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Sir Richard Francis: Part 1

Table of contents

THIS ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC insert:

Frank Gillard talking with Richard Francis

Part One

RECORDED 22nd October 1986

Transcribed from an audio cassette for the BBC Sound Library
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IDENTIFICATION

REEL 1

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC - 22nd October 1986, recording in London. And the contributor this morning and today is Mr Richard Francis, whose BBC career ran from 1958 to 1986.

GILLARD: After Oxford, you er.. had your military service, and then you got your first taste of broadcasting.

FRANCIS: Yes, it was while I was doing National Service. In fact, while I was at Oxford I'd done a fair amount of work with OUDS and most particularly the Experimental Theatre Group, and actually was one of the instigators of the Oxford Review Group - review and cabaret being one of the ways in which I wasted my Oxford years. So, it was fairly natural that when I got to BAOR I should be hauled in as an Entertainments Officer first for the Regiment, 45 Field; then for the garrison in Dortmund; and then, after that, into working for BFN and producing, would you believe, live light entertainment for the British

Forces Network. A hairier operation I cannot think of! On one occasion my star turn - who happened to be my driver - was a wonderful harmonica player. He was also a hotblooded Scot and the night before the big concert to be live on British Forces Network, he went and got himself arrested by the German Police for getting into a rough house in a pub down in Lower Dortmund. Well, instead of taking the final dress rehearsals on the day of transmission, I spent most of the day negotiating with the German Police, the Red Caps and everything else to get his release. And er.. I recall that we were already live on the air and he hadn't arrived, and I was on the stage introducing the show as well as sort of producing it, and I was shuffling the running order when I heard off stage "Left right, left right, left right, left right, left right, left right. Party halt!" And indeed, the Red Caps had marched him to the stage during the performance so that he could perform. (LAUGH)

GILLARD: Well, anyway, you had this taste for broadcasting, so you applied to the BBC and you were accepted as a trainee.

FRANCIS: That's right. That was.. I'd actually joined de facto as Associate Producer of SATURDAY NIGHT ON THE LIGHT, produced by John Bridges. I joined after about 2 or 3 editions, and this was the.. to start with, 3-hour programme running on the Light Programme on Saturday evenings. It was the first sequence programme. And it had little sort of 3-minute clips, some of which were speech items from people such as Stan Unwin and Gerald Hoffnung and other favourites, and there were also... there was also strip music provided by the.. the

Northern Dance Orchestra. And I remember coming into the studio on my very first day, which happened to be a Saturday, which was the Saturday - I think it was the 8th of August - expecting to see the orchestra sitting there and playing in 3-minute bursts between the speech. I was rather disappointed on entering S2 in the bowels of Broadcasting House. Nonetheless, I learnt a great deal from John. (Mmm) And that, of course, was in Features Group, and it was Lawrence Gillins' Features Group in those days. I remember attending a Departmental meeting held by Lawrence in his flat, which was alongside Regent's Park. That was on account of the fact it was a Test Match day and one could watch it on Television, I think from about sort of 12.30 to 1.30 and then we had a working lunch and then there was a bit more Television in the afternoon. And during that meeting, which must have been sort of late August/early September, Lawrence announced that shortly he would be departing to sail around the world to gather material for his Christmas Day programme. But on the other hand, the whole Department was imbued by Lawrence's spirit. It was a Department of poets, both literally and metaphorically. John Bridges' was one of them in his way. (Mmmm) Rebel poets one might even say. (Mmmm) And I for one was very sad to see the old Features Department go. The very fact that it sort of didn't quite have a place in the natural order of events was a rather..an important ingredient.

GILLARD: This seems an odd background for somebody who was to become the BBC's guru of News & Current Affairs.

FRANCIS: Er.. yes it is in a way. It's partly because when I was at Oxford I hadn't really resolved whether I was going to go into the serious business of politics, or whether I was going to go into the less serious business of the theatre. I... in fact what happened was I got a Natural Science Scholarship to Oxford, and they put me in a white coat and expected me to spend the afternoons in the chemistry labs, and that proved to be rather a frustrating experience, and after some negotiation I managed to hang onto my Degree and change course to PPE, and during the course of that - partly because I had a mathematical background - I became very interested in the study and analysis of politics and the budding er.. science of sophology (PH) under one David Butler, for it was to him that I used to go down in Nuffield College with my pathetic attempts at essays. So, when I left Oxford, feeling somewhat beholden to my parents, and feeling that I ought to do something more serious that simply going on the boards or directing the theatre - a rather sort of dodgy life - I settled really in a sense for a compromise, which was the BBC, whereby you could get a salary for a traineeship, which was essentially being a traineeship in broadcasting but with some management aspects, and in that sense it seemed to me that I was satisfying, albeit on a compromise basis, this rather complicated set of yen. In other words, I hadn't decided precisely what I wanted to do and the BBC was a good place to go to make that decision. (YES..) And then, incidentally, because I had already, simultaneous with my applying for a traineeship, been offered by John Bridges the Associate Producership of SNOL, automatically I took that as my first attachment, and subsequently I did a production training course and so on. In fact, by choice I elected to go first to Light Entertainment, Radio and then

to Light Entertainment, Television, and then to Drama, Television - not really by that stage because I had any real intention of making those my career, but I wanted while I had the opportunity to learn about the professional way of doing things.

GILLARD: Sure. But then by 1960 you were lodged in Television, weren't you?

FRANCIS: I was. But what was interesting is this that at the time Doreen Williams was running Womens' Programmes as it was called, later to be called Afternoon Programmes for they took place in the early afternoon. And she was looking for a little bit of sort of professional bite and, frankly, a few males around the place, and so I opted to go to her for my first substantive job, rather than go to be teaboy on PANORAMA, which most trainees did. That is why I ended-up in Threshold House, first of all working as a Production Assistant and Studio Director and then Film Director for WEDNESDAY MAGAZINE, produced by Lorna Pegram. Then doing one or two programmes of my own. Notably, i started the series called TABLETALK where we put a lot of young, budding politicians - anybody less than an MP - you couldn't take part if you'd already got a seat. And there would be 6 or 7 of them sat round an oval table and we would actually feed them lunch to sort of warm them up a bit, and warm them to one or two current themes and then either Irskine Childers or Andrew Gardener - who alternated as Chairman - and sometimes both sat at the table because they were men of opinion as well as being Chairmen - would take them through half a dozen issues of the day. A bit like the sort of ANY QUESTIONS format whereby you'd alternate

serious and light issues of the day. And these people would air their views. And there were people like Geoffrey Howe and Shirley Williams and Gill Knight, David Steel, who all tossed their pennies in before they were MPs.

GILLARD: And of course this was all black and white and it was all live and I suppose it was Television on a shoe-string really, wasn't it?

FRANCIS: It was very much so. I mean the fact is that with the TABLETALK programme I had a secretary, and she was a mere secretary and she had a boyfriend and spent plenty of time with him, and together we shared all the duties of editor, producer, studio director, researcher, production secretary, secretary of the whole caboodle. And I think it was important, actually, because it meant that one learnt all the facets of the art.

GILLARD: A darn good training and background experience anyway. Did anybody blurt out something controversial that landed you into trouble? I mean it so oftens happens in these unscripted, impromptu programmes.

FRANCIS: Well, the better answer is no, because although they may have said things which were controversial, a bit like Radio and you will appreciate that experience, it was a medium in which.. or rather it was a part of the medium in which you could actually say controversial things and they didn't hit the fan, and broadcasting on Television at

lunchtime is rather the equivalent of broadcasting on Radio, except at breakfast time.

GILLARD: Yes, yes, yes. Well, this led you on of course. What was you next move, so to speak?

FRANCIS: Well, I had been angling to to make the move which was inevitable in my mind and by now I was quite clear that I wanted to go the Current Affairs route to Lime Grove, Grace's Lime Grove, and Paul Fox was the Editor of PANORAMA. And I had come to their attention, partly because well Lorna had a baby, I produced WEDNESDAY MAGAZINE, and we were really quite sharp. We were a bit like WOMAN'S HOUR and we could be as topical and as pertinent, particularly with such issues as abortion and so on which in those days was fairly daring. And in a purely technical sense, the art of shooting TABLETALK in the round which one... which one to some extent had mastered, because of course there are a lot of reverse angle shots there, except that I used intermediate wide angle shots to disguise the effect. That had certainly come to Paul's attention, and PANORAMA was being badly directed in the studio at the time, and he invited me - it had to be a full producer, of course I was a full producer by then - to cross over to PANORAMA as a producer, primarily in the first instance as a studio producer. But as I'd also done quite a bit of filming for these afternoon programmes I quickly got onto the film road and because I was technically minded and always had been from the days when I got my Natural Science Scholarship to Oxford and read Maths, Physics and Chemistry, I was very quickly seen to be one of the people in Current Affairs who had a sort of technical mind as

well as a studio direction bent. And so with the onset of satellites, satellite programmes, I was very quickly one of those producers who got involved in that. Thus when Kennedy died, I had not long been in Current Affairs, but there I was producing the whole spate of programmes over the weekend after his death, quite simply because I was a mechanic. I was able to put all these things together and administer then and understood a bit about the technology.

GILLARD: Mmm. You of course were handling PANORAMA in the days of the great Richard Dimbleby. Can you tell us something about him?

FRANCIS: Yes, I mean Richard is one of those people who had a lasting impression upon me and of course not on me alone. He was an arch professional. I'm sure indeed you have written to that effect, you will appreciate that. I mean he taught me a great deal. He taught me about what not to do as well as what to do. He taught me, for example, as one of the producers or... oft time the producer acted as researcher for his items in the programme. In those days, each producer roughly speaking did one item per week, and there were about 3 or 4 items a week. So one had a segment of the programme, and being initially at any rate the studio producer, I would tend to produce the studio items, and being the man in the studio, Richard would tend to introduce them, and I very quickly learnt that you didn't present him with a full set of words. That if you tried to give him the conversational form of words that eventually would get out he would get very angry. So I also learnt the technique of writing the piece and taking out all the verbs and

adjectives and let him put them back in. (LAUGH) But there's a serious point there. It is that there has to be a sort of relationship between the researcher and the presenter in the sense that the presenter only then utters the words which he is happy with, which he believes in and which he knows. This, of course, was one of the keys to Richard's credibility. He never or except with...with very great exception, when there wasn't time, never read other peoples' stuff blindly over the air. Point one. Point two, of course, he had this great ability to so describe things and so address himself to things as to form some kind of compact with.. with the public at large. He was one of them. And although he did stand like a colossus over any production and in any studio, his attitude through the screen, his attitude to the public he was addressing was anything but domineering. It had great conviction, as when after the... after the Cuba Crisis, or rather during the Cuba Crisis, PANORAMA did one of its many specials, and he ended the programme by virtually telling the nation it could go to bed that night and sleep safely in its beds, and they believed him - a crucially important thing. I have to say, incidentally, that um... when er.. in the autumn of his death everybody saw him as one of the great losses to British Broadcasting - and no question about that - if not one of the greatest losses there has been. He was at the same time proving something of a problem for the Editor of PANORAMA, which by now was David Wheeler. And he felt that partly because of Richard's domination of the programme, and indeed the other reporters, but more particularly because as he saw it, Richard's lack of political acumen, he was becoming a liability. There was certainly a certain amount of tension, because, for example, Richard would tend not to be given the major

political interviews, and they would tend to go to Robin Day. So, there was tension there. I mean I... I would like to think that it would have been worked out because it would seem to me that whilst there was a Richard Dimbleby around it would unthinkable that the BBC's flagship should not have employed him as the presenter - such was his credibility. But, nonetheless, the truth is that questions had been asked before that final autumn. Richard's last year was traumatic. I mean it started in terms of trauma of course with the onset of the cancer again, and he made no great bones about that, even from that point on with the staff with whom he worked. Indeed rather the opposite, because as we all know eventually he was not only prepared to say that he had cancer but very keen to be seen to be saying it and certainly the medical profession felt that some of the taboos surrounding that disease were broken down by the way in which Richard himself, and indeed having the family do it for him, talked about the disease. And one of the things he asked for was that when he'd gone that we in PANORAMA should devote a whole issue to the research into cancer - and that we did in the January after his death.

IDENTIFICATION

ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC. This is the contribution by Mr Richard Francis and it's TAPE 2 and we're talking about.... Mr Francis talking about Richard Dimbleby.

FRANCIS: When Richard's ill....

RE-START...

GILLARD: MR RICHARD FRANCIS TAPE 2

FRANCIS: When Richard's cancer returned, the secondaries set in in the early part of '65 there was nothing in the manner, his manner towards film crews or studio crews, people to whom it wasn't already known, which would betray that. He was still his own benign self. He was always solicitous of everybody working on a programme, and they all felt that very much. Um..somebody with whom he had a particular relationship was Joan Marsden, the floor manager of PANORAMA in those days. And it really was a marvellous relationship and she was a great professional. Richard's ability actually to swing the programme almost like a sort of fighter pilot, banking first one way and then another, was legend. But of course it's very difficult to come out of a live interview and go into another subject, if you haven't got some form of crib sheet. On one occasion he had no such crib sheet, he was no-where

near the script, he was standing up in the middle of the studio and had to get from A to B but he couldn't remember what B was. So with great presence of mind he marched in front of a world map and said, "And shall we now cast the window on the world towards Russia or the United States or Southern Africa...?" (LAUGH) And when he hit the mark, Joan showed a thumb up and off we went. I.. think one of the sort of most dramatic things for him was when he swore live on the air. And that was when the Queen went to Germany and visited Berlin in May of '65. And this, of course, was an historic day for the Monarch to visit Berlin and go to the Wall. It had also been a terribly hectic day. Landlines were limited out of Berlin to West Germany. The world's media, not so very numerous in those days, but nontheless something like sort of 12 or 15 Networks, all wanted their commentary circuits and there was just not enough circuitry to go around. And even the super efficient Germans, it was ZDF on that occasion, made a nonsense of it. And many times during the course of the day at the various locations where there were cameras to provide for live picture coverage, we lost our commentary circuits or our production co-ord circuit or both, and it had been a very wearing day. And as well as that we happened to be interleaving with a Test Match, and of course you can never predict when cricket's going to be interesting or whether it's going to be dull, when it's going to be dull. And so it had been a pretty ghastly day, but nonetheless we rested on the notion that at 8.30 in the evening there would in fact be a pull together. And we had edited a package in Berlin and Richard would re-voice this live and out it would go and that would be the definitive story of the Queen's day in Berlin. So we looked forward to that and we got it all edited but when we were due to go on the air

there wasn't a single sound circuit through to London, and neither could we even get a telephone up. So we debated as to whether to go ahead on the clock and we decided we'd better not, and we managed to secure some kind of circuit after about 5 minutes - that's to say 5 minutes into the billed time for the programme to start. And so a great sigh of relief, we said, "Right we will use this circuit as the programme sound at the top of the next minute and go ahead..." And off we did. And after about a couple of minutes, back came a voice from London to say, "We don't know what you're doing there in Berlin but we're not getting any of it here." And we checked and he said, "No, no. No, we're not getting any picture and we're not getting any programme sound." And unfortunately Robin Scott was the fellow producer, I was on the talkback at the time. I said to Richard, "Richard, you may have thought we were going ahead and we'd gone ahead late but I have to tell you they're not getting us." And Jesus.... And he said, "Jesus wept. What the bloody Hell are these fff-ing Krauts doing now?!" Now, the untold story is that of course London was getting it. Yes, the first two words did go out and caused quite a stir and quite a few headlines, because in those days that would be seen as very much de rigueur. But all one can say is that London Control was sufficiently on the ball to get it out before the next disastrous sentence.

GILLARD: Dear oh dear.

FRANCIS: After the programme was over, Richard who would normally be so friendly and give.. give all thanks to everybody around the place, came storming up into the Gallery and this time he really was

black. He had taken no pleasure from this. He had taken no pleasure from the day. He was in some pain. And we wondered how we were going to pass the evening. When the German sound engineer, he was a very tall man, came in, Herr Tolmeister, and he clicked his heels and bent at the waist and said, "Herr Dimbleby, I am very honoured. I have always wanted to work with your BBC and today my ambition is fulfilled." And Richard collapsed into a great laugh and after that we had a relaxed evening. And then later in the year, in October, the Pope went to New York, and we were due to cover that live. By now travel was getting very difficult for Richard. And he came out to New York. He arrived on the Friday night, in fact it was about 6 o'clock on New York time and he insisted, despite fatigue, on getting a whole lot of research material. We took it to his room which was in the Ai Goncorin (PH). He ordered Eggs Benedict, nothing more hefty, and spent the evening doing his coloured cards, such that he put his...all his research material for his commentary on different coloured cards for quick access. The following day we had the er... the conference with the American Networks and the American pool and all the other broadcasters. And it was very interesting that such was his reputation, largely really stemming from the days of the death of Kennedy and what followed that, the Kennedy funeral, that at this conference at which the executive producer was giving mighty commands as only the Americans can do, he would be seen to be deferring to Richard. "Well, you reckon that'll make out, Mr Dimbleby?" That kind of comment. This was from the American executive producer. Later that day he went round the route. I remember there was a great big 20 stone black driver, Ed Studley, and he made his living out of showing people round New York and knowing.. knowing every stick

and stone. And we started off at Kennedy where the Pope would start off, and as we came in through Queens and on round Central Park and so on it ended up not by Studley telling Richard what was what, but by Richard telling him. (Mmm) Later that day, we were going to have that problem which always attain when you're live on the air in New York to London that you would finish your day's work at about sort of 5 or 6 o'clock New York time when London went to sleep. And I'd anticipated this, and Richard had a penchant for Sarde's and I said, "Oh Richard, by the way I've booked a table at Sarde's. Would you like to have a nice quiet supper there?" And he looked at me and said, "Well, I don't know that I can make that." He said, "What I'd really like to do is to go and see HELLO DOLLY." Now, HELLO DOLLY had been on quite a while but it was still an absolute sell-out, and here was Richard about half-past-five saying he wanted to go to HELLO DOLLY. And it's a great tribute to one or two people in the New York office, they managed to get us house seats, absolutely smashing seats - they were dead centre aisle about 6 rows back. And in that production they had a wonderful sort of apron which actually came out round the edge of the orchestra pit, so you had the great big swinging HELLO DOLLY number with the whole of the cast coming round literally within about sort of 10 feet of us. And Richard was in his element. But you know he never... never moved in the interval, he couldn't move in the interval. And afterwards we did take up the reservation at Sarde's, but he didn't eat very much, and the next day we packed him on a plane to London, and that was the last time he did a major OB.

GILLARD: What was the status of PANORAMA in those days?

FRANCIS: It was the programme, there's no question about that, and it's sons - the specials, the PANORAMA SPECIALS also had immense credibility and I think it was a coincidence of a number of factors which led to this. Partly it was the personality and the conviction which Richard Dimbleby carried. Partly because there wasn't very much else in the field - I mean there were no nightly Current Affairs programmes knocking-off the topics by the night. So they tended to wait for next Monday without too much difficulty. And that was a position not particularly threatened either by Television News, which was very much the slave of the aeroplane and News would tend to happen sort of 24-hours later when the film had been flown in and developed. And I think too it's partly editorial. News was still suffering from the aftermath of the Tarhuhoe (PH) influence, whereby it was a very narrow definition of what was News. So PANORAMA was left on its own and it was also under the Editorship of Paul Fox, highly reactive. I mean he would change the make-up of the programme, quite literally chuck extra items in at 5 o'clock on a Monday, and it was of course a magazine programme with 3 or 4 items, and they would be highly reactive. I mean in his day, it seems rather ludicrous now, the political travelogue had still not really been worked out - the scene had not been worked out. So to go and do a story about whither...Ethiopia, say, the week before somebody made a visit, was still a legitimate piece of Television journalism because nobody knew much about Ethiopia - and nobody had actually seen it on the box. Well, that, of course, was.. that particular vein has long been worked out. But it did mean that we would literally sit in an Editorial Conference on the Tuesday morning after a Monday night programme, and we would scan the newspapers and look-up our

world atlases or in the case of Paul Fox his Letts diary with its world of....its picture of the world on the inside leaf. (LAUGH) And we would deploy ourselves around the world, either on a Tuesday afternoon or a Wednesday morning to ask whither questions for the following Monday. And those of us who were out in the field were liable to be moved around. I mean David Webster tells the tale of when he was down in Miami chasing something or other apropos Cuba and Marylin Monroe died and Paul got on the 'phone and said, "Get me a piece back on the plane tonight from Los Angeles...' slightly forgetting the fact that it's a 5 hour flight from one coast to t'other. I was down in Cape Town, having done a great deal of stuff in the run up to UDI, and er.. Paul got on the 'phone, or rather I got on the 'phone from the Mount & Enson (PH) Hotel and told him about how it was going. And he said, "Hey have you heard the News?" I said, "Yes I have. I gather that Smithy did it this morning." He said, "Yes, get a piece on the plane tonight." It's 1400 miles from Cape town to Salisbury! However, back to the point about PANORAMA it did stand very much on its own. You had a very reactive Editor. It was a magazine format. What went wrong? Well, partly what went wrong was that other programmes burgeoned both in number and in their editorial scope. Also, I think a tactical error really of Current Affairs own making, with the appointment of Jeremy Isaacs as Editor, PANORAMA, he tended to go for single item programmes, definitive programmes on this and that running 40/50 minutes. The problem with that proposition is that more often than not it would turn out to be the wrong topic on the day in question. Furthermore, with the advent of BBC-2 and the opening-up of Kensington House and the Features Departments, there were a whole lot of other people in BBC Television

who were seeking to do definitive full length programmes. So it seems to me that there were the seeds of its own destruction there plus th...the additional competition gradually eroded its authority.

GILLARD: Tell us something about the.. the PANORAMA SPECIALS?

FRANCIS: Well, because PANORAMA in itself was the major Current Affairs vehicle - and I say that advisedly, because although TONIGHT was extremely popular in the evening newspaper sense, even the tabloid sense and led to a style of Television reporting which is present today in the.. in the Whicker programmes and so on, which is laced with wit and scepticism. So far as the flatfooted, firmfooted approach is concerned, PANORAMA most certainly was the stable, and one was very conscious that there had been two stables in Lime Grove. Arguably, to start with at any rate, there was the third stable which was the Hu Wheldon stable but that drifted off into another Department, not away from Lime Grove initially.

GILLARD: What were the two stables?

FRANCIS: The two stables were PANORAMA and TONIGHT. And what they'd bred were rather different animals, and I think you can see the effect of that in some of the sons of TONIGHT who have gone on to .. to senior office in the BBC and are still around today. And maybe the PANORAMA people were more flatfooted, but they were also more solid based. And therefore PANORAMA would do such things as a devaluation special and that sort of thing at very short notice, and it had the

expertise and the professionalism to be able to mount them very successfully. But equally, those of us on the programme, like all producers of all time, wanted to do single programmes. I remember doing one big programme on the hundred year promise, in which all the leading civil rights leaders in the United States came together to assess the extent to which the hundred year promise had been fulfilled in the period 1864/1964. Then we did another full length programme on the death of Kennedy, and that was a book which was based... that was a programme which was really based upon the Mark Lane book and it tested out various theories. I remember dramatically it tested out in .. in a studio set, whether or not Oswald could have fired the shots in the given time. And what we did for that exercise... first of all in order to demonstrate the circumstances of Deliah Plaza we had a...

REEL 2 ENDS

IDENTIFICATION

Mr Richard Francis **TAPE 3**

FRANCIS: We had a full scale model of Deliah Plaza in the studio, about 30 foot by 20 foot, which enabled Cliff Michelmore in the introduction to set the scene and quite literally sort of put everything in perspective. He looked like a great big um.. er... a great big Gulliver figure in a Lilliputian setting. But we also got the crackshot from the Royal Marines to lean over the top of the model of the Depository and with electronic firing to fire-off rounds as fast as he could to see whether or not Oswald could have fired the shots in the given time. And the interesting thing was even in those circumstances, i.e. relatively cool circumstances in the studio, the best shot in the Royal Marines could only fire as fast as Oswald was supposed to have fired. (Mmm) It doesn't prove anything, but it was obviously quite a dramatic moment in the programme.

GILLARD: You er.. during this period, your 10 years in Current Affairs, Television, I mean you were involved in a lot of political broadcasts, were you not?

FRANCIS: Yes. I mean I think one of the interesting things is this is that the PANORAMA team, because as I've said rather politically-minded, were also the people who were recruited to do the Party Political Broadcasts and the Party Election Broadcasts, and it was no skin off the politician's nose that even the same person might be

producing Party Politicals for the Tory Party, for Labour and for the Liberals. I did all 3. I was treated as a professional. I was taken into their confidence to the extent that you would have politicians turn-up in Lime Grove sometimes with a well-prepared script, often not with a script, sometimes with a few illustrations, a graph or two, a still or two, which we as Television professionals had to put into some shape or reject and recommend they should do so. Frequently, we'd have to clean-up their script and so on and make it broadcastable and the right length and everything else. So there was a.. there was a very close relationship between the professional producer, a BBC employee, who the very next week might actually be producing a tough Robin Day interview in the studio for PANORAMA. Indeed, I.. in the early part of 1964, the first 3 weeks, we had the Party Leaders on and we also had in the final one of the 3 the Prime Minister Home. Now there was a great of fussation because Sir Alec Douglas-Home at the time had a reputation for being rotten on Television, and one of the reasons that he was considered to be rotten was because he didn't look too good. He had a rather sort of death-like mask and therefore when he came to do a live interview, a full length interview in the studio with Robin Day, the BBC made enormous arrangements. The Head of Make-Up made him up. The Head of Lighting came and lit him and each came-up with sort of amazing conclusions. I remember the Head of Lighting decided that what he would end-up with was a little small spotlight about 2 feet off the studio floor sort of beamed-up at Home's face. In the event, I don't think anything of those things mattered. It seemed to me that what mattered was that he actually played the interview right and to use a cricketing analogy he was able to play the fast bowling of Robin Day a damn sight

better than some of the fiddley little interviews with which he'd become involved and upon which his reputation as being bad on Television was based. The faster that Robin Day bowled full length bowls straight at Alec Douglas-Home the better the PM batted them back. And it seemed to me that there was a lesson there because he was certainly one of those politicians who couldn't well-adjust to the notion of a quick statement, a door stepping interview, but in a fullblooded confrontation like that came off extremely well. Arguably, that interview was the start of his resurgence and making a very close thing of it in the October election.

GILLARD: Yes. What about the BBC's election programmes and the results programmes?

FRANCIS: Well, I didn't get involved with them until 1964, but I did get involved then, because Brian Cowgill was the Number One Director, brought in by Paul Fox who was effectively Editing, and Paul Bonnar was to have been the Number Two Director, but he went sick, and so I was dragged in as this new-found chap who seemed to know a bit about direction. And that was the start of my involvement, plus the fact, of course, that I did have a very real interest in stipology (PH), in the analysis of the results and the close relationship with David Butler. So I became one of the election team, and I think the important thing about those early elections, '64 and '66 to which.. in my case, was that it was a team and it was an ongoing team. It had to be an ongoing team between '64 and '66 because we really had to be ready to go with another election all the time onwards from '64, given the.. the small Labour majority. And what happened was this, that we had a series

of meetings in Lime Grove at which the various commentators and producers concerned would talk through the plans. Now this was crucially important because it meant for one thing we got our language sorted out and I mean, yes it was always a joke that there would be great rows between Bob MacKensie and David Butler as to what constituted swing, and two-party swing, an all-party swing and so on and so forth. But the main point was that we were talking about it. We were actually in dialogue, the team was formed. We had the graphics man there, we had the... even the operations & engineering people there. So that we were thinking about the operation. And I say that because I don't believe that that happens these days to anything like the same extent. Certainly, I think that one of the problems in election coverage over the last 15 years has been a problem of language. That what has not happened is the dry rehearsal of all the commentators from their different backgrounds and so on to come to some uniform language and approach. We even ran sort of rehearsals, dry runs, on different scenarios. I mean, if the Tories turn out to be miles ahead; if it's very close; if Labour's ahead etc., etc., how will we run the programme? That kind of... there was time in those days. Funnily enough, although we were all doing about 3 programmes a week we made time for that kind of intellectual basis for programming, which I don't find anything like so apparent and haven't done for some time nowadays.

GILLARD: But the great election night programme, I mean was already in a highly developed state, was it, by this time?

FRANCIS: Yes, I mean the breakthrough had really been in '59 and that was down to Michael Peacock very largely, but... and '64 which was really Paul's occasion, Michael Peacock by then being involved more as a sort of background, backroom guru.

GILLARD: And what about the events of the 1970 election?

FRANCIS: Well, 1970 was the first of the electronic elections really, because although in 1966 we had in.. we'd actually utilized a thing called Divcon, which was an American invention whereby you.. it was an electronic graphic which could be superimposed or ... blackedged, inlaided into the screen, and we'd only used it for off-line headlines and one or two sort of headline results. By 1970, not only had the BBC developed an Alpha Numeric Character Generator, christened ANCHOR - A.N.C.H.O.R. - but also we had devised a system of gathering all the results and putting them in the computer and the computer spitting out the answer in graphic form ready to go on the screen within a second-and-a-half. And we had a priority system whereby the priority cues such that the most important results would be guaranteed to come through the computer first. It would do the arguing for us because we had pre-set the criteria. So, really the first electronic election was 1970, because in addition to what was actually seen on the screen by the public, the commentators had a second monitor each on which they had ...a VDU display of the associated analysis for the results which were coming-up etc. Um... we even went to the extent of having the running order done graphically and electronically. And this is a very simple device because on that kind of programme you're for ever changing the

running order, necessarily, and a whole lot of people need to know. What we did was to have right at my elbow, 'cos I edited the 1970 election, a girl with a keyboard, and quite literally when I said we would go to such and such an OB next, we'll take a spate of results next, we'll analyse what's going on in Scotland next - all this was written on the screen and everybody knew exactly who was doing what next. As one person put it, it was as if you could see the Editor's mind dancing around - and it was!

GILLARD: Mmm fascinating., Now, some.. somewhat.. somewhere amidst all this range of experience, the 24-HOURS programme fits in.

FRANCIS: Yes it does. I mean in a funny sort of a way I didn't really feel the change because I.. in my years in PANORAMA I gradually moved away from the studio, first of all by taking the programme on OBs to some notable places. I remember we introduced the programme from the Ruhr on one occasion. We were the guest of Krupps and we had a dinner beforehand with some of the Krupps and the Directors and Richard of course and with great aplomb Richard said, "Do you know it's 20 years to the day since I was here. Mind you, I was at about 15 thousand feet at the time." (LAUGHTER)

FRANCIS: Later, for instance, we went to Berlin when the Wall was first opened. That was Christmas 1965 and Richard had just died and on that occasion it was Michael Barrett, but that was a spectacular live outside broadcast story from the Wall. It had a Mother Courage quality to it. The snow was floating down gently. The Vopos and the West

German, West Berlin Police, actually joined in singing SILENT NIGHT at one point, which was really quite amazing. And of course we had Willy Brandt and other politicians there commenting on it. But that was the kind of sort of programme risk that one was prepared to take. It was a hair raiser - anything. I mean we'd only fix it up at the last moment. In fact, so much so, that on the previous Monday we'd decided that what we wanted was some kind of Christmasy item with a bit of political bite and we'd eschewed the Berlin Wall thing partly because there was no certainty it was going to be open on that Monday.. for the following Monday. And we'd gone for the singing nun who was.. who was a Belgian and she had made a pop record and gone to the top of the charts. And that seemed to be a very good possibility and there was a real possibility that we'd get her. In the end, I think the Mother Superior objected, but nonetheless, back I came from an abortive trip to Brussels, with the news already in that the Berlin Wall was going to be opened for people to return to the East, and so I said, "Right, well let's switch our attention to Berlin." And so David Wheeler said, "Fine, if you can get a crew." And I rang round and I got a ZDF crew from Minsk and made them drive all the way from Minsk out to Berlin. We set the whole thing up - none of them spoke English, my German improved by leaps and bounds I'll tell you. And we had this live OB and it was about a 25-minute item - we actually over-ran the time because it really was an amazing scene. But those were the kind of programme risks you took, and that of course by... one of the consequences was you got whopping audiences. There would have been 14 or 15 million people watching that PANORAMA that night.

GILLARD: So now lead us on to 24-HOURS.

FRANCIS: Well, the transition to 24-HOURS was not all that great, although by now I'd .. been an Assistant Editor of PANORAMA, I was now one of the Assistant Editors of 24-HOURS and had to do my stint as Editor-of-the-Day. But when I wasn't being Editor-of-the-Day I would tend to try and mount the programme more often than not live from somewhere. Thus we did the first live broadcast from Africa from Tunis. That was a bit of a scrape because what happened was a generator feeding a link in Sicily was got at - we always thought it must have been the Mafia because they hadn't been paid enough, but nonetheless we lost the feed for about the first 20-minutes - but we got it over in the end live from Tunis. Then, tragically, we did the programme live from Aberfan on that terrible day. It was, I think, the first time I realised what it was to be involved with something as cataclysmic in human terms as a journalist, as a working journalist. And surprising myself at the numbness that I felt - not so much numbness in terms of shock, but standing off the problem and not being involved while I was there. And I mean first of all we'd gone into the office for the editorial meeting. We were wearing ordinary clothes and ordinary shoes. I had quite a young suit on and quite young shoes on, and quickly we mounted a party to go down there and we decided, because of course the M4 wasn't in existence in those days, the best way to get the production team down there quickly would be to charter a plane, an old DC3 from Gatwick to Cardiff. Arrived about lunchtime. By then BBC Wales were in situ on the ground in Aberfan. No communications with the people who were there because all the 'phones was out. But they had sent cars and things for

us at Cardiff Airport. We drove up to Aberfan. And it was actually impossible to.. to feel it. And this was, as I say, the first time that I realised that it was because one had a professional job to do that one could be distanced from the emotions, at any rate temporarily while one was doing it. We set up a series of programme feeds, not only for the BBC but for the world, live. We had absolutely no incoming communication. We did have a battery operated set so we could watch BBC-1. And short of running up the hill to the nearest 'phonebox that was working, and that was about a mile, we had no communications for cueing. So what we settled into was a routine whereby we knew in advance roughly when we'd be coming up and at the end of each feed we said, "And we shall be reporting again at such-and-such a time." And so Presentation knew when to return to us and we watched BBC-1 and when they said, "And now to Aberfan..." we started. But I remember, apart from the sheer horror of the occasion and the logistic problems, the sort of peril that live programming could bring. David Lomax, for whom I have a high regard, particularly when doing sensitive interviews, had tried to piece together with close witnesses what had happened. And he had various people including teachers in the school, who got out of the school. But one absolutely key witness, and key witness to the enquiry as it subsequently turned out, was a little girl. And she had lost her friends in her class and what she said was that she remembered this bang and that's the last thing she remembered. Not slurry, bang. As it turned out this was a crucially important piece of evidence, because indeed....

IDENTIFICATION

ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC - Mr Richard Francis, **TAPE 4**

FRANCIS: We'd been looking around for witnesses and we found quite a number including teachers, but also some of the children. And one absolutely crucial witness, crucial to the subsequent enquiry as it turned out, was a little girl who spoke of hearing a bang, nothing else. No talk of slurry or anything, and then the next thing she remembered was being given sweeties and wanting to give some of the sweeties in the bag to her friends, who of course were not there to give them to. Now this story was important because, as it subsequently turned out, many of the children it is felt died because of the impact, the shock wave before they were so to speak drowned by the slurry. And off we went to do this sequence, and David Lomax interviewed this little child, who'd been very self-possessed earlier, and he had to prompt her to get this story out and it all went terribly wrong. And when he got to the point of saying, "And what happened then?" And expecting that she would say, "I just heard this bang..." she broke down and cried for her friends live on the air, and there was very serious repercussions in the sense that people said, "How callous can you be...?" and so on and so forth. And also a lot of people said, "Well you shouldn't do that sort of thing live." Well, the fact is there was no possible means of recording there but it was an object lesson. You've got to be extremely careful with children.

GILLARD: Yeah.

FRANCIS: But I remember what happened was this that we went on literally feeding - that horrible American word - but quite right in the circumstances, all-comers, because all the American Networks and others wanted material, and so it was we weren't really through until midnight, and we had obviously been tramping over the site and we'd been to the Chapel - that awful place where all the bodies were laid out for identification. And we'd had it.. I mean literally we had the slurry up to our knees and out suits and our shoes were ruined, but we'd had 'it' up to here, up to.. up to the throat. Fortunately, arrangements had been made for us all to have rooms in the St Melon's Country Club Hotel, between Newport and Cardiff and they had very kindly said, "Look, we'll lay on a cold supper and it doesn't matter what hour you come in there'll be suppers laid out." I guess we got there about 1 o'clock in the morning, which was by now early hours of Saturday, and we were stinking and filthy, and gradually we were breaking down and realising that but for the grace of God it could have been our children there. And the very fact that we had been numbed and anaesthetized earlier made this.. this moment of sort of thawing out the worse. And we were really in quite some state. I remember simply being tensed at that point and I hadn't sort of broken down to tears. But as we tried to get into the Hotel in our filthy condition, out were coming a whole lot of what in these days would be called 'Hooray Henry's' in their dinner jackets.

GILLARD: Yes.

FRANCIS: Having had their.. had their dinner dance that night. And they started to throw some adverse comments towards us and

the crew and so on and so forth, and I remember letting fly - I mean verbally, I was so deeply offended that there could actually be people within a few miles of this scene who'd spent the evening jollying along in their dinner jackets. It seemed to me one of the greatest obscenities.

GILLARD: You did of course... you covered an enormous number of stories overseas, didn't you?

FRANCIS: Yes, I suppose the Africa one was one of mine. I did Southern Africa a large number of times. I remember we.. we did a run of programmes. We tended to go on tours and keep sending stuff back. I did a number of programmes at the time of U.. UDI. In fact we'd been in Zambia. We'd done a programme about one year of Zambia's Independence. We had filmed Kenneth Kaunda talking about the future of his country whilst driving a tractor. That was the era when you never did an interview in a static position or a normal position and if you could possibly make a President or a Prime Minister drive a tractor and be interviewed about the future of his country you did so. Cameraman sitting on the tractor wing I recall. We'd done all that and then we went down to Salisbury to cover Wilson's trip to Salisbury and er.. that I remember very distinctly because on the Saturday when he left he was fairly confident that he had managed to achieve a modus vivendi with Ian Smith, but more important he had talked to various businesmen, farmers, planters etc., who he called 'the natural opposition' because they were all against the notion of UDI and they were worried. They were moderate in their political views and they had their businesses and their farms

to worry about. But he had great confidence that there was indeed a natural opposition to Smithie. And he said in a memorable phrase which we filmed on his Comet as we flew in from Salisbury to er.. Victoria Falls. He said, "There will be no UDI in the foreseeable future." Well, that was Saturday lunchtime and Smithie declared UDI the following Thursdsay. Er.. we got off at Niagra Falls incidentally and went about our business, and he flew on back over the Bush. I.... there was one of those little tiffs with Number 10 which sort of have always taken place through the years. As well as interviewing Wilson up in the First Class Section of the plane we thought we had better take a few shots of Number 10 at work, 'cos he had sort of quite a lot of the Number 10 staff doing their routine office work in the back of the plane, and there were secretaries typing and so on and so forth. And so we filmed and we took an over shoulder shot of one the secretaries who was hard at work over the African Bush, typing out the business of the State and what she was typing was 'Harold and Mary thank you for your kind invitation...' (LAUGH) and there.. there was a terrible fuss because that was deemed to be unacceptable.

GILLARD: Oh I bet, yes.

FRANCIS: However, when.. when Smithie declared UDI the following Thursday we were already down in South Africa filming a story about the South African Press and the extent to which that personified a reasonably pluralistic approach to South Africa - something which of course is still true in ... to some extent today. And Paul Fox demanded that we get back up to Salisbury to do the story of UDI. Well, we did.

We didn't quite get it out on a plane that night because it took some time to fly up from Cape Town to Johannesburg and thence to Salisbury. When we got there we found that the natural opposition, of which Harold Wilson had been speaking one week earlier, had evaporated, because to use an analogy once Smithie cast off the boat all the farmers and all the planters and all the other people who might have opposed him politically were in the same boat with him, rowing with him.

GILLARD: Yeah.

FRANCIS: And that was the story in a way of.. of UDI. Um.. I of course went back to Rhodesia during the period of UDI and during the period when Ronnie Robson was the correspondent in Salisbury, and having a very rough time because gradually the Rhodesian authorities put the pressure on the European journalists and not least the British journalists and the BBC. And one of the ways they did it, they required all expenses, including for circuits and telexs to be paid for in cash on the nail, otherwise they wouldn't take circuit bookings and they wouldn't pass telexs. But not only that, the cash had to be either the .. the illegal so to speak Rhodesian currency, or any other currency but Sterling. So anybody who went into Rhodesia was under some obligation to try and feed Ronnie with a basket of currencies. And I did one of those runs and it was a bit hairy because it was obviously illegal. What happened was this that I took delivery of I think it was 14 hundred pounds, which in those days was quite a lot of money from a Bank in Johannesburg. It was all set-up by the BBC in London. In 10 currencies, Yens and Swiss Francs and things. And having thought about

how to do this and not of course being in a position to tell Ronnie what I was doing, I made arrangements to fly up on the last plane of the night from Johannesburg - in fact it was the BA London flight. And it was going Johannesburg/Salisbury/Nairobi/London. And I had this money which I put in a bag and I put in the hold, or rather I got a porter to put in the hold, a big black porter, together with my other baggage. And I checked it all in falsely. I got my baggage checked into Nairobi. So the consequence... or rather I got that bag checked into Nairobi, I beg your pardon. This was all worked out. I'm not saying it was the best way to do it I'm saying... telling you what happened. And what happened was this that when we arrived at Salisbury lo and behold I was one bag short. Meantime the London plane was sort of itching to get away. Meantime the Immigration People had checked all the baggage through and so on and so forth so they had gradually filtered off, save about one man who reluctantly stayed back for this shemozzle while they searched the plane to see if there was one bag falsely labelled. And lo and behold there was one bag with my name on it falsely labelled for Nairobi and with a sigh of relief they found it, threw it at me and said, "Go on, don't be so damn silly next time..." or whatever, and off I went. It's typical of Ronnie Robson that he could hardly contain his glee as this great bag of money was delivered.

GILLARD: Yes. Um..

FRANCIS: Yes I mean the Africa run was not the only run I did but I think in many ways some of the more memorable stories - I remember doing Schweitzer at the age of 90 with Michael Barrett, and all this...

is filming in another age really because we did it extremely quickly but we got some absolutely marvellous and telling film. Of course, he was to die later that year before he reached his 91st birthday and the film that we had shot and shown on PANORAMA on his 90th birthday quickly became the substance of the obit. But I think of all the people I met in that period - Adenauer and Schweitzer were the two persons who had the greatest impact upon me in terms of their personality. Schweitzer was quite remarkable because not only did he have a mesmeric personality but.. which one felt one to one, but he had this tremendous effect upon all the people around him, and of course in many ways medically it forestalled progress. But the fact is that many people were also healed by Schweitzer by dint of faith, no question about that. But he ran that hospital with immense autocracy. I mean he had this.. this strange parade in the morning, whereby the relatives of those who were in the hospital who were meant to come along and not merely look after their er.. loved ones who were sick, but also to work to pay in kind for their upkeep, were quite literally paraded, rather like sort of Ragtag and Bobtail Home Guard, in front of Schweitzer's hut at 8 o'clock in the morning or whatever hour, and detailed off to go and work in the plantations and so on and so forth under the supervision of these rather austere pith-helmeted Swiss Sisters. And that was the way he ran it. But he.. but again you see Schweitzer had a.. a strange um.. and in a sense advanced notion of public relations. Not only did he managed to capture great quantities of money from all sorts of philanthropic institutions and philanthropic minded people but he understood entirely about films and.. and PR. And when, for example, we took the final shot, we designed it perhaps with some idea that one day in .. it would

be part of an obit, the final shot was to be us casting off with the camera across the great Ogui River with Schweitzer waving his pith-helmet, standing on the bank. Well we did it to start with and there was no point in doing it in one of the dugout canooes which were paddled by lepers far too slow, so it had to be in one of the doctor's motor boats. Wrongly, the first time round, we did it rather slowly thinking it was better to keep the camera fairly stable and not rocking too much, so we went off at a steady pace and the shot took far too long and there was no dramatic effect. But to our horror, of course, Schweitzer having waved turned upon his heel and staggered back up to the village, aged 90.

GILLARD: Yes.

FRANCIS: When we realised that the shot really was no good and the cameraman, Eric. Eric Dershmeed, who was a splendid cameraman, knew exactly that it wasn't going to work. We said, "Well for goodness sake can we possibly get Schweitzer back again?" And so arrangements were made and swiftly he turned upon his heel came down and did a retake.

GILLARD: Mmm even at 90 - did you get caught up in Vietnam?

FRANCIS: Yes, I got caught up in Vietnam, and that's quite literally what happened. By now I was Head of Special Projects, having incidentally been promoted because I left the Corporation to bid for one of the Chalkser contracts. Michael Peacock and myself were the only two

who were forced to leave because we were the only two BBC people who elected to go and present our consortia's cases in front of the IBA in Brompton Road and that was the criterion whereby you had to leave if... You could have your name on the piece of paper but if you turned up in front of the IBA it was decided you had to leave. So off we went.

GILLARD: You didn't get it.

FRANCIS: No, I got promotion instead, as of course Aubrey Singer did because he was subsequently asked to be Controller of Programmes for Yorkshire for the winning consortium and he was kept on board by dint of promotion. It's an outrageous system. (LAUGH) But anyway, I digress. I was going to mount a major special on Vietnam in the early part of 1968. Because during 1967 the Americans had been making some fairly bullish noises about winning it and there was certainly some scepticism as to whether they could win it and anyway there was certainly some scepticism as to what it was they were winning because the.. there was no question about it, but the Saigon regime, Chu en Kee (PH) were pretty rocky. So we thought that rather than just these News Reports which.....

END TAPE 4

IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC - Mr Richard Francis and this is now **TAPE 5**

GILLARD: And you said you arrived just as TET (PH) had broke about your ears in Vietnam.

FRANCIS: Er yes, in fact, of course, it had started by the time I flew in because the way in which I had planned the Special was to go first of all to the US and talk to various people in Washington, try and line-up their views and possibly line-up their contributions. And then move out Westward to Vietnam. Well, TET broke while I was in the States and so but for a night in Hawaii, I went straight on out to Saigon. And found there what everybody found there which was the most amazing er... it had the most amazing impact. I mean the Americans had got it all wrong. They had literally assessed the situation on the ground, falsely, and.. and in many ways exaggerating the peace pacification . They were suffering from a major case of self-delusion, even in military circles. For example, quite a long way into my stay there - I was there for about 2 months from the early part of January to er... to er the middle of March, on my birthday, the 10th of March, I went with er.. Barry Zorvin (PH) who was the chief of JUSPAO - the Joint US Public Affairs Office - and he took us on a trip of the Delta, through various places like Kandho (PH) which was the headquarters of the er.. of 4 Division, Porcore (PH) I beg your pardon. And er.. he said, "Look I'd like to run you round the Delta because you boys are all

saying that we haven't got a grip of it here and I want to show you that this place is fully pacified." Well, the first place we flew to in his plane, I think it was an Otter, or something like that - it was a Canadian plane with about 7 seats and a pilot you could talk to up the front - was the province capital of the province immediately adjacent to Cambodia on the coast. And this had for a long while been blue on Admiral Comber's map in Saigon, which meant that it was pacified. And when we got to the province capital we noticed that the pilot was actually circling the main street of the town and not the airstrip, which was a couple of kilometers, two clicks, south. And we shouted up to him, "What's going on?" And he said, "I've got to make it on the main street because Charlie's got the strip and all the town's people are all over the main street." And this was about sort of 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning. That was a pacified province! Well, good God, when we got on the ground we were met by the Peace Corps Chief in a jeep with a Chinese AK47 across his lap, who said, "Jump in let's go this is Indian country." And we went straight down the main street, turned left in through a lot of sandbags, as if we were getting away from the Indians, getting into the fort, and that was the Peace Corps Headquarters for the province capital of a province which back in Saigon, and therefore Washington, they thought they'd pacified.

GILLARD: Mmm dear.

FRANCIS: Likewise, we went down to Kandtow and we saw there what had happened at the University. Now, of course, we'd got the story wrong because unless as journalists we had visited it we wouldn't have

seen what had happened. What happened was this that shortly after the start of TET, because TET sort of rumbled on and there were manifestations for quite a while. The new University there which had been set-up with American money as part of the pacification programme, a marvellous University, wonderful facilities, libraries, books etc., had been flattened, and it had been flattened by the United States Air Force and South Vietnamese Army Artillery. What had happened was this that the Viet Kong took possession of the University Buildings one night. The following morning an ARVEN Unit about 300 strong advanced straight across the open campus towards the buildings and took an enormous number of casulaties when the Viet Kong opened fire. So they went to ground and called for Air and called for Artillery, and after a while they got it at right angles to the line of advance. It was successful to the extent, if you can call it successful, if flattened the University. It also, as I recall, was responsible for about 300 civilian deaths in the immediate area and over a 1000 people going homeless, or over a 1000 families being made homeless. (Mmm) When the dust had settled and the ARVEN Unit moved forward they discovered 7 Viet Kong bodies in the rubble of the University. Well, I mean what kind of a War were you winning that way? You were certainly losing the war of minds. Now, the question then was how did we translate this into programme terms?

GILLARD: Yes.

FRANCIS: And I had to send back word that given that it was a fluid situation, an ongoing situation, it was still unstable and the situation in the Delta was different from the one around Saigon. There

were still er... there were still nightly artillery and mortar attacks on Tansenoot (PH) Airport, the main Airport, and we used to go the roof of the Caravel Hotel at cocktail hour to watch the show, quite literally to watch the.. the artillery and the mortars coming in. Not only at Tansenoot Airport, but also going for the ships on the river. There was no question of trying to sort of freeze the situation and do a massive Special. The point was how could we best infuse our reactive coverage with the kind of circumstance which I had been describing and which were not actually the subject of the daily news briefings held by JUSPAO at 5 o'clock every afternoon in Saigon. So, I stayed on to roughly co-ordinate the activities of 3 or 4 reporters at any one time. There was a certain amount of co-operation between News and Current Affairs because for the reasons stated you couldn't draw the line very clearly between what would be seen as sort of programmatic and significant and what was just an hard news story. Um.. so it was a loose form of co-ordination and I had to conclude, as I did.. and I did a situation there, a major report which I see is dated the 13th of March before I left Saigon, and I sent that to er... to David Attenborough who was Director of Programmes, in which amongst other things I said I didn't think that the situation there being so fluid, nor the propensity of people to come forward which had suddenly diminished with the onset of TET made for a Special. But I did actually do a full appraisal of the situation and it was quite interesting that a number of the observations that I made which were by no means exclusively mine, anybody there on the ground would make them, came to pass a few years later.

GILLARD: Mmm. You of course during this period, you actually were resident in the United States on the BBC's behalf for a period?

FRANCIS: Well, I was. I mean I got home in time to have Easter with the family up in the Welsh Hills and then I got involved in the build-up to the American election year, the conventions and the election itself. And of course the '68 election was a fairly dramatic one, both in terms of the close run thing in the autumn and also the conventions themselves, because notably in Chicago, the Democratic convention, there was a lot of trouble there. And the trouble was...was actually.. did involve the media. Because one of the things which the Mayor Daily and his people resented was the media coverage of the Yippies and other demonstrators who sought to use the occasion of the Democratic convention to make their point about the Vietnam War and other social problems, such as Civil Rights problems. And it was really quite extraordinary because the.. what happened was that by dint of the way in which the er.. authorities, the Police, the National Guard who were called in and most particularly the way in which Daily was running the city, it aggravated the problem out of all proportion. Thus, for example, in the weekend before the convention started, we were scratching around for those sort of pre-convention stories, some of the delegates... delegations were already in town, the platform committee was sitting etc., and we were almost scouting around to find these demonstrators who had threatened to come to Chicago, and they were in fact spread around the parks, all around the northern part of the city and so on but not in any way concerted. Daily gave the order for them all to be corralled in Grant Park which was a downtown park immediately

opposite the main convention hotel where... which was literally .. I think it was McGovern headquarters, I might be wrong about that. But anyway it doesn't matter, it was the main convention headquarters hotel, the Hilton. That had one advantage, we could literally look out of the windows and take top shots of the demos because what happened then was that the whole of Grant Park was ringed about 2 and 3 deep by Police and National Guard and e.. if ever you had a.. a disorganised set of demonstrators suddenly as a concerted demonstration, that was an example of it. And it was entirely at the hand of Daily and the authorities. Then, of course, we ran into trouble trying to film it, because the Police cordons tended to try and keep the Units out. So we got to all sorts of devices like driving around with cameras on the tops of trucks, and at night driving around with cameras and lights on the tops of trucks. And what you would find is that if a journalistic truck was making the circuit round the block, which was Grant Park, while the cameras were turning over and the lights were on there would be demonstration, then as the Unit would go round the back of the block, which took quite a long time because there were various sort of obstructions like Police in the way, all the demonstrators sort of lie down, get back in their sleeping bags and their love-in and what have you and not be re-activated until the cameras and the lights came back. (LAUGH) But the main point of course was that it was actually a multilateral operation with a European operations group and I was running the operations group. I did 12 in all, mainly the American elections and the American Space Programme. Such were the enormous costs of the satellites, which for the first time were available, the geo-stationary satellites were available to cover the American elections

in '68, that we had the ability to cover them, the proceedings gavel gabble to gabble, hour after hour, feeding, if you like, the raw material back to Europe and the broadcasting organisations in Europe for them to sort out what they wanted - live, recorded, packaged or what have you. The inhibiting factor, of course, was money. Because the satellites were costing in those days something of the order of £300 a minute for a colour satellite and you need to do an awful lot of sharing to bring those costs down, and the way in which we handled it, although in fact we did show the conventions virtually gabble to gabble - thereby incidentally absolutely minimising the video tape costs on site, showing across Europe. We also organised a set of sequential unilaterals whereby each organisations in turn would have their commentators in front of a camera or have the ability to run-in film of their own making and editing as unilateral contributions for the base network then to knit together the multilateral picture of actuality and the individual unilateral contributions from their correspondents. It was still extremely expensive though. (Mmm) The same thing attained in 1972 in the sense that it was possible to run the conventions at full length but money and other things had intervened by then. First of all it wasn't as an interesting a convention and election year, by and large. '68 had been a very close run thing and of course when it came to the election itself we went for hours relaying the NBC election programme to Europe, awaiting the.. the final claim of victory, or rather for the Humphrey concession. That didn't come until about ten to one, New York time, about ten to six, London time, on the following day following the election, the Wednesday, so we'd been on the air for some 18 hours. Typical, however, of the BBC that whilst I had all the other European

organisations in for... 'cos they kept opting out and saving money, for what was anticipated to be the Press Conference by Humphrey at which he would concede, and as he did.. he did, he broke down and it was quite sad, very sad really - he was a good man. Er.. everybody got it except for the BBC, my own organisation, and given that I was running the team a lot of BBC people were putting their effort into the EBU team. What happened was this, it came through during the News and whereas for all the other hours of the day the thing was being handled as a live OB, while the early evening News was on that was what the Network was showing. And I got through personally to the BBC and said to them, "Look, what is about to happen is.. is the denouement of the whole story." "Can't talk to you now, we're on the air," said a voice in London. And then a few minutes later they came back, "Now what did you want, New York?" I said, "Well, you've just missed the story." (LAUGH)

GILLARD: Shame wasn't it, yes. You handled some of the Apollo missions too, didn't you?

FRANCIS: Well indeed and what happened there was partly while we were out there mounting the conventions in '68, we started to build up to coverage for Apollo 7. After the fire on what was known as Apollo 1, there had been a pause, but NASA had announced that they would be ready to go ahead with Apollo 7, which was actually an earth orbit mission, but using a Saturn 1-B rocket in the Apollo spacecraft, in the autumn of '68. And it was quite convenient actually because a lot of the people who were working on the US conventions were on the ground and working with the American Networks, and we started to think through our

Apollo coverage, again on the half... behalf of EBU. But a new dimension entered now and that was that whereas the American elections were only really of interest, really big interest, to those nations who either spoke English or understood it, thus the Scandinavians and the Dutch, because incidentally this long, long coverage of the conventions proved to be highly programmatic. I mean.. very fascinating to people in this country - whether or not the Democrats had a platform for this, or the Republicans had a platform for that, had not been very interesting. What was fascinating were all the characters played at length in the convention and to see all the by-play and so on and so forth. Come Apollo, you were onto a different thing altogether. The whole world could understand what man going to the Moon was going to be about, and suddenly the European Broadcasting Union, who were well ahead of the game, found itself in a position whereby it was going to be planning multilateral coverage not only for Europe but also for all the other countries of the world.

And we're now on **TAPE 6**

GILLARD: I wanted to ask you before we leave this altogether, how did the BBC .. the BBC come to be in command of this operation for the whole of Europe, for all.. for so many countries? Why was it our job to do it?

FRANCIS: Well, In think the first reason is that we had the professionalism to handle it, and whereas some other organisations do the Italian notion of journalism, the French notion of journalism is not quite ours. I mean at the time Italy used to reckon that News didn't happen on Television till lunchtime because they weren't on the air until then. Then I think the English language was a factor, and the fact that the.. what preceded the big Apollo programmes was actually the US elections, and for reasons that are I think.. are fairly obvious, the US elections and extended coverage of them were altogether more in.. interesting to those who speak or understand English. That gave us another reason why we wanted a lot of coverage and for financial reasons we wanted to share the costs. So the motivation actually to... to drive forward a cost-sharing EBU operation was clearly with us. Then when it came to Apollo we.. the reason why the BBC leading the EBU team then found itself leading the coverage for the rest of the world was quite simply because the other Broadcasting Unions and those countries who were really not members of well-concerted unions, such as the South American countries, woke-up to the fact that they were going to want to have coverage of this great event, and here was an international operation already in being. For instance, there were not... there were

not enough circuits for everyone to do their thing. Coming out of the Cape, Cape Kennedy up to New York, there were only 4 longline video circuits, vision circuits, available. The 3 networks had one each and the US pool had the fourth one. Well, in the event we were able to persuade them that that should actually become international pool, and as we were operating the international operation it would be the International Pool Line. When they needed it for their own purposes, and there were times when they did, not of course during the major moments of the mission, then they used it as a US Pool Line, it was certainly a backup line for the American Networks, but the way in which they handled the backup was pragmatic. They weren't prepared for it to be handed over to any one Network if that Network lost its feed. What they asked for was a guaranteed clean feed up this fourth line. Well, it wasn't too difficult, though I must say there were a hell of a lot of meetings to sort out the priorities and so on and so forth, to establish what a clean feed should contain - which was designed to provide basic coverage for any broadcaster in the world, and which was also available to provide sensible backup if any of the American Networks lost their picture. (Mmm) That was the reasoning whereby the BBC-led EBU operation got involved with the world, and became in the event the sort of international pool alongside the three American Networks. Certainly that's the way NASA saw it and... just to give you an example, on the eve of Apollo 11, the top brass in NASA had a dinner at the Coco Beach Country CLub which is about 15 miles south of the launch pad at Cape Kennedy. And they had about um... 40 people there, 5 tables of 8, and it was half NASA bigwigs and it was half media bigwigs. And I represented the Europeans as the sort of European media bigwig. I was

very lucky, actually, I sat next to Zanner von Browne (PH) and he was looking bronzed and tanned and fit and I said, "You seem to have come through these last traumatic weeks pretty well." And he said, "Why not? I have been scubadiving." I said, "You've been scubadiving??? And you're baby's about to go and make history tomorrow!" He said, "Tomorrow is a matter of routine." And he then expounded what I think is one of the fundamental lessons about NASA in the days of the Apollo Mission. he said, "Look, we have the best spacecraft in the world. We have the best engineers in the world. We know that every single part - one and a half million parts of that spacecraft has been properly checked out by these experts." He said, "By comparison, when you get on your average 707 and you fly off in the general direction of Europe, you have no idea of which diego has been maintaining it. Tomorrow is a matter of routine."

GILLARD: Mmm that actually went smoothly.

FRANCIS: And it of course went smoothly.

GILLARD: Yes.

FRANCIS: But back to the.. to the operation. There were tensions because there was the BBC um.. always having to watch the tensions within the other Europeans that we were heading things up and driving them on, partly, as I say, because of our somewhat more advanced editorial sense, matched by the.. Germans and the Scandinavians, but not always sort of to the liking of the Latins who take a rather more laid

back view of journalism. But also, I mean resented by the Americans, because there we were showing the world their big show. That was, I have to say, offset by a certain sense of relief that there were a few foreigners around capable of co-ordinating all these divers activities, so that they got off the back of the Americans who had quite enough problems of their own. But it did create a lot of tensions and it taught me a lot about international diplomacy.

GILLARD: You, of course, were involved in all this work during a decade of immense technical advance and developments, and you exploited it to the full, didn't you?

FRANCIS: Yes. I mean the fact is that very quickly we realised that the point about satellites was not simply that you could be dealing with point to point feeds of programmes; you could deal with multilateral soundtracks. For example, when Apollo 11 went off, apart from the... the lengthy routing, whereby we sent the main picture back from the States, across the Pacific, and then across the Indian Ocean via two satellites and a landline right across Japan inbetween - though, incidentally, for most of the time we had one of the Atlantic satellites up as backup. We also realised of course you could hitch about 12 audio circuits onto that without much difficulty, and did so. So, already, one was realising the huge possibilities of satellite communication. And at that time the real problems were ones of cost and lack of numbers of satellites. For example, we had a mad situation whereby as we ran up to Apollo 11 it transpired, according to the final flight plan, that the actual landing on the Moon was liable to coincide

with the feed of a baseball game to Puerto Rico. And months in advance, not one but two Puerto Rican Stations had booked satellite circuits so that they could put up rival coverage of this baseball, and they were damned if they were going to move off their spot - particularly as they reckoned that they could dodge a bit of the Moon in amongst the baseball and get the best of all worlds in their rather competitive television environment. I remember going down to Puerto Rico and spending a rather pleasant couple of days lying about on the beach and in the pool and negotiating gently this notion out of their minds. But the fact is that that was the kind of competition that you had for the very limited number of satellite channels. Electronic graphics came in, of course, during that period, and notably - I mean it. perhaps it's reached it peak and maybe it went over the top during the coverage of Apollo, because we wrote all over the screen all of the time. Now, that was quite valuable in the sense that you could put additional information up and you could certainly track the progress of things with clocks, countdowns and countups and goodness knows what. You could also, incidentally, using such things as the sort of demonstration techniques, with electronic pencils, you could point out little things in the pictures with the rather obscure pictures coming back from the Moon - that sort of thing. So, rather like a War brings on an aircraft industry, there's nothing like a space programme to bring on communications technology. There's nothing like an election programme, incidentally, to bring on broadcasting technology, as we found by putting the General Election results direct on line, because in fact that was really the basis of electronic graphics, not merely alpha numeric characters, which is the norm today. Nowadays, you wouldn't be

seen dead with cardboard captions. But I mean what... the first users of the electronic graphics and that whole development were the big programmes, for which in a sense the budgets were limitless. They were limitless.. I mean I think they were limitless for two reasons really, if not three. They were limitless because in those days perhaps the BBC wasn't quite so concerned about cash, but more importantly because the BBC was absolutely firm in its conviction, often confirmed in its conviction that it was the channel to which people looked - BBC-1 - when there was a big story. So the whole credibility of the Television Service rested upon getting the big ones right.

GILLARD: Mmm Yes.

FRANCIS: Er..ENG. Well, we first used ENG in 1968 in Miami, Miami Beach, covering the Republican covention. Mobile cameras with a mobile recorder on the back of another man - admitted they were a bit hefty, but they were ENG all right. And I mean the.. the awful point is that it was to take the best part of 15 years before boths News and then programmes within BBC Television would first of all have the money, the yen and the Unions' agreements to use that technology - 15 years from the first use on behalf of the BBC, it's.. it's s sad tale.

GILLARD: And the equipment locked away in the vaults.

FRANCIS: Absolutely. I mean with a fast moving technology, anyway, it was fatal to start locking that equipment up because of course you had a sort of new generation of equipment every 2 or 3 years,

and you could get out of date very fast indeed. More important it meant, and I would be recording as DMCA, an inability to cover with the came flexibility stories from all those parts of the world where there are not film labs, where there are not studios where you can do film injects, and so on.

GILLARD: Yes, yes. Yeah. Moving away to another topic. Of course, you.. you did have your own series during this period, didn't you? I mean let's talk about....

FRANCIS: Yes. I.. rather opted to be the second Assistant Head of Current Affairs Group who played the sort of.. the maverick role, and that meant Specials and big operations like the American operations and so on, but there were conceptual Specials and there were Special Series which didn't quite fit the.. the pattern of the sort of daily or weekly programmes, and one of those was TALKBACK. I did that almost as a change from the massive sort of overseas OBs and satellite programmes, and it was, of course, a programme in which we invited members of the public to comment on BBC programmes - a sort of correspondence column of the air. And we tried - it was much more difficult incidentally to get BBC responders, Heads of Departments and others to come and answer the criticisms, than it was to get the criticism. I think it worked quite well. I think you need a vehicle like that, a serious vehicle. I've always felt that, whether you call it TALKBACK or a serious form of POINTS OF VIEW or whatever, I think you have to have that kind of two-way programme, but the trouble is that there are only really about 7 or 8 issues where in one way or another

you seem... the argument tends to turn on those issues. And I found, as I told Hu Wheldon when we were discussing the programme in advance, that actually it worked best when what we were doing was to carry an issue forward another generation. Let me give an example. If you had an issue which you tried to treat in a comprehensive fashion in about 30 minutes, invariably you'd end up with a lame pay-off from a presenter saying, "Well, that's all we have time for." And what you've been trying to do is a definitive programme about 'Whither Cancer Research' or something. Highly unsatisfactory. If one can use the TALKBACK technique actually to get people to respond to that first programme for a sort of second generation of consideration, it could indeed be constructive and exciting. And that, that principle can still be applied to the rather sort of banal discussion of criticism which can so often occur, because we all know how, to take an example, Mary Whitehouse's first sallys will be. Indeed TALKBACK was the first per.. programme to put Mary Whitehouse on. And there was a fair amount of resistance from Charles Curran to this notion, who had always said that she shouldn't go on the air, and when I said, "Well, let's put her on for a whole programme..." momentarily I saw him pause and then I realised that he got the message, and as it turned out the message was there to be seen on the air. We had a studio audience for TALKBACK. It was a 100 souls selected as well as possible as a sample, socioeconomically etc., so that when we asked them to vote on an issue we got some rough count which was a little bit better than just the first 100 people to come off the street. Anyway, Mary Whitehouse was getting enormous applause for the first 4 or 5 minutes, coming up with the first generation of comments, so to speak. Then when some of the

other people on the programme who had views about the programme she was criticising, started to weigh in with their arguments, there was a much more balanced reaction to her. By the sort of 25th to 30th minute of the programme she was being bayed - an object lesson there, if ever I saw one.

GILLARD: Yes. Of course, I suppose it could be argued that the talent and craftsmanship which is cultivated in a Director or a Producer who puts on a programme which may be controversial and suitable for discussion in TALKBACK is one quality, but the ability to stand up on your feet and argue for it before an audience is quite another quality.

FRANCIS: I think... and therefore Producers might not necessarily be able to justify themselves properly, or frankly Heads of Department of Controllers. On the other hand, you don't have to go to the Head of Department. I mean very often the most important person to have is the Producer, or the writer of a play or the writer of a documentary or the reporter. So I mean there were ways round that. I mean what you certainly needed was the support of the Head of Department or Controller and that wasn't always forthcoming. Perhaps it's natural, but in fact there was in those days quite a reticence to come on and sometimes quite a reticence to give support and provide clips of the programmes etc.,

END TAPE 6

TAPE 7

GILLARD: We were going to talk about personalities and people at Lime Grove I think, were we?

FRANCIS: Yes, I suppose it's inevitable that a young Producer arriving in Lime Grove in 1963 would appreciate immediately the big oaks under which the acorns were flourishing. One was very conscious of Grace, Grace Wyndham-Goldie; of Hu Wheldon, in a slightly different sphere, namely the Arts; and Paul Fox, who as Editor of PANORAMA certainly assumed an importance which was greater than that of the role itself. And I think one of the things which perhaps now with hindsight, though possibly by comparison with those days has changed, now with hindsight one feels is there is no longer... anything like the same stature in the people who are supposedly in charge of Current Affairs at departmental level, because in the 60s there's no question but that Grace Wyndham-Goldie was a key element in the relationship of the BBC with politicians, and to that extent arguably almost cut out Television Centre, which was to start with.. was just the scenery wing in the early 60s.. in the early 60s. But nonetheless I mean she was the relevant figure in Television, and she was the relevant figure in political broadcasting so far as many politicians were concerned. I think that was then followed not so much by Leonard Mial but by Paul Fox adopting a similar role as Head of Current Affairs Programmes, and then perhaps less successfully by John Grist following that. Certainly you had the impression, and perhaps this was because I was simply Producer in those days to start with, then an Assistant Editor, that the Head of

Department was the key figure, both being closely in touch with the output, but also actually standing for something in the BBC's line-up, certainly so far as politicians are concerned. Argu.. arguably in the case of John Grist it went a bit sour because something of his close relationship with the politicians was perhaps the reason why over the YESTERDAY'S MEN affair the BBC itself got into the trouble that it did. Paul Fox and to start with Donald Babberstock, later on Alistair Milne, were always in a sense of tension... in a sense in tension one with another. And it.. partly because they were the leaders of the two teams, that of PANORAMA and the solid political programming, and TONIGHT, which felt itself to be altogether fleeter of foot. But it seems to me that what it... that what those two teams generated were two kinds of person, perhaps to some extent they attracted two different kinds of person to them, but they certainly produced two different sorts. And those who came from the PANORAMA tradition tended to take a very solid establishment view. For example, David Webster, who went on first of all as Assistant Head of Current Affairs Group, to cultivate the link between Lime Grove and Broadcasting House, and then subsequently as the BBC's Director of Public Affairs to represent the Corporation as a whole to the politicians and to the outside world. And.. probably the most outstanding example is Alistair Milne, the current Director General, who was after Donald Babberstock - first of all he was Donald Babberstock's Number 2 and then he became Head of TONIGHT productions. But he came from that stable which was not of the strict political mould and it was altogether a more optional kind of journalism (Mmm) and was further removed from hardnosed News journalism and further removed from News Division, than say PANORAMA. Thus when I

became Director of News & Current Affairs and Alistair was Managing Director of Television one still had the feeling that one was playing the same kind of game as one had been aware of in PANORA... in Lime Grove in the 60s in the relationship and at times the antagonism between PANORAMA and TONIGHT. (Mmm) And for instance when.. the night that Kennedy died, we mounted an instant Special, and it was mounted in Studio G, a long, thin studio, and it was all hands to the pumps or rather it was two teams to the pumps. It was the PANORAMA team headed by Paul Fox, it was the TONIGHT team, and in order to organise what was a highly disorganised affair because we were literally getting those people into the studio we could and those who arrived we talked to. We actually asked the two teams to muster their people at either end of the studio - I was directing in the Gallery. And the running order was to alternate between the two ends, and when we went off to some film insert or something like that we would count the number of people waiting to bat for the PANORAMA team and the number of people waiting for the TONIGHT team and ask the one withn the longest queue to bat first. Well, you can say...(LAUGH) you can say it was co-operation. It was a kind of arm's length co-operation symptomatic of this sort of divide between the two parts of Lime Grove.

GILLARD: Yes. Yes. Well you were in '72, of course, you were a frontline witness to the catastrophic YESTERDAY'S MEN business. Perhaps you'd better tell us about that.

FRANCIS: Yes, I was in a particular position because at the time John Grist was the Head of Current Affairs Group and he had two

Assistant Heads of Group, myself and John Tisdall, who'd taken over from David Webster. Now John was more of a deskbound man and tended to be the Assistant Head in terms of deputising and staying at the desk and playing the patient role of keeping the link in with Broadcasting House. Though I'd have to say that the difference between John Tisdall and David Webster was quite marked. John Tisdall was a highly thoughtful person and when eventually he became my Assistant Director of News & Current Affairs I found in him a wisdom and a coolness which was extremely valuable. What he was not, however, was one who would actually forge a high profile or sort of drive a relationship forward - which Webster had been, which was one of the reasons why he subsequently became Director of Public Affairs, because he really nurtured the.. the BH link with Lime Grove on behalf of John Grist. And whereas John Grist had formed a close relationship with the politicians he had to some extent got himself distanced from and certainly across in the parlance the Director General, Charles Curran. Webster was the more realistic link. I was the second Assistant Head of Current Affairs Group. I was Assistant Head of everything else and in particular the Specials, both the sort of Event Specials, elections and so on, but also Conceptual Specials. And so it was that we decided during the course of 1971 that what was needed partly to offset the... the instant reporting were a number of Specials such as THE QUESTION OF ULSTER when we looked into Ulster. In the meantime, John Tisdall was sort of mopping up on the day-to-day current affairs, the routine reactionary current affairs, included in which were a pair of programmes which were designed to mark one year of Tory Government and one year of Opposition for the Labour Party. So far so good. He didn't commission the two programmes, in

fact the Television Centre did in the sense of the Network Controller commissioned a pair of programmes. There were then assigned two very different Producers who came up with two very different scenarios for those programmes. One was a relatively soft programme to be chaired by Robin Day which woould in fact be a sort of discussion in the studio with as I recall an audience, in the sense that it... there were a whole lot of people to ask questions, not an audience in the entertainment sense, of various Ministers who had been one year in Office. And the previous night, as it was scheduled, there was to be a programme to be produced by Angela Pope on the basis of an idea from David Dimbleby, which was to look into what it's like to be out of power where once you knew what power was like - the chauffeur-driven car, etc. And er.. what the.. those who had in a sense idealistically tried to bring to British politics in the Labour Governments between 1964 and 1970 now found er.. the sense of frustration that those people who had been involved in what in many senses in 1964 was an idealistic...idealistic approach to politics and economic problems, what now they thought. And er.. rather sort of impishly the title YESTERDAY'S MEN was dreampt up and off they went. The title YESTERDAY'S MEN was really a working title actually which became, as is quite often the case, the actual title, because the billing day crept up and no better title presented itself.

GILLARD: Harold Wilson in this series, this Archive series, has said that they couldn't complain about the title because it was what they themselves.. how they themselves had described the Conservative Party in their turn.

FRANCIS: Oh I couldn't agree more. I mean irony invariably is a two-edged sword. Er.. no, I mean I think the real issue as I saw it from being relatively close to it though not directly involved, I don't say that by any way to escape the blame (LAUGH) but more because I was able to observe it very closely, was the realisation perhaps for the first time in my career that it's a very unsatisfactory situation to have the Television Centre, as one saw it, the Network Controller, the Director of Programmes or Controller of Programmes whatever he was at the time, commissioning output, and a whole set of other people answering if in some way it faltered - namely Broadcasting House. And that peculiar duality I'm sorry to say exists to this day, and it seems still to bedevil the BBC whenever things don't quite go to plan. That duality of control and responsibility, answerability perhaps is quite the.. is the word. The other thing, of course, was quite simply, that however you protest that there was nothing un... there was nothing designed in the unfortunate circumstance that the programmes were so different - one was soft and the other was spiky - outside, nobody will be believe that. And therefore it was perceived as a designed slight on the Labour Party. Of course, what set the fussation in motion was actually the interviewing of Harold Wilson. I honestly believe that the.. the various complaints that various of the contributors had, justified though in some respects that they were, would not have really caught fire if it had not been over the incident of the Harold Wilson interview in which he had rather huffily er.. dismissed David's... David Dimbleby's persistence in asking the question about how much he got for his memoirs, causing that particular question to be addressed by the Board. The Board, or rather a quorum of the Board, then saying, "Right

in order to ajudge that one we've got to see it." And then subsequently, even in.. even in Charles Curran's own reading of it, the Board not taking responsibility for the whole of the programme which in fact they'd seen on the grounds that they had only been watching it in order to answer one question. And to the Producer, Angela Pope, and the other people in Lime Grove involved, that, oddly enough, was the.. the worst slight of all. The notion that people upstairs, namely a quorum of the Board of Governors no less, not simply the DG, should have seen the programme in toto and then subsequently only appeared to take responsibility for a small part of it, really stuck in the claw of many Lime Grove people.

GILLARD: Interesting though, isn't it, that we're now talking 14 years after the event, but it still echoes around, dosen't it?

FRANCIS: Yes, it does, because it seems to me there is a design fault in the structure when you have the commissioning people as a different body of people than those who are ultimately answerable. It was one of the reasons, incidentally, where.. whereby I reconciled myself whilst DNCA to a restructuring again which would require the Managing Directors of Television and Radio respectively to take upon themselves the editorial responsibility, such as MDXB has for External Broadcasting. So you do not have this split of responsibility. I'm sorry to say that that has actually not worked out. That although in fact the old News Division was broken-up and the post of DNCA collapsed except insofar as the response...the leg man for DGs for journalistic responsibility, that role has passed to ADG. The fact is, here we are,

15 years later, and the structural fault still obtains and.. a string of incidents over recent years has demonstrated the kind of danger that can ensue, not least, incidentally, about the way in which a shemozzle is sorted out, sorted out, because invariably there are two problems. One is about the programme itself, and the other is how the mess is handled. And I would suspect that much of the way in which the BBC has let itself down over the years has been about the way in which it's handled messes. Messes are almost inevitable in the business of broadcasting; the question is whether they can be handled with equanimity and poise.

GILLARD: Mmm yeah. Well, we must move on, and the next topic is one that you were intimately and closely involved in. I don't know whether you in fact conceived the original idea. But it's another of those great landmarks in the history of BBC Television Current Affairs. It's the programme called THE QUESTION OF ULSTER. How did the concept arise? Can you remember? Is it important?

FRANCIS: Oh I think it is. I mean during 1969/70/71 Current Affairs had been making various forays to Ulster and reporting almost reactively what was going on, particularly in the.. on the political scene, whilst News was pointing cameras at the emerging trouble. But it was obviously a complex situation, and one which needed a sort of deeper understanding. So we were looking for ways in which we could try and coolly mount a conceptual programme about the different points of view, and about the different potential solutions to the problem. And that is why, partly incidentally because those of us who conceived the formula, had been working in the United States and we thought that....END TAPE 7

IDENTIFICATION

This is Mr Richard Francis and this is **TAPE 8**

FRANCIS: We realised that what we were dealing with was a multi-faceted situation, and there were a large number of different points of view as to the problem and as to potential solutions. And the format appealed to us, partly I think because the people involved had been working in the United States, as something akin to Senate Committee Hearings, some of which we had actually been recording in the States. And so it was that we formed the notion of some kind of Tribunal at which the different protagonists would have the opportunity to come forward with their views and have them tested by a panel of people akin to the Senators, etc. And that is the way in which we put it first of all to Paul Fox who was Controller of BBC-1 and also to Waldo MacGuire. It transpired that...

GILLARD: Just a minute. Waldo MacGuire, tell us about him.

FRANCIS: He was the Controller of Northern Ireland at the time, he'd formally been Editor of Television News, an Ulsterman himself. And somebody who um... whilst fairly liberal about programme making and investigating the problems in the midst of the region, nonetheless felt very strongly that each programme should be self-sufficient and balanced, rather than balancing over a period. That such were the sensitivities in Northern Ireland it was necessary when there was a multi-faceted issue, and many of course are multi-faceted in that

situation, that the various viewpoints should be.. all be represented. So the formula appealed to him, and it coincided with a feeling on his part and er.. Paul Fox's that there was an awful lot of reactive programming coming from Northern Ireland about the troubles, this sort of confusion of the Civil Rights issue and the Republicanism or Nationalism, extreme Nationalism. That what was needed was a cool talk-in, and we'd come up with a format which began to appeal to them. So that er... I think we came up with that in the middle of October 1971, and on the early part of November Paul Fox indicated that he could clear Wednesday the 5th January 1972 from 2120 onwards, after the main News, for a major talk-in on the Ulster situation. That was around about the second week of November. And at that point we put flesh on the bones. I pulled together the basis of the production team. I would be the Executive Producer, Head of Department if you like; Michael Butt would be the Editor and we wrote the format down and went across to Northern Ireland to discuss it with Waldo MacGuire, with the suggested title, THE QUESTION OF IRELAND - a redland (?) of course of the historical past. And we felt and Waldo felt too that as it was going to involve diverse elements - politicians from all sorts of persuasions, including from south of the border in our thinking, that we would need to agree the format and stick to it. So that the format needed to be described, the framework in which their contributions would be made, because it was going to be a live programme with admittedly some recorded elements and some introductory elements - but nonetheless they all needed to know exactly what the circumstances would be that they would find. Er.. we also felt that er.. we would have to invite the contributors simultaneously. Now, why so? Well, because we felt that there were a

number of people there who could play awkward, even in our original list of contributors. And if you were to issue these invitations, conditional upon one or other of them having the option to come or not to come it would make life extremely difficult. So therefore it was going to be a set of simultaneous invitations with a fixed format. The second week of November we agreed the format with CNI and in keeping with his general thinking he thought we could not get by with less than 8 antagonists. This necessary to represent not only the Protestant Catholic divide, but also not quite the same, Loyalist Republican feelings, extreme and moderate, left and right - it needed 8 viewpoints. And then we talked to... we thought about who should actually chair this enquiry. And our minds fell upon Lord Gardner, though subsequently he was actually debarred because he was set to work upon a Royal Commission shortly aferwards. In a sense it showed... it demonstrated that our thinking was in the right direction, though it illustrated the extent to which we were approaching it in a kind of quasi judicial way, something which subsequently was going to become one of the stumbling blocks. When he dropped out, and that was actually only...after 2 or 3 days, we asked Lord Devlin if he would chair it and he was fairly swift in agreeing in principle to take part in such a programme, insuring as he put it 'judicial balance' - though he was quick to point out and we were quite pleased he did because if he hadn't said it we would have done, that he wouldn't be the appropriate person to do an introduction reading teleprompter, explaining the historical build-up to the situation which Northern Ireland was facing. 24th November (so it's all moving fairly fast) we had not only the precise format but we also had the potential list of contributors, and discussed that with the

Controller of BBC-1 and with ENCA, who was Desmond Taylor. But it's interesting that in that piece of paper we were indeeed talking about a Tribunal, using words like 'protagonist' 'expert witness' etc., to describe the format. And we also agreed that if each of these persons was to make a.. an opening statement, so to speak, which they could illustrate and back with expert witnesses of...of their choosing, that those depositions would need to be made in writing in advance, so that we could circulate them to all the contributors in such a way that they would.. the.. the advantages and disadvantages of the batting order would be mitigated. So, this is the 24th November, (RATTLING IN BACKGROUND) This was the 24th November and a full 6 weeks before transmission date. And I say that because I think it's important to realise that from the beginning, we - Paul Fox, Wally MacGuire, Desmond Taylor - had realised that this would have to be dealt with like treading on eggs. And I do believe that some of the fussation which subsequently arose, and some of the exaggerated stories, not least based upon the intemperate remarks of politicians, totally failed to recognise that the BBC had very coolly and responsibily for a number of weeks been working on such precise detail as the format and the terminology and .. all the rest of it. We also recognised quite swiftly that to be called an expert witness and to be accepted as an expert witness, it was necessary that there was some degree of acceptance on behalf of all the protagonists, because it was no good having one of the protagonists, who might be, for example, speaking for one of the more extreme political parties, wheeling in a so-called expert witness, who was no more than reflector of their own views. This in itself was to become an important consideration later on, because for expert witness, you might read

neutral witness in certain respects, and that, of course, is quite a difficult thing to find in the Northern Ireland context. Anybody who has any authority, in a sense has a record, and is therefore liable to be doubted and distrusted by one element or other. Then came the next problem about the RADIO TIMES' billing date - bearing in mind that this was fairly well advanced given that we were into the Christmas Season. And I felt very strongly that what we needed to do was to get it all set, both the format and the casting, in time to go to Press with the RADIO TIMES, such that there could be no doubt on the part of the public about the nature of the programme, and the precise nature of the programme would be spelt out in the RADIO TIMES, and furthermore the protagonists would be locked in by having their names in the public print. In the event, of course, we weren't able to do this and this, again, proved very difficult, because an intention to produce a programme is very clearly laid down, and the nature of that programme is clearly laid down once you get it into the RADIO TIMES. If, on the other hand, with a Special of this nature, you don't get it into the RADIO TIMES, so in fact it becomes a pre-emptive Special - all sorts of things follow. The BBC's commitment to doing it becomes questionable. The individual's commitment to the programme which they've agreed to do - particularly if you haven't already got an exchange of contracts, and anyway what's a contract to do a programme? - becomes as it were mutable. And so the business of getting it all sorted out before the RADIO TIMES' deadline is absolutely crucial. On the 25th November, we approached Robin Day to be the BBC Moderator, to introduce and guide the proceedings, which would then be chaired by Lord Devlin. At the same time, incidentally, that same day, Harold Wilson - who was not only the

Leader of the Opposition, but also the Opposition spokesman on Ulster, announced a 15-point Plan for Ulster, including some consideration of re-unification of Ireland. That was actually a bit of a fly in the ointment, because the way in which we had conceived the 8 protagonists was to get Irish politicians, north and south. And whilst we would take contributions from the British Government, what we were... and indeed the Opposition, the.. Her Majesty's Opposition. What we didn't want to do was to have the whole programme turning upon the British politicians' solutions for Ulster. So, as I say, Harold Wilson's announcement of the Labour Party's 15-point plan was something of a fly in the ointment, though he would subsequently have an opportunity to spell it out. Well, in the last week of November we had further discussion of the format and the invitees with Robin Day, and he asked for certain rights himself, which became a point of issue. He asked to have the right of supplementary questioning, such that he could but in during the process which was essentially that which we had envisaged being conducted by Lord Devlin. I mark that down, because of course eventually Robin Day was to drop out. At the time the title was still a.. was still a bit mute. For instance, Robin Day had handled a thing called THE GREAT DEBATE which was actually about the emergent Nationalism in the United Kingdom, principally Scotland and Wales, and thought it might be a good device to call this THE GREAT DEBATE - not least to take a little bit of pressure off the fact that it was a sensitive Northern Ireland programme. And Robin was also very keen that the protagonists should be limited to 4 - say Gerry Fitt for the Social Democratic Labour Party, Paisley for the um.. DUP, a Doyle spokesman and a Stormont spokesman. So there was a great deal of debate still only... still 5 weeks off

transmission as to the make-up of the programme. On the 29th November, I submitted the proposal for the final format and the likely names to ENCA. And at that point the.. we had changed the title to A QUESTION OF ULSTER, the more accurately to reflect what it was, and also to get it out from under the idea that we were in any way reiterating the history of the 19th century. And that was the time when CNI, that was.. that was the week, the last week in November, when CNI agreed that we should actually line-up Robin Bailey for the Unionist Government, Ian Paisley, Bob Cooper - who would speak for the Alliance - Blakely for the Northern Ireland Labour Party, Fitt for the SDLP, Bernadette Devlin for the more extreme Republican... Republican movement...movements (plural) and Neil Blainy and Hilary from the Irish Republic. Now the presence of the last two was to cause quite a fuss, because there were allegations that Neil Blainy had been involved in gun-running, and where as Hilary was acceptable as a Junior Minister for Foreign Affairs, there was a lot of questioning about Blainy's role. Anyway, the green .. the green light was given by DG himself to this format on the 30th November. At that point we started to look to those other people who might embellish the introducdtion to it. And so we approached Lord Butler, and it's significant that he actually asked for a whole lot of details whilst professing his unavail..unavailability. It wasn't a very convincing response. We also approached Bailey's PRO, Robin Bailey's PRO at Stormont, outlining the programme, and fixed a meeting for Friday 3rd December to discuss the details. We stressed that there would be no other approaches made until that meeting, because although originally we'd come to the conclusion that there should be simultaneous

invitations, we felt it was reasonable under the circumstances to go....CUTS OFF LAST 15 SECONDS OF TAPE 8 MISSING.

IDENTIFICATION

Mr Richard Francis **TAPE 9**

FRANCIS: The first week of December, back to the selection and invitations of the Tribunal. Lord Devlin to chair it, one of the three. First choice was um.. Butler and Lord Caradon was also invited. He was to reply and accept fairly quickly on the 2nd December. On the same day, Lord Butler declined on "doctor's orders" (quotes) he should not break his convalescent holiday in Mull. And we then got onto Sir John Foster, because what we needed partly politically to balance Lord Carrington...Caradon, but also to have somebody of a legalistic background, was a Tory lawyer. And John Foster, his secretary said that he would be abroad. We got on to Lord Boyle, he had other commitments too. But the next day, Friday 3rd December, we heard that Sir John Foster would accept, and he'd change his travel plans. So now we had Devlin, Caradon and Foster in position for the so-called Tribunal. I had a meeting fixed with Robin Bailey, the Stormont Minister, and he just didn't turn up, and his PRO, Templeton, I did meet and he said that he would give all the full details to Robin Bailey, including a written description of the format and a list of the invitees. I think that was an error. I.. admittedly I'd sent that document to him, but I think I should have sought to prevent him from passing it on, because in the event it turned out to be a rather crucial omission that I had not personally explained to the Minister, Bailey, the nature of the programme. More particularly what it was not. And misconceptions as to what the programme should be were fairly quick, subsequently, to get to

Brian Faulkner, who would then make public statements about what the Unionists would and would not do, based really upon a misconception of the programme, not least the use of this word 'Tribunal'. Anyway, er.. the next sort of round of invitations were to other politicians - fitt, Cooper, Paisley, Blakely - they were all pretty certain to say yes, and all subsequently would say yes, although at one point Paisley would drop out. Saturday, 4th December, I did get to meet Robin Bailey, with Tam Fry, who was one of the Producers. And he opened, rather to my surprise, extremely strongly that this would be an inopportune time. "Now is the time for strong Government, not words," he said. "The programme has dangers." He admitted that it complimented instant reporting, but he expressed doubts about the format, not least that it would place the representative of the Unionist Government in a minority of 7 to 1 and that amongst all those present he felt that all other 7s would be against internment, and he would be alone in defending internment. Obviously, one went into sort of patient explanation routine, not least to the effect that it was our intention that the Stormont Government should be represented not only by a live protagonist in the studio, but by a statement by the Prime Minister. That there would anyway be a statement by the British Home Secretary. Maudling, and the position of the status quo, if you like, the authorities, if you like in another sense, and the internment argument um.. would not only be represented, but actually internment was not going to be an issue, because it was not a Tribunal to look into the past; it was actually, if you want to use the word 'Tribunal', an endeavour to investigate the potential solutions to the problem. So it wasn't going to be about recrimination. Anyway, he was sufficiently turned by the arguments to

begin to consider whether he would wish to bat first or last, and reckoned that he could live on his wits and would prefer to bat last. And he also accepted the point that his boss, Brian Faulkner, would be invited in the coolness of a recording studio to make a statement for the top of the programme, so that in fact the Unionists would be batting high up and have last say. And he said, "Right, well I'll give you the answer early the next week." He said, "Thursday morning, 9th December at the latest." This was against my request to have the whole thing sewn-up by the 9th, given that the RADIO TIME's Press date was the 10th. And then we approached Bernadette Devlin, one of the other potential protagonists, and Roy Lilly, Deputy Editor of the BELFAST TELEGRAPH at the time, and a much respected journalist - apart from being the most respected journalist in the Province - still is. As being an expert witness in terms of the current history of the Province. Though even his um.. participation was subsequently to cause fuss, because you.. even for the BELFAST TELEGRAPH, which takes a pretty middle-of-the-road view of things, that was too much for Ian Paisley. Now all the... all the participants we invited accepted. There were some problems with the Irish Government whereby um... they were not quite sure whether Hilary himself should take part, or whether in fact he should have a deputy. But basically speaking, they were prepared to take part. Wednesday 8th, Thursday 9th December - we were still waiting for news from Stormont. In the meantime, Jack White, who was the Controller of Programmes for RTE, sounded us out about the possibility of the programme being simultaneously broadcast by RTE. In any event, half the population of the Republic would receive the broadcast by dint of the overspill of the transmitters from BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Wales. But they were

feeling in the... in the South that it would actually be better if they designedly put it on the RTE Network as a simultaneous broadcast, which subsequently they were to do. And of course we submitted the final RADIO TIME's billing. We had all the Tribunal, we had all the protagonists. One thing we weren't able to do was to confirm that names of Robin.. of the Robin Bailey as the Unionist protagonist. Thursday 9th, we get a message to say that there's no news, and the only person that we can possibly contact would be the Prime Minister's office. Now that in itself seemed slighty obscure, and when eventually we got through to the... Faulkner's Private Secretarty, Faulkner had said, and this was the message, "No, he wouldn't participate himself." And he didn't appear to know the Robin Bailey had been asked. So now we were getting a rather misleading message. On the one hand, the only people who could really answer the question were the Prime Minister/Faulkner's office. On the other hand, they didn't appear to understand even that Robin Bailey had been asked, let alone the subtleties and ramifications of the programme format. And this was on the afternoon before the RADIO TIMES went to Press, so clearly the whole thing was getting a bit tight. The next thing we discovered was that the Prime Minister, Faulkner, was going to write to the DG objecting to the timing and the balance of the programme. We were formally told that he was writing and that hopefully the letter would be hand delivered the following day. Meantime, Dublin had changed their representation to the Junior Minister Kennedy. But that was a maybe, they were happy to participate. Now the RADIO TIMES billing was revised to take out the names of the protagonists but at least to explain the format, and most particularly to sort of block out a hunk of time on BBC-1 on the 5th January so that it didn't appear that

this massive special turned up as a pre.. as a pre-emptive special, because afterall we'd been working on it for some weeks already, and by the time it went on the air we'd of been working on it for 9 weeks, and the one thing we didn't want to give was the impression that it was a sudden and hasty move, for it was not. The fact is, however, that by the time the RADIO TIMES went to Press on the Friday 10th of December, we had not had formal approval from Robin Bailey, and indeed we got Faulkner's letter read over the 'phone. It was basically as his man, his Private Secretary, Ramsey, had suggested, and it included this significant paragraph. Quote, "Robin Bailey has consulted me about whether he should take part in this programme. I have told him that if it is to proceed it would, of course, be essential that the point of view of this Government should be heard, and I would approve of his doing so." i.e. Robin Bailey. So we'd now got a rather unfortunate situation. We were sufficiently concerned about Faulkner's basic objections to the timing of the programme, and the balance of the programme, and in fact as we had already heard that he was going to have.. discuss it with the Home Secretary Maudling, who was at the time responsible for Northern Ireland. That we realised there was more mileage in that fuss, and although the particular paragraph in the letter sounded pretty hopeful, the key question was "If the programme is to proceed..." given that he, the Prime Minister Faulkner was actually going to do his best to stop it. And so it was that the Home Secretary requested a meeting with the Chairman and DG which was subsequently fixed for 4 o'clock on the afternoon of Monday 13th December, which of course was 3 days after RADIO TIMES had gone to Press. And under those circumstances we had no option but to withdraw the whole billing from

RADIO TIMES and Controller BBC-1 scheduled other programmes for that night. This er.. this lack of a billing and therefore statement of intent by the BBC subsequently are going to prove very difficult, certainly it's gonna make life more.. more difficult. Before the Home Secretary meeting, the DG, Charles Curran, sent a letter in reply to the Home Secretary's note including a precise description of the programme format and names of all the participants. A sensible move, partly because we had it all ready and it was important to be able to prove that we'd thought it through, but also, of course, to mean.. intended to ensure that the meeting when it took place on the Monday 13th December would start off on a basis of some knowledge, and the first part of it wouldn't be sort of confused by a complicated explanatory session. However, in the meantime, if we'd thought we could all... we could sort it out quietly behind closed doors, on Saturday 11th December there was the first Press story, and actually this was a sympathetic story, including a faithful precis of the format, and a mention of Robin Bailey's having been invited, this in the BELFAST TELEGRAPH, and IRELAND SATURDAY NIGHT. Now, it... of course, Roy Lilly knew all about it and he worked for the TELEGRAPH, but so too did quite a lot of other people in Northern Ireland, it's a small place. The fact that it was a sympathetic story towards the BBC, however, was not to our advantage. At least paradoxically it caused a whole lot of people then to start asking questions. And I mean there was a largely inaccurate story in the SUNDAY INDEPENDENT in Dublin on Sunday 12th December, which just began to confuse the issue. And this is so familiar perhaps nowadays that the notion that actually the publicity can be disadvantageous if it's sympathetic, that the whole heap of publicity

and the extent to which the publicity is inaccurate can confuse the issue, was in a sense rather new to me, but also quite frankly new to a number of people involved. Because here we were trying as deftly as possible to think very carefully how to handle a cool, talk-in programme about the most sensitive of issues. And of course this was to be a forerunner and a pattern which would be followed many times during the 70s - whereby with all the best designs in the world to do a cool think-piece on the air, fussation would mean that eventually you would end up by doing a programme designedly cool but nonetheless put into a hot atmosphere by irresponsible reporting, and quite frankly irresponsible remarks by politicians and others who should know better. Can you stop a moment?

FRANCIS: At the meeting between the Home Secretary, the Chairman and the DG on the Monday afternoon the 13th December, Reggie Maudling took just as vehement a line as Brian Faulkner, very much the same time. This was an opportune time.. this was an inopportune time, and it was a dangerous format. He was challenged to offer to the Chairman of the BBC a..as a Privy Councillor if necessary in privy circumstances, the precise reasons why the 5th January might be inopportune. And it was made plain that unless good reasons were furnished to the BBC for why this was untimely, the BBC would have to assume that there was no better reason than any other why the 5th January would not be satisfactory. Timeliness, again, being one of those sort of messages which one was subsequently to have a lot of concern about during the 70s. Timeliness being one of those factors,

whereby so often the argument would be, "This is not the time, old boy." Well, the answer must be, "Well, then tell us when will be." And there being no satisfactory answer forthcoming on that day, the 13th December, or on many occasions, one feels obligated to proceed. And that is precisely what the Chairman and DG told the Home Secretary. It wasn't a particularly noisy meeting as I understand, I wasn't present. But nonetheless it was forthright. And so the decision having been taken at that stage to proceed on the basis described, it was then assumed that Faulkner would authorise Bailey's participation, and indeed do something himself, had he not said, "If the programme is to proceed Bailey would be the man to do it." Now, of course, on the 14th there were more Press stories, because although it would have been best to have that meeting as a private meeting - private it was - but the knowledge of it was widespread. The Labour Party began to enquire about the nature of the programme, for had they not issued statement about how they would solve the problem, and they'd heard about it from the Northern Ireland Labour Party, and they thought that the programme, if nothing else, should examine the one concrete initiative which had been made by politicians in recent weeks.

END TAPE 9

IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC Mr Richard Francis **TAPE 10**

GILLARD: We're continuing the story of THE QUESTION OF ULSTER.

FRANCIS: And if one felt that the BBC in anyway could do things privately, that impression was dispelled that evening when I visited Transport House and the Central Office in Smith Square, both having Christmas Parties for journalists, and the talk was of virtually nothing else. Wednesday 16th December saw the first critical British Press story. Critical in the sense that the DAILY MIRROR, taking something of a political angle, talked about the BBC having called off a great debate on Ulster - we wondered where the phrase 'great debate' got out from, because it was certainly not one that we had published - after representations from Stormont that it might be inflammatory. And inevitably you then got all the strong.. strong reactions from all the other would-be participants. From that stage forward really, the 16th December, the Producers er.. Tam Fry and Chris Jeans, Michael Buck, the Editor, ran sheep dog round the participants in continuing circles, sort of keep.. keeping them whipped in, because as each move... each manoeuvre either occurred or.. a story appeared in the newspaper, there would be signs of defection on various fronts. Anyway, the important point was that the BBC had now replied to Faulkner that it was our intention to proceed. It was irksome that we had just missed the RADIO

TIME's deadline, because nothing would have made the point more clearly to the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland than a RADIO TIME's billing, which of course was now.. was not going to be possible. Friday 17th December we discovered that the Private Office Advisers in Stormont are actually divided. One of them admitts that to me, and we arrange a further meeting for the following week, which of course will be the last week running up to Christmas. We agree the RTE request for a simultaneous broadcast. But now there's a problem because RTE want to start publicising it and we haven't gone to Press with the RADIO TIMES, so for them to say they're simultaneously pub.. going to run a programme which we haven't yet publicised, is going to give some problem. Monday 20th, no response to DG's letter. And on the Tuesday morning, I get through to Ramsey, the Private Secretary, who says although the Prime Minister still has serious doubts about the programme he's considering representation on it very seriously and carefully - a holding message, obviously, but good enough to.. to suggest to me that it might be wise to fly back to Belfast and sit on Faulkner's doorstep, which I do on the evening of Tuesday 21st December. Somewhat reluctantly with Christmas coming up I have to tell you. Wednesday, the 22nd, I lunched at Stormont with the various advisors, none of the principles. And at this point we.. we pushed and pulled the format as far as we reasonably dare. We were certainly talking about the possibility of double time for the Stormont spokesman. We were talking about Faulkner recording a piece which he could do either at the beginning or the end - that kind of pushing and pulling. But at least it was all fairly constructive. And at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I'd gone back to Broadcasting House in Belfast, David Gilliland rang up from

the Cabinet Office and said, "Catch a plane back to London, you'll get your Minister, it's agreed in principle but we won't know who it's going to be until late this evening or tomorrow morning, so you might as well go back to London." However, it does seem that there was a Cabinet Meeting in Stormont later that evening, Wednesday 22nd December, at which the whole question of their representation was adamantly rejected. Suggesting perhaps that the harder liners than Brian Faulkner himself were by now weighing in, not least of course because they were doing it on the back of some fairly vociferous Press speculation. So the following day, the Thursday 23rd December, I find myself back in London, and I receive an indirect message from David Gilliland, "There will be no Stormont representative..." following as it appeared the Cabinet meeting the night before. And when I rang back there was nobody available in the private office to elaborate. On Christmas Eve, Peter Borough in the DAILY TELEGRAPH, ran a piece headline "BBC inquisition into British policy in Northern Ireland - Lord Butler refused to have anything to do with it." Well, it was precisely not an inquisition into the past that we were planning, and one wondered why Lord Butler should be brought in. Immediately, we put out feelers to see if we couldn't get some Unionist alternatives, Sir Robert Porter, Robin Chichester Clarke were both contacted and they requested that we would call them back on, after Christmas. At this stage, I mean the feeling was that it was not only essential programmatically to have a Unionist spokesman, we couldn't possibly pretend the programme was balanced if we didn't have a spokesman for the majority Government. But also Ian Paisley had said that he would not participate if there wasn't an official Unionist, so to speak - it wasn't called the Official Unionist Party in those

days. He just couldn't be seen to be sitting at the same table as Southern politicians, if the Faulkner Unionists, the Unionist Government were not there as well. Well, if we thought we were going to have a quiet Christmas we didn't. Lord Devlin was plagued over Christmas by the DAILY TELEGRAPH, and his son, Tim Devlin, who was working for THE TIMES, for a statement. And so I talked to him at some length, and he was very reassuring in his stance and he was very clear that he thought the DAILY TELEGRAPH was acting irresponsib...irresponsibly in stirring up controversy. And he was right, because on Tuesday 29th December, the DAILY TELEGRAPH lead story and editorial was headed 'Ulster fury at the BBC Television Tribunal' quoting Angus Maude and Ratdon Powner and Straton Mills - the last 2 being Ulster MPs. Robin Chichester Clarke, whom we'd contacted before Christmas, requested an early meeting to consider the programme in view of the Press clamour. So now it was that the potential contributors were all going to consider whether or not they should participate, not so much in the light of what we had to say about the programme format, but whether or not they could stand politically in front of the Press clamour. He.. undoubtedly he was entertaining the invitation seriously, but as I say, I think by now that kind of pressure was getting to him. But more importantly we were now locked in, because people like Fitt and Blakely and O'Kennedy and Blainy South of the Border, were issuing statements saying that the BBC must not bow to this kind of suppression, this kind of pressure. So they were not merely saying that they wouldn't participate, they were saying they were going to participate, and they were damned if anybody was going to stop the programme going ahead, and yet we were on the horns of a dilemma, because clearly it would have been totally irresponsible to

go ahead with a programme which didn't have adequate representation of the Stormont Government's point of view. The Stormont Government at the time being under some pressure, because it was only a matter of weeks, in the event, before it was paroled.

GILLARD: I remember, yes.

FRANCIS: And therefore, I mean one was very sensitive to the fact that the skids were under them to some extent, not least because of the implementation of internment, and we had to be sensitive to that. Not.. not for political reasons but for the sensible reasons and everything else - just sheer responsibility. Anyway, we'd now reached the sort of.. the final phase. DG thought it would be a good idea to contact Faulkner again, which he did on Wednesday 29th December, said, "As far as the BBC is concerned, the door is still wide open." We confirmed the fact that we were going ahead with the programme, and used phrases like, "The production team is going ahead with its planning for a programme on January 5th." We used the fact that we were being hounded by the Press to as far as possible get over the fact that the BBC was determined to go ahead with the programme - the thing which was missing because we hadn't got a RADIO TIMES billing. I mean anybody who picked up a RADIO TIMES, which of course was now on sale for January 5th, could see movies or whatever scheduled for that evening on BBC-1. Now, it had reached the pitch that by Wednesday 29th December, Gerry Fitt, who was to take part, and Rafdon Pownder, who was one of the Ulster MPs who'd objected, actually debated the issue on UTV as to whether the BBC should go ahead with the programme the following week -

which seemed to me a rather interesting situation, whereby they were giving us in effect a whole lot of publicity. Thursday the 3.. 30th December, I was back at Stormont talking to the top advisers, including the Secretary to the Cabinet, and once again I requested a positive reason from them, to the Chairman if necessary, why the 5th January might be inopportune and when might be opportune. No answers forthcoming. And this was when we had to assert it was our intention to press on with the best available spokesman if there was no Minister forthcoming. The problem at that point, on New Year's eve, 31st December, was that Faulkner issued a long statement, rejecting the BBC's (quote) "subpeona," and reiterating that no representative of the Northern Ireland Government will be taking part in the programme. He repeated his concern about the timing and balance of the programme. And he charged that the public controversy (quote) "might have been avoided if the BBC had been prudent enough to explore fully the views of all the parties concerned, including the Governments repsonsible for Northern Ireland, before committing itself to some of them..." some of the parties concerned. A fallacious position I would suggest, because if you.. if you make the going ahead of a major programme subject to the agreement of all the parties concerned, including Governments, you are in effect handing them power of veto. And there's no question that trying to lock 8 protagonists into the same room at the same time is difficult, but if you say, "And by the way, if any one of you objects we won't go ahead with the programme..." you can kiss goodbye to this kind of programme. Anyway, New Year's Day, Saturday, every Unionist we approached - we sat there in melancholy fashion in amongst the sports journalists, ringing every known Unionist councillor, former Stormont

MP, obviously the Westminster MPs, and officials in the Unionist Party, and we got down to saying, "Look the person must have a firm Unionist label on them, even if he's not a Westminster MP." The one person we hadn't tracked down was one Jack Maginnis, who was something of a maverick figure, a bit of a loner, the MP for Armagh. And he was the kind of figure who would be entirely loyal to the Party, and yet totally determined to do exactly as he wished. And so it was in the afternoon of Sunday that we approached Jack Maginnis, who invited us to go down to his farm in Armagh, which we did in County Armagh - not far from the Border. And when we got there, he had the Lambeg drum out (PH) and before he would talk business, he gave us a few rounds - if rounds is the word - on the Lambeg drum. So we thought we might well be in for a roasting from one of the real hard line Unionists. However, not at all. He had read all about it. He thought it was very important. It was crucially important that the Unionists be represented. He was going to do it and he was damned if anybody was going to stop him - so he stated. Well, we'd got our Unionist. Actually, as we went back, first of all we thought, well gee whizz - it was late now on the Sunday night - I must ring Hu, Hu Wheldon, and tell him that we've got a Unionist, because there was to be an Emergency Board Meeting the following morning, Monday 3rd January, in London. I had already perspectively booked an air taxi - a fairly expensive effort in those days - to get me back in time. But I was able to tell Hu before he went to bed that night, or I was going to be able to tell him that we had in fact got a Unionist, and so Paisley would re-join etc. The only trouble was that we tried to find a 'phone box in South County Armagh which worked at that late hour of night. And as we scratched around with a torch, which gave us pause...

and sometimes the headlights pointed at 'phonebooths, we must have gone to half a dozen before we found one that worked. One suddenly became aware of the fact we were in Indian country, and there we were quite literally buggering about and if the IRA didn't get us, I mean the Security Forces might well have thought we were extremely suspicious. So we made a rather breathless call... call to Hu Wheldon. Got back to the BBC where was the ubiquitous Billy Flax, the political correspondent for Northern Ireland. And we told Billy with some sort of air of triumph, Waldo was still around, he'd stayed in the office - oh I beg your pardon, no Waldo came down with us, oh sorry. Waldo had come down with us, driven us down to Armagh, 'cos he knew Armagh, he was born there, and he was very chuffed and scratched his belly many times as he was wont to do. And we told Billy Flax that we had in fact landed a Unionist MP. "Who?" he said. "Jack Maginnis," we said. He said, "Oh God, no not stammering Jack." However, stammering Jack he may have been by one reputation, but the fact is that he was blunt and forthright and held his ground. And whilst he may not have been the most articulate ex.. exponent of the Unionist point of view, nonetheless he was an unwaverable one, particularly under cross-questioning in the studio format. So early... in the early hours of Monday 3rd January, a very clear, cold morning, in the air taxi, I flew back to Heathrow, parked.. taxi or car was it laid on, I can't remember, into Broadcasting House. A fair bit of tough questioning from Charles Hill, but no question on which way the Chairman stood. That was it, we were going ahead. And so the decision was confirmed on Monday 3rd December for transmission on the Wednesday night, the 5th. END TAPE 10

IDENTIFICATION

Mr Richard Francis. TAPE 11

GILLARD: And we're still talking about the real.. THE QUESTION OF ULSTER.

FRANCIS: I remember Charlie Hill grinning in that familiar way when I said to him, "Well, of course, Maginnis was no Lloyd George, but he would certainly answer the criteria we were seeking." And I think there was a kind of heady atmosphere this morning, there certainly was in me, because of course having squared the circle the night before, got into bed rather late and up rather early, I suppose I felt fairly heady about it. But now of course we had to get back to the business of really making sure we got it all locked together. So I got onto Paisley and he said he'd have to consult his Party, which he did, and they agreed to his participating. He said he had to consult his Party. I've always formed the impression that he told the Party, not only on that occasion, which way they were to face. But he certainly felt it was necessary to sort of.. to spread the responsibility for participation. We had a very constructive briefing dinner with Devlin, Caradon and Foster that night, but Lord Devlin insisted that he should be responsible for the supplementary questioning of the protagonists and their witnesses and that he couldn't accept supplementaries from Robin Day. Meantime., Harold Wilson's office was requesting news of the invitation to make a recorded statement. We'd not in fact told them they were going to be asked to do that, because until such time as we

had everything in position, we didn't want to be inviting the Leader of the Opposition lightly to do a programme. But, of course, they had read about the format in newspapers, and in it... in that format it said that the Opposition and Her Majesty's Government would have the opportunity to make statements. So he was kind of sort of saying, "Well when am I going to be invited?" And so we invited him, and he accepted and published the fact that he'd been invited and he was accepting almost instan.. almost instaneously. We were to, partly because of the principle of simultaneous invitation, we'd thought again as to whether we should go to Reggie Maudling first and if, and only if, he accepted, we should invite Harold Wilson. And we decided against that, and we issued the two invitations simultaneously. Because Reggie Maudling as Home Secretary was responsible for Northern Ireland for the Government, and Harold Wilson, albeit Leader of the Opposition, held the Northern Ireland brief for the Opposition. So we issued simultaneous invitations. Harold Wilson was so quick to respond and go public with his response that one of the tensions which occurred in Maudling's office, if not with Maudling himself, was due to the perception, incorrect, that we'd had the nerve to ask Harold Wilson first before inviting the Government of the day. "Not that it would have made any difference," they hastened to add, "because we're damned if we're going to take part." "Damned if we're going to take part," being the phrase actually used on the 'phone, though not in their public statements. Well, now, off we went with various other mechanical things, such as the BBC's statement out.. outlining the precise formula, because up to now it's always been as reported by the Press. And at that point Robin Day, even as we were releasing a piece of paper which said that he would

chair the thing, withdrew, saying - and has always said to this day that he did so because he felt fundamentally the programme was out of balance. Personally, I think it came down simply to the fact that he was not going to be involved asking the supplementary questions, though he certainly had a pretty big role to play in the introductory phase. A less generous interpretation has been that he was lent on and he felt a sort of a club embarrassment and so on and so forth - that such was the tide against the programme that he didn't want to be associated with it. I've no evidence for that. I think it came down quite frankly to a matter of professional pride and the supplementary questioning. Anyway, out he went. I had anticipated the possibility of this, and I had Ludo Kennedy in him, I rang him in Scotland. I remember he paused and said, "This is the kind of moment that one works years in this business for - I shall be proud to do the programme." Which was.. well, at the time I remember being quite moved by it, but it.. 'cos it was the conviction that he really held. It had now assumed a much greater importance than an enquiry into Ulster. It had assumed the sort of constitutional importance as to who called the tune on the BBC airwaves. And it had been a very close run thing, because there's no question about it that the veto could have worked. If the politicians of the day, if the Parties of the day are not prepared to play the game with the broadcaster, there's no question about it that by the.. the extension of the veto to all members of recognisible authorities within a Party, they can actually cause the broadcaster to withdraw the programme simply on grounds of responsibility - for it would be irresponsible and unbalanced to proceed. And they damn nearly caught us on that one that day. It suggests actually there is a point beyond which Parties, if they wish

broadcasters to operate in an independent fashion, have to accept that there will be some occasions when they'd rather not participate, and may be they have to make provision for one spokesman rather than another to participate. But ultimately, unless they play the game, so to speak, when the broadcasters are wanting to play it, you could actually bring down the whole great edifice. It had assumed those proportions, and it was against that that Ludo felt somehow that his mission, not of his whole career, but he certainly put it very highly in his career, this was a moment when he would actually justify himself. So he said, "Right I'm on the first plane or train..." I can't remember, Faulkner issued another statement accusing the BBC of (quotes) "plumbing the depths of absurdity." He disowned Maginnis for all his loyalty. He also disowned any archive film of himself proporting to represent his policy. In the event, what we were to use was a piece which Faulkner had done a couple of days previous at the New Year, talking about the future and the Stormont Government's plans for it. It wasn't exactly archive film, and it certainly represented his policy as of 48-hours previously, but I mean one must put that down, I think, to the sort of heightened emotions which were surrounding the whole thing, because even responsible people were actually coming forward with some rather silly statements. The Home Secretary replied to the invitation with a published letter to the Chairman. What happened was that Michael Butt, my Number 2, the Editor of the programme, got through to his office at the Home Office, and the next thing we knew was not that the Chairman had received a letter, but in the public prints, I think it was THE EVENING STANDARD, the letter was published which the Chairman was to receive - let alone a reply to the telephone call to the Editor of the programme. And in that you had

a rather sharp exchange of letters which were published at the time. Maudling's letter was... Maudling's letter was published and so was Charles Hill's. And Charles Hill's letter was a very forthright fundamental letter about the position of the BBC in a situation like this. Well, perhaps the rest is history. The fact is that the programme went on the air against a hail of headlines, some of them were really quite.. quite boisterous. "The full United Kingdom is now in peril," said THE BELFAST NEWSLETTER on the morning of Wednesday 5th, the day of transmission. The er.. the tabloid Press in England were equally sensational. Here I look up the cuttings. "Lord Blunder of the Beeb," was one headline. Excuse me, I'll just go back over that.

There were um.. huge headlines. THE DAILY MIRROR had, "Lord Blunder of the Beeb," referring of course to Lord Hill.

GILLARD: On the front page, I see.

FRANCIS: On the front page, two inch headlines. Two inch headlines in THE SUN, "Telly trial storm boils over." THE EXPRESS had, "TV trial fury." And yet, in the event, the programme was long, lengthy, and Lord Caradon, one of the so-called Tribunal, was to say afterwards, "We may have been dull but we were never dangerous."

GILLARD: Was Reggie Maudling, the Home Secretary, invited to use his power of veto, do you know? Did Lord Hill in fact say to him,

"If you want to stop the programme, we're not going to stop it but you have the power to do it."

FRANCIS: Yes, that did occur. I mean that occurred during the meeting of the 13th December, very early on in fact. Because it was when, as Chairman, he was testing the point about the programme being inopportune, and the Government was not forthcoming for reasons as to why it should be.. inopportune. And he was reminded of the fact that he had powers under Section 13.4 to request the programme be not transmitted. But of course by then, it was all public knowledge that we had the intention to do it, and so any Government action would have been overt in any event. And that has always been the case, or seems to have been the case over 13.4 - it has been the countervailing publicity which has always caused Governments, as it was in the case of Anthony Eden, to think twice and not to invoke 13.4 for fear of the repercussions.

GILLARD: Yes, because what strikes one in your recounting of this absolutely key story in the BBC's history, is that one relates it to more recent events. For example, the.. particularly THE REAL LIVES episode, which you and I both have vividly in mind. The fact that throughout this episode, you had everybody right up to the Chairman fully in the picture. I mean the reference-up business couldn't have been more effectively and completely fulfilled, and the result was.. for the BBC, a very satisfactory outcome.

FRANCIS: Yes, I mean it's tempting to say, "Well that's the answer, isn't it?" I think it's also true to say that nobody could

actually... there was no question of seeing this programme in advance, for example, because it was to be a live studio programme, so there was no question of running into that kind of problem, such as had been experienced with YESTERDAY'S MEN, and such as would be experienced again in the future with REAL LIVES. It is true to say that everyone was in the.. was in the picture. It's also true to say that, at the time, possibly because there hadn't been such a furore over Northern Ireland. Afterall, Northern Ireland had turned a big corner under Waldo McGuire, and it was now about not only telling the story itself, but also permitting and encouraging Network coverage of the issues. Was it not Waldo McGuire as CNI who with Paul Fox were receptive to the idea of a long, cool programme, investigating the problem, the different points of view behind the violence? So that what you had actually was in a sense a.. a whole set of fresh attitudes, because it was the first time we had really tried to do a major programme which ran up against political opposition. Incidentally, I mean it.. later on there would be similar rows, some big, some small, and a number of the lessons from A QUESTION OF ULSTER were learnt on both sides. For example, subsequently, Secretaries of State and Home Secretaries... Secretaries of State in charge of Northern Ireland and Home Secretaries in charge of broadcasting, would recognise the dangers attached to releasing their letters to the Chairman of the BBC publicly, even as they were delivering them. A lesson perhaps which was forgotten by Leon Brittan over REAL LIVES. Similarly, some of the lessons about reference-up and pain's taking thinking through and planning of the programme for weeks in advance, and the fact that the Chairman, the Director General and everyone else knew about it well in advance of billing - those lessons

were forgotten by the production people over many of the shemozzles that were to follow.

GILLARD: Yes. But what about the viewing audience? You haven't told us anything about their reactions. Were there large numbers of them or were they bored with it and turned off? What happened?

FRANCIS: Well, the first thing is that Northern Ireland had one of its quietness nights for years because everyone was locked in in front of the telly. Half of the people who started to watch the programme finished it - which isn't bad.

GILLARD: It ran for about 3 hours.

FRANCIS: Yes, so I mean in many ways retention was more important than the total number. It did examine the issues. It certainly illustrated to the ignorant British public - they were ignorant then and they're still ignorant - the complexities of the situation and the differing viewpoints which impinge upon it. If you like the problem which any Government has to solve, being almost intractable. It was pain's taking. It was cool. Even Bernadette Devlin who's well capable on a soap box of stirring things up, was nonetheless very impressive. There were one or two of who thought that Lord Devlin um.. not only sort of saw.. saw quite a lot in her arguments, but chatted with her in a very sociable way after the programme. (LAUGH)

GILLARD: Yeah.

FRANCIS: I mean the point I'm making is that even in those circumstances the Neil Blainy's and the Bernadette Devlins, and Ian Paisley's, who are prone to make very strong extremist statements on the soap box, when we come along and just film what they're doing in public, were constrained by the quiet, cool circumstances of the studio, the presence of Lord Devlin and the members of the Tribunal, into behaving in a very reasonable fashion.

GILLARD: It certainly was a very notable programme. Of course, it had a profound effect on your own career, didn't it, because you subsequently and quite soon became Controller Northern Ireland, and then you became DNCA and through.. that part of your career you had to handle one Northern Ireland crisis after another, and I think we might go on and discuss those in sequence before we come back to other details perhaps of your Belfast reign and your DNCA reign.

FRANCIS: Yes, there's no question in my mind that that was one of those events in one's career which had a profound effect. I like many other people in Current Affairs had been doing programmes since the onset of the troubles in 1969, and therefore it wasn't the only programme that I had done in Northern Ireland, and it wasn't the only programme for which I travelled to Northern Ireland and got to know the problem a bit. Remember that I had been somewhat put out of joint by the promotion of Brian Wenham to be Head of Current Affairs Group? He wasn't an Assistant Head of Group, he was Editor, PANORAMA, so .. yes,

he was promoted above me, I was an Assistant Head of the Group. And clearly, it seemed sensible in my terms, to look for another track on which to pursue my career, side step and out. And sometime after THE QUESTION OF ULSTER I was having a chat with David Attenborough, who was Director of Programmes, and he asked me in which direction I would like to go, and I actually said, "Well if Waldo McGuire ever goes under a bus, I'd very much like to bid for Controller Northern Ireland. END OF TAPE

IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC, Mr Richard Francis.

And we're now on **TAPE 12** and we've just appointed him as Controller Northern Ireland.

FRANCIS: Well, I would qualify that and say that .. in a sense the point of story was when I was asked would I be interested to.. to bid. I'd already registered my interest to David Attenborough as DP Tel. Waldo didn't go under bus, he went under a boat and um..in a sense that's what saved his life because there he was, he had the stroke and he fell half into the water of the lake in Donegal where he was fishing, and undoubtedly his body temperature was kept low enough by the fact that sufficient of his body was in the water, to survive that stroke. He was found, after a lot of worry, of course, because there was a feeling that he might have been kidnapped, being in the Republic, and being the person he was because not only was he Controller of BBC Northern Ireland, but he wa.s. he was considered, I think rather unfairly in many respects, to be one of the Unionist establishment. He was not in anyway. But nonetheless, there he was. He'd had this stroke and there was a very real um.. feeling at one stage that he would be able to return. Stuart Whitman Wyton was invited to hold the fort. When it became increasingly apparent that whether or not Waldo returned to some form of duty with the BBC, such an exacting post particularly during the troubles as Controller Northern Ireland would be beyond him. Stuart

was... I think almost sounded, according to what he told me, about the possibilities of doing the job, but unfortunately he too was not too fit a man, and so it was felt that the best thing to do was to have the consideration of the field, not including Stuart. And that is when I came into the ring, and Hu Wheldon approached me to ask if I would be interested in the job. Actually, I was at the time, covering Watergate, and I was in the States, mounting an operation, rather akin to some of the operations we'd mounted to cover the conventions previously. This, I suppose, was a denominating convention that was occurring. And we were doing this coverage, which we were also passing multilaterally to other European broadcasters on a night by night basis. But the one thing about the Watergate Hearings was that of course they occurred only 3 days a week - Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday - and one had long weekends. And my scenario was that it was cheaper to get a cheap weekend flight, for $120, down to the Virgin Islands, and then borrow a friend's boat and go cruising for the weekend, than sit around the bars of Washington where it was.. where it was extremely expensive. Well, that was my story, and so most weekends on a Friday, having finished our business, we'd go down to the Virgin Islands and sail, and on the Monday we'd get back into port and we would fly up to Washington for the next day's hearings. Well, on this occasion we decided to get back at the boathouse on the Sunday night, and spend the night overnight at St Thomas because there was a Carnival. And when we got back to the boathouse, I suppose it was about 7 o'clock Sunday evening in the Virgin Isles, literally nailed to the door of the boathouse - it was much a Hemingway sort of brokendown kind of boathouse, with a brokendown pub on the quay, there was a message which said, "Dick, ring Hu Wheldon

anytime..." giving the London number. And I realised that it was now midnight and a bit London time, the early hours of Monday morning, and the Managing Director of Television might not be too pleased to receive a call, but as I had plenty of rum in me on the way back to harbour, I looked for a 'phone, and found one of those American-type 'phones, literally on a telegraph pole, with not a great deal of acoustic cover, which was all very well but for the Carnival going on in the background, and being a West Indian Carnival, there was a great deal of metal involved, and I could hardly hear myself think. But again having had sufficient rum I pursued this call, rang with some trepidation the Kew number and almost immediately the 'phone was picked up, and Hu answered it, and I started with a set of apologies about ringing at that hour. And he said, "Stuff and nonsense, really old boy. Do you want Northern Ireland?" (LAUGH) So after a little explanation as to what he meant by that, namely would I like to be considered by the Board, he said "Get on the first plane and get back here Thursday moring. Mind you, you won't get it." And with that advice and cautionary tale because it sort of sobered me up and made me work hard, I went in in front of a Board, and I competed with Ronnie Mason who was at the time Head of Programmes in Northern Ireland, and I got the job, Ronnie was my Number 2 and became eventually my best man.

GILLARD: Did he? What did you feel about the job that had to be done there? Was it carrying on where Waldo left off or was there more?

FRANCIS: Well I.. I discovered rather quickly a couple of things. The first thing was that Waldo had made a great deal of difference. I remember trying to do Current Affairs programmes there in the 1960s, in fact doing one or two, and for the most part missing the big story. I remember we used Northern Ireland as an example of.. of the delegation of the.. the devolution, excuse me, the devolution of Government when looking at the Scottish and Welsh aspirations, we actually trotted over to Northern Ireland and said, "Look it works terribly well here," that was 1967. And Waldo had made a great difference, because he'd already turned the corner editorially, and he insisted that the news men reported to the full. But he was, I'm afraid he didn't.. he didn't get the credit that was due to him. Partly, I think, because he worked too near to the coal face. He spent his whole time in shirtsleeves in the News Room. That wasn't necessarily the right way to win friends and influence people outside the BBC. Also I fear it might have been something to do with his stroke, that he was so near to the coal face 7 days a week, 24-hours a day sometimes. Second thing was that he had a very narrow focus. It was not simply that he was a newsman, he believed passionately that while the troubles were on, and one can see why he came to this conclusion, in the first years of the 70s, it would be unwise to beef-up the BBC's activities outside sheer news gathering. That he did that is.. sure. That the News Room there facilitated the reporters from the BBC and other broadcasters all round the world, true. That he did everything possible to enable them to do their job and to stand in the way of pressures and opposition. But he eschewed absolutely the notion of expanding other programme areas, and even filling vacancies when they occurred in non-News

programming. Not only that, he also felt that it would be rather unwise for the BBC to start putting up new buildings, or to embark upon getting a colour scanner for their OB Unit for Television, when there was a very real danger that the thing could be burnt out within 24-hours of it being delivered in the Province. I understand all that, but the point was that by the time I reached Northern Ireland in 1973, two things attain, one was a realisation that if this thing was going to go on, it was going to be even more important to pursue normal programming as an antidote to the inevitable bad news and disruption - not only in regional terms and using, particularly Radio, by developing as it became to be known, Radio Ulster, as a natural medium of communication to the community in Northern Ireland. But also frankly Television to cover in colour sporting events, concerts, events around the Province, and so on and so forth, as an outward manifestation of normally, not only to the people of the Province, but also to the rest of the United Kingdom and indeed the world. So I found myself very early in 1974, writing a very fairly short clipped, even scruffy note, to the Managing Director of Television and the Managing Director of Radio, imploring them to pour quite a lot more resources and to build up the staff strength all round the region, not simply in the News Room. And I must say they responded instantly, because we'd fallen a long way behind. And such things as the Programme Allowance for ordinary programmes, including Current Affairs programmes, were considerably smaller in Northern Ireland than in Scotland and Wales, when arguably the problems were the greater.

GILLARD: Yes.

FRANCIS: We pressed on with the new office block, to take pressure off the building, and then we pressed on subsequently with the new News Studio and so on and so forth. And most particularly, within a year, we had a new.. CMCR - half a million pounds of hardware.

GILLARD: Yeah.

FRANCIS: And indeed that was to be tested very soon, because whereas up to then there had been a great reluctance to deploy the OB Unit into troublesome areas, and great reluctance to force a predominantly Protestant OB camera crew to go and work even on the coverage of Sunday Services in hardline Republican/Catholic areas, we were actually to deploy the CMCR south of the border in some fairly contentious situations. The first time we did it, was for the gaelic football semifinal. The Ulster gaelic football being 9 counties, it so happened that the final in 1974 was due to be played in Monahan, south of the border. As it was our responsibility to cover that and feed it to RTE, and we got their feeds from.. of all the other Provinces, we had a difficult decision to.. to take. Actually, the decision to take was not difficult. What was difficult was to pursuade the crew to go. And they said, "What about security?" And the GAA said, "Well, don't worry, we'll provide security." And the cameramen with some trepidation crossed the border, eschewing any military escort - quite rightly in my view. When they got to Monahan, they were indeed met, not by the Guarde, by a lot of gentlemen in dark leather jackets and bulging pockets, who looked af.. who looked after them absolutely marvellously, no questions asked. And of course they had to deploy overnight and all

the rest of it, and there was no question of anybody messing around with the gear.

GILLARD: Was it fairly soon after this that you had to deal with the UWC situation? We've got about 3 or 4 minutes.

FRANCIS: Well.. yes, I mean I arrived in the September of '73. The other reason why I was able to persuade the Managing Directors why we should proceed to develop in the natural sense, consolidate if you like, because we were a long way behind in terms of hardware, very very archaic equipment we had, was the fact that the outlook was pretty good. That was the autumn in which Willy Whitelaw was Secretary of State, and we had first of all Sunningdale, and the agreement to go ahead with the power-sharing executive - which of course came in in January '74, which was just about 4 months after I arrived. And so there was a very rosy outlook. There was even a ceasefire, an IRA ceasefire that Christmas. So there were a lot of good reason why we should if not sort of develop normality to offset abnormality, we could actually see some daylight ahead. That was not to be, of course, because, well first of all Willy went back warning that a General Election in the United Kingdom could destablize what was already a dodgy situation in the Province. Because whereas the elections to the Assembly were on a PR basis, and whereas you had got a power-sharing executive, when it came to the General Election in... the first General Election of 1974, at the end of February, what of course you had was a first past the post system which delivered up 11 Unionists and only 1 Republican. So that once again you heightened the tensions, the very

campaign itself did and it gave a great deal of a boost to Paisley, to Molyneaux and others, who were not prepared to accept the power-sharing executive - in other words the hardline Unionists. That was the political background, and really in a way the skids were under the power-sharing executive from that General Election. What pushed it over the brink, of course, happened to be an illegal, non-constitutional strike. I mean what started off and was perceived as no more than a sort of industrial stoppage, after 15 days had effectively brought down the legitimate arm of Government. And brought it down with Westminster virtually looking on, the British Army standing back, the RUC not by any means disposed to put the boot in to the Ulster workers and subsequently their supporters, which extended not only to elected representatives in the Assembly and MPs, such as Paisley, but also to decent middle-of-the-road Unionist people, such as the farmers of Northern Ireland, who ended up in procession marching or driving on Stormont in support of the UWC.

GILLARD: Was it almost a General Strike?

FRANCIS: Yes, it was because the point about the strike, and it conditioned very much the news coverage, was that what they would seek to do was to stop the Province working. And whereas that tended to be selective, not least by the use of the.. electric power, or rather the non-use of it, because I mean the point was to withdraw power supplies as far as possible. They tried to interdict petrol supplies. They tried to interdict all communications.

GILLARD: Did broadcasting keep going?

FRANCIS: Broadcasting kept going, and of course Radio came into its own, or came back into its own, because when you had power strikes, which at times would render people off the air so far as Television is concerned, for two-thirds of the time, Radio and battery operated sets were one of the few ways in which people could find out what was going on. I mean the newspapers were at a standstill, 'cos even if they were printing they were not getting distributed at all widely outside Belfast, etc. And Radio became very much the channel of communication whereby people had to make decisions as to whether they would risk going to work, whether they would risk going through roadblocks, some of which were manned by dangerous louts. I mean quite apart from political motivation, it wasn't a very pleasant experience - I know, I ran into some. So...CUTS OFF

END TAPE 12