer, because the Army wouldn't have him. He was never any good anyway as an administrator of the unit. He spent the rest of the war back in London, sitting in his office, writing his book about, ‘My years as Director of Public Relations at the Ministry of Food.’ He really completely detached himself from us.

So, there we were, without a director and with Malcolm in hospital, without a deputy director. So, what happened was that, without any official instructions or anything like that, Richard Dimbleby, who was here in London, based in London and mainly doing air stories, flying out on air sorties and that sort of thing, he took charge at the London end, without a title or anything like that.

I took charge in Normandy, as the senior man on the spot. Richard and I, understanding each other very well, being the best of friends, had no problem whatever about, between us, running the two sides of the War Reporting Unit. So, that was how this fabulous unit was conducted through most of the months of the Normandy campaign and the advance which finally led to the end of the war.

0:26:58

Interviewer: So, almost despite the BBC's appointments, it succeeded. Why?

Frank Gillard: You see, we had innumerable outlets. We had 'Radio Newsreel'. We had something called 'Combat Diary' on the service which is called AEFP: Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme. We had goodness knows how many topical magazines running in various external services, in different languages. Again and again, we had endless approaches from programme departments wanting material from the front and so forth.

I think we managed to keep most of them happy. So, 'War Report' was able to draw on extremely up-to-date and, on the whole, high-quality war-reporting material. There it was, every

night on the air, as I say, at peak listening time, and the entire nation hanging breathless on it to learn what progress had been made in this matter, which was life and death to everybody in the country.

We were, on the whole, day by day, telling a success story. It was a success story. It was a story of advance, holdups here and there, but in the end advance, advance, advance. So, it's not surprising that 'War Report', in the end, gained enormous réclame and prestige, and is talked about even now, 30/40 years later, as being a great milestone in broadcasting and so on. I don't think that any great credit attaches to us, those of us who were involved in it, but that's just how it worked out.

Interviewer: It's almost like in other fields that war prompts a greater improvement progression in arms and here in broadcasting.

Frank Gillard: Yes, [it's so 0:28:41], and here in broadcasting. 'War Report', the actual organisation of 'War Report', was very well handled here in the London end. Adequate resources were provided for it in terms of space, and staff and so on.

It was jointly the product – and this is a very important thing – of the News division and Features department, Laurence Gilliam's department, so that the News people decided the content, but the Features department decided the presentation. They were both so very expert at their job that it couldn't fail to be an absolutely first-class show, and in all circumstances.

There's no doubt about it, it did win the BBC an enormous army of friends at home and right round the world. It gave great support to the BBC in the years after the war, when the future of broadcasting in this country was under consideration.

Interviewer: We covered the bare bones of your experience and of other people's, and the way the BBC reported the war. Tell us now, I mean clothe those bones with some of your particular memories of your time when you were War Correspondent.

Frank Gillard: Yes, let me think now. I suppose first I would say, outstanding recollections: the end of the war in North Africa. Suddenly, it was all over there. Tunis had been captured. Bizerte had been captured. We'd rounded up, I don't know, several hundred thousand Germans, and even more Italians.

Suddenly, unaccountably almost, no bombs were falling. No shells were bursting. There was no sound of gunfire. You could hardly believe it. All the bells, all the church bells, rang in England to mark this, but out there it was the silence that marked it, the fact that you didn't really have to be looking over your shoulder every minute of the day for what the hell is going to happen next.

I was just beginning to adjust myself to this and to enjoy it, of course, when, I don't know, on the second or third night after the capitulation of the Germans, I was on my camp bed and asleep in a crummy little hotel in Tunis, where we'd taken – where we'd managed to grab – some rooms, and I was shaken by the shoulder.

I found an officer whom I knew, looking down at me. He said, "I have to tell you, you're under arrest." I said, "You can't be serious." He said, "Yes, you are. You're under arrest." I said, "On what charge?" and he said, "I'm not at liberty to tell you that. Do I have your assurance that you won't attempt to leave this room?" I said, "Well, it's the middle of the night. I don't want to leave the room. Of course, if you say so, I won't leave

the room." He said, "I shall put a guard at the door and I'll see you in the morning."

So, in the morning, first thing, there he was. I said, "Well, do tell me what this is all about." He said, "I don't know any more than you do, but I am ordered to accompany you back to Algiers. We have first-class authorisation for travel to Algiers, which means to say that we'll be taken on the flight, even if generals are thrown off. We report to the military airfield at once."

So, we were flown back to Algiers and to allied headquarters, Eisenhower's headquarters there, and I was still under some sort of guard. I had no freedom at all. I was accompanied by armed guard. Eventually, after a lot of hanging around, I was marched into the office of Jock Whitley, General Whitley, who was the British General on Eisenhower's staff.

I was pretty well [burning 0:32:25] with indignation at this stage because you must understand that a war correspondent is only a civilian in uniform. He's not under military orders at all. I said, "I demand to know what this is all about." He said, "We've brought you here on the charge, which is laid against you by the General commanding the First Army, that you have seriously misrepresented the share of the First Army in the Allied victory in North Africa."

I said, "But I have not been reporting the First Army. I have been with the Eighth Army. I am accredited to Montgomery and the Eighth Army. I'm not reporting the First Army."
"Nevertheless, you have seriously misrepresented."

He then produced a script, a transcript of something of a dispatch I'd sent and which the BBC had broadcast, which had described the final advance on Tunis, in which Eighth Army and First Army had come together. Since I was with the Eighth

Army Forces advancing on Tunis, I had written about them. I had not written about or spoken about the First Army, because Howard Marshall was supposed to do that. I wasn't covering the First Army. Howard was covering the First Army.

I said, “But I was only doing my job.” “You have consistently, throughout the campaign, given too much weight to the Eighth Army,” but I said, “Let me say it again: I was the Eighth Army correspondent. I didn't determine the ratio of Eighth Army to First Army material used on the BBC. That's determined by the editors back in London.”

“I sent my stuff about the Eighth Army, Marshall sent his stuff about the First Army back to London, and in London they decided which was the more interesting. It's not my fault if they found the Eighth Army more interesting than the First.” In fact, the Eighth Army – the First Army – of course, had made rather a mess of it. General Anderson made a shocking mess of it. He was never heard of again.

I was harangued as if I were a common criminal, by Jock Whitley, and treated as an absolute outcast and practically sentenced to death. I mean, he [was talking 0:34:24], “I’ve a very good mind to send you back home, a very good mind to deport you from this [theatre of war] altogether,” and so on. I said, “If you do, of course, I shall make every representation when I get back, about this particular issue, because you're being very unjust to me.”

In the end, he calmed down a bit and said, “Well, you'd better to go back to Tunis and get on with your job.” I said, “Do I get first-class travel authorisation?” and he said, “Yes,” so back to Tunis I went, though of course the war was over, but it did me no harm, this.

It does demonstrate, really, the ignorant attitude of the military authorities at that time towards the way in which the war was covered by an institution like the BBC. It did me no harm, because, of course, Monty got to know about it very soon indeed.

Monty was tickled pink to think that I had been brought to trial, so to speak, because I had given more emphasis to his Army than I had to General Anderson's army. Monty always used to say to me, “Anderson is no more than a good, plain cook,” (Laughter) and so he was delighted about this. He’d always been good to me up to then, but from then on I was the blue-eyed boy. This stood me in good stead for the whole of the rest of the war, and in the years after the war, too. So, I remember that.

In Italy, there was another BBC man around. This was Denis Johnston, but Denis wasn't really a newsman. He was a features man. I never knew where Denis was. He just was not a man for day-to-day reporting. He couldn't do it. Much of his time, he was in Yugoslavia with the partisans and that sort of thing, so I really had to do – in fact, just not ‘really’, I, indeed, had to do – all the day-to-day reporting, from both Mark Clark’s army, which was on the Mediterranean coast of Italy, and from Monty’s army, which is on the Adriatic coast, the [___ 0:36:16] side.

This took a lot of organisation. This took a lot of organising. Really, I had to break my rule about only reporting what I saw with my own eyes if I was to… I couldn't be on two fronts at once. So, I had to depend very much on cabled material, but, understandably, the newsroom was, first and foremost, anxious to have the news. That wasn't a totally disastrous situation.

I worked out a very simple system, really. I found out that the censorship unit in the field, with either Monty's army or Mark Clark's army, was in touch with the Army Group Intelligence department, around about four o'clock every afternoon. So, whichever side of Italy I was on, I turned up at the forward censorship tent at four o'clock in the afternoon and just said to the officer in command, "What are you passing today?"

He would say, "You can have we've advanced so much in this sector and we've been knocked back a bit here. We had great success over something else," you see. I would just take down those words that he spoke, and hand them back to him so that there wasn't a moment's delay. He instantly put his censorship stamp on them and handed them off for transmission by cable. They had to be cabled to New York and then from New York to London, but they were in London within a few minutes.

This, at any rate, gave the newsroom here in London the guidelines for the six o'clock bulletin and the nine o'clock bulletin, and, of course, on the Overseas Services, all the intermediate bulletins. Then I went away and wrote my own story of the day, what I had seen with my own eyes. That could be a much more leisurely affair, but this was getting across very rapidly indeed to the BBC.

I didn't realise quite how rapidly until I received – and I was with Mark Clark's Army at the time, on the Naples side, on the Mediterranean side – an invitation from General Alexander, who I knew very well, to come across to his headquarters, right across on the other coast of Italy, a long way away, for dinner tomorrow night and state the mess.

You can't refuse the Army Group Commander. I didn't want to, so I hopped in my Jeep and drove over the Apennines and down the other side, and we had a very agreeable meal. His Chief of Staff was there, and it was all very nice. Then, after

dinner, he sat back and said, “Well, Gillard” – I don't think he ever called me Frank; Monty always called me Frank, but Alex, I think, always caught me Gillard – “I have a bone to pick with you.”

I said, “Really?” and he said, “Yes. You are beating the gun.” I said, “What do you mean, sir?” and he said, “I hear what my armies are doing, on the BBC, before I hear it through my own signals communications. Why is this?” I didn't know why. I was tempted to say, “Because your own signals communication system is so inefficient,” but that wouldn't do. You learned not to let your friends down, so I said, “I can't account for that at all. I'm working perfectly normally. It simply means, I suppose, that communication to London is quicker than communication back to you.”

He said, “No, that's not the reason at all, and you know it isn’t.” He said, “You have a secret transmitter up there somewhere, and you are beating the gun.” I said, “Of course I haven't. You're not serious about this?” He said, “I am. We all believe that you've got a secret transmitter. We're sure you have. You're in communication with London and you're sending uncensored material back over your secret transmitter.”

I said, “Well, sir, if you really think that, we ought to have an inquiry into it.” He said, “Oh, I intend to have an inquiry into it.” He said, “I’ve cabled Brendan Bracken today,” who was the Minister of Information in London, “And I’ve asked him to come out and investigate you.”

This was all said in the nicest way. Alex never had a row with anybody. He wasn't dressing me down or anything like that, but he was just telling me frankly, face to face, that he suspected that I was up to these underhanded tricks. It was ludicrous, so I said, “Well, very good. When he comes, if he comes, I shall, of course, be ready to cooperate with him.”

So, then we got back onto the old [___ 0:40:34] business, and we had a few more brandies, and we had a quite pleasant evening. I went to bed and next morning went back to my duties.

A few days later, [again] over with Mike Clark's Army, I receive another signal from Alex, saying, ‘Mr Haley of the BBC arriving here Friday. Report for dinner.’ So, again, I drove across the Apennines and I hadn't the foggiest idea who Mr Haley was. I had never heard of Mr Haley. I didn't know who he was or what he was, what post he held in the BBC or anything else.

I got to Alex's headquarters late in the afternoon, and I went into his office and saw his ADC and said, “Here I am. Who's Mr Haley?” The ADC said, “Well, you’ll very soon find out. He has arrived and he’s mad as hell with you because you should have been there to meet him.” I said, “How did I know where he was coming and when he was coming? I had no information about this.” “Well, you’d better go and see him.”

So, I was told where to find Haley and I found them all alone, in a miserably cold, little room. This was December, and Italy is very cold in December. Here was this man, and he was in a rage. I said to him, “You really must forgive me, but in the first place I don't think we've met before and I've no idea what your office is on the BBC. Secondly, I had no means whatever of knowing what time you were coming or where you were coming, and I couldn't possibly meet you. I've had to come. I've come several hundred miles in my Jeep, and a lovely, cold journey it has been, too. I'm delighted to meet you, but you really mustn’t blame me for not being there to receive you.”

So, he calmed down a bit, and it turned out, as he told me, that he had recently come in from Reuters, where he was Chairman of Reuters. He was Joint Managing Director of The Guardian Group, and Editor of the Manchester Evening News.

He'd just joined the BBC to be what was called Editor-in-Chief, and he was number two to the Director-General.

He had come out to investigate General Alexander's complaint against me that I was operating an illicit transmitter, so we, the two of us, Haley having recovered his composure a bit by now, had dinner with Alex that night, and Alex put forward his allegation. He also embroidered it by producing transcripts of a number of broadcasts that I'd done, in which he challenged the accuracy of my statements. Haley undertook to look into that, as well.

Then Alex said to me – and this was all very good-natured, we were still very friendly – Alex said to me, "I'm providing you with a staff car." It was a Humber Snipe saloon, quite a nice car, and a driver. He said, "I wish you to take Mr Haley around, to introduce him to all your acquaintances in both armies, Monty and Mark Clark's army, including Mark Clark and Monty. He must meet them both. Take him round, and show him the battlefields, and let him see everything he wants to see. In 10 days' time, bring him back here, and we will have another dinner together and we will settle the whole business. He will present his evidence to me."

Poor old Haley, you see, was a civilian. He was the only civilian in sight. He was wearing a blue, thin suit and he had an ordinary civilian sort of luggage and all. He was really a comic sight, but this staff car, fortunately, they piled in a couple of bed rolls for us, and the necessary extra equipment that you need if you're on military service, and off we set the next morning.

I spent the next few days taking Haley round and introducing him to everybody. It only took five minutes to persuade Haley that the business about the transmitter was rubbish. As to the disputed facts in the transcripts, I had documentary evidence

to prove every word I'd said, fortunately, so all that was cleared up immediately, but we had to spend 10 days in Italy.

As bad luck would have it, we were struck by a blizzard, a horrible period. This was when we were on the Adriatic side of Italy. We arrived late one night in a little seaside place called Vasto, on the Adriatic Coast of Italy, where Monty had his main headquarters. Not his own headquarters, because he lived at a forward headquarters, but his main headquarters, and we were due to spend the night there.

They had found billets for us, we were told, but, because of slippery roads and so on, we were awfully late getting in. It was long, long after dark. I guess it was late evening, and the Army headquarters didn't know where these billets were, so we were left on our own. I said to Haley, “We’ll doss down where we can.”

We found that in the town square of Vasto there was a public laboratory, which had a, kind of, little anteroom that you passed through before you got into the urinal section. So, I said to Haley, “I've slept in worse places than this. If you haven't, it's time you did,” and so we got out the bed rolls and we stretched them out in this anteroom adjoining the public lavatory.

The odour wasn't very pleasant, but at least we had a roof over our heads, which is more than I'd had for most of my time as a war correspondent, and there we slept on it. Or at any rate, there we spent the night. I slept. I don't know what he did.

Next morning, we went to Army Headquarters and we met Freddie de Guingand, who was the Chief of Staff. Freddie said, “I'm sorry, but I can't allow you on the roads. The roads are like ice, and I've still got to get my supplies through. We can only get a single-line column of traffic along the road up to Monty’s

headquarters. You'd better settle down here somewhere in Vasto until I tell you, 'You can go through.'"

So, I went out, and searched the town and found a pleasant little three-roomed bungalow on the coast, and I commandeered it, which one got used to doing during the war. I moved Haley in, and he and I had three days and nights there in this place, in which we were reasonably comfortable. He spent the time, he said, "I'm going to pick your brains now about the BBC. I'm going to find out all there is to know about the BBC."

At the end of it, we were able to go up to see Monty, and I could introduce Haley to Monty. I left them together, actually, and they had a very useful discussion, in the course of which Haley was able to extract from Monty an undertaking that Monty would back Haley in every effort he made to get the BBC properly recognised by the military authorities, because Monty by now had a very keen concept of the value of the BBC to the military commander, in two ways.

Monty was ready to be approached by the top man in the BBC, and he was ready to hear the case for great strengthening of the BBC on the spot. Not one poor little Gillard fighting desperately hard to cover two armies and tearing himself apart, racing over the Apennines day after day, from one front to another.

So, we finished up with an immediate supply of Army transport, immediately. We finished up with consent that I should not just have one extra chap; I should have four or five extra people to come out and join me. Wynford Vaughan-Thomas was one of them, his first war-reporting assignment. Tony Beckwith was another. Michael Reynolds was another. I can't remember the rest of them.

Shipping was to be provided for properly constructed recording vehicles, and these were properly… These were ambulance vehicles from which all the ambulance equipment was removed and the BBC fitted up instead with decent recording equipment and, as soon as possible, a full-sized transmitter so that we would be able to transmit direct from Italy into London.

That was really the product of Haley's visit to Italy. It took 10 days. I was determined to get him home by Christmas. I felt that, if he was bogged down in Italy over Christmas, he'd never forgive me. I was able, by pulling every string that was in my hand, to get him an allocation on an aircraft on Christmas Eve to fly back home.

Then I said to him, “Now you're going back home into a country which won't have any oranges for Christmas. It won't have any nuts for Christmas. It won't have anything like that, but they are here in Italy, so I'm going to load you up with all these things.”

Then the problem was, of course, was he going to be overweight and so forth? There wasn't a 44lbs baggage weight. This wasn't a civilian aircraft, but military aircraft were carrying other things, so I said, “Look, we can get back far more nuts if we crack them.”

So, the Editor-in-Chief of the BBC and I sat down just outside the airfield. We found a bridge with a parapet to it, and on that stone parapet we smashed hundreds of walnuts and threw the wooden, the nutty part into the river, and saved the kernels and put them into bags so that, when he got on the aeroplane, he had a great load of oranges. He had a great load of cracked walnuts and various other things, which he took back home.

Every time I meet him now, even last week, he reminded me of this and says that, in fact, he met somebody last year who

alleges that he saw the two of us by the bridge by the airfield, cracking nuts and loading him up with things to bring back to England.

But that was how the BBC was able, first of all, to convince the man at the top of the BBC that we needed proper materials and resources if we were going to do a good coverage of the war, because those three days in Vasto enabled Hayley to quiz me about the BBC. But it also enabled me to get at him and preach my doctrine about what was necessary if the BBC was going to give proper coverage to the remaining phases of the war, and also to suggest that the whole of the BBC's future depended on whether we did the job properly or not.

It did the missionary job on Haley, and it also did the missionary job on Monty, which was conveyed back because, in no time at all, Monty was transferred back to England to be the Army Group Commander for the landings in France so that, when the BBC's case was put to the War Office for full facilities for the D-Day landings and so forth, nobody said, "No."

Interviewer: You should, perhaps, add a sentence that Alexander was convinced in the end

Frank Gillard: Yes, indeed. (Laughter) Of course, there was no problem when we had the final debriefing, so to speak, with Alex, that Haley was able to say to him, "I've been into all this and I can assure you that Mr Gillard is behaving perfectly properly. There has been no question of an illicit transmitter. As to these disputed dispatches, here's the evidence which proves that what he said was correct."

END AUDIO

www.uktranscription.com