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THE ORAL HISTORY

OF

THE BBC

TOM

CHALMERS

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RECORDED 26/3/82

BBC Sound Archives.

Transcribed by:

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(0276) 66111

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THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC: TOM CHALMERS.

Recorded in Cambridge 26th March 1982.

INTERVIEWER: Well Tom, before you went to Nigeria, in 1951, you'd got a lot of experience in the BBC ?

CHALMERS: Yes I had started in 1936 as a trainee, the first trainee course that they ever had, which included people like Eric Crozier, who went onto write libretti for Benjamin Britten; Guy Burgess of infamous memory and various others whose names I don't remember at the moment. But there were about twelve of us. And from there I went to Northern Ireland, I was an announcer, '36 - '39, and then came back to London with the outbreak of war, went into what was still known as the Empire Service, very much under-developed and helped develop it through its various aspects into the Overseas Services in all their ramifications, english language and languages of various sorts, english and various sorts of languages I mean to say.

Then at the end of the war I was asked to join the Light Programme, one of Haley's three domestic services, under Maurice Gorham and I eventually became Controller of the Light Programme and then decided to go out to Nigeria.

INT: Well you had reached a high level in the BBC so it might seem rather surprising that you were induced to go to West Africa ?

CHALMERS: Well yes. It was a planned move actually, on my part, because I realised that at 36 when I was made Controller, the youngest controller at that time ever, that I'd got another twenty four years to go before retirement right at the top and I couldn't go very much further as I was, there was only one layer above me between me and the Director General, so one had to go sideways. Norman Collins asked me if i'd like to go up to Alexandra Palace and look after Presentation for Television but it didn't attract me very much. And the other opening was Nigeria and so I chose that.

INT: Were there any people in the BBC, you'd been working with, who particularly developed your interest in W. Africa ?

CHALMERS: Yes there was one in particular and that was John Grenfell Williams who was Head of the African Service. He has started as a medical missionary and was caught in London on the outbreak of war and I think had been put to work in the Ministry of Information, who then sent him along to the BBC. And he used to tell me a lot during the night-watches when we were fire-watching or whatever we were doing, about Africa and his hopes and fears for the future and he interested me very much in broadcasting out there which was apparently in a rudimentary state. So much so that I felt that I'd like to go and do something there sometime. I'd never been to Africa, I had never met any Africans, any black Africans and so I think this idea remained dormant in my mind until an opportunity arose.

INT: And what did it feel like when you arrived in Lagos, in January 1951 ?

CHALMERS: Well very strange indeed. I was quite stunned by the colour and the noise and the variety as I was driven in a Government House car from the airport to Government House. Of course one had to learn a completely new vocabulary, set of ideas, and I was young enough to be fascinated by it and to enter very fully into these aspects of African life. And it was a great challenge to be given, what was it, a million and a half pounds or something like that, by way of a colonial development and welfare grant and told to get on with it. That's roughly what it was, a complete, almost carte blanche.

INT: When you arrived and had been taken to Government House, you were really given the 'red-carpet' treatment.

CHALMERS: Very much so, yes.

INT: And you kept up very good colonial connections with the Colonial Secretariat in Lagos ?

CHALMERS: Yes well one had to. There was nothing else to keep up connections with, I mean if you wanted to get something off the ground, I mean something as unknown as broadcasting was out there, you had to have very considerable help and it's awfully difficult to get anything started on your own. So this is why I elected to work with the Colonial Secretariat machine rather than set up something independent which would have trebled the amount of work that we had to do independently and increase the cost.

INT: Now it wasn't entirely unknown country in terms of broadcasting because some people had looked at broadcasting in W. Africa and written reports or a report on what might be done.

CHALMERS: Yes the Turner Byron report as it's called. That was commissioned, I think in about 1947, something like that, by the Colonial Office for broadcasting in W. Africa as a whole. Turner was, Leslie Turner was a BBC engineer and Frank, I think he was, Frank Byron of the Crown Agents. And the war had of course demonstrated the importance of broadcasting and in W. Africa there was a sort of rudimentary wired wireless service, it had been started I think in the Gold Coast by Sir Arnold Hodson, before the war and they'd copied this in Nigeria and they got what they called Radidiffussion stations which relayed mostly BBC programme material and originated some of their own local stuff. So there was broadcasting of a kind but not the sort of broadcasting that we were accustomed to, it wasn't wire-less broadcasting.

INT: And you took the Nigeria part of the plan and had another look at it.

CHALMERS: Had another look at it, yes this plan the Turner Byron Report dealt with broadcasting, as I say, in W. Africa as a whole and at one time they had some crazy idea of having a central station which would cover the whole territory. This was entirely against the whole trend of politics which were then developing rapidly. So in the end they produced a tri-partite report and I took the Nigeria part and worked on that.

It was already out of date and in some respects unrealistic by the time I got there. Of course the Korean War had started and equipment was difficult to get and all sorts of development was going on which made the task of any new enterprise even more difficult than it would normally have been.

INT: Can you tell us what the facilities were in Lagos for broadcasting. Were there studios, was there a transmitter what was there ?

CHALMERS: The studio, in Lagos there was a, yes there were two studios, one in an army hut up in ^{Ikoji} Ikoji where the amplifying equipment was kept and a studio in the centre of Lagos on the marina waterfront at the Glover Hall. When we say studio one mustn't think of nicely panelled or acoustically treated BBC studios, nothing like that, it was very ramshackle indeed and I don't know how the equipment was kept working, it was very old equipment ~~am~~ended by the P & T from time to time. And the studios were only big enough to take a few performers, a couple of speakers and perhaps a singing party or a band.

INT: And I should think very hot.

CHALMERS: Very hot indeed, no air conditioning, a fan which you could only put on in between broadcasts, so there was a very small shortwave transmitter on loan from the Post & Telegraphs which was used about twice a week and it didn't get anywhere it was only about 250 watts of power. So I mean broadcasting facilities as we would know them, of a respectable kind, were virtually nil. And this went for the rest of Nigeria to where they had these RDS stations, as they were called, with very small studios. The quality of sound which came out from the boxes was absolutely unbelievable. The human voice was distorted almost beyond recognition.

INT: These were the boxes from the wired system.

CHALMERS: From the wired system, yes.

INT: No presumably you had a good tour round the country in order to acquaint yourself with the physical conditions and what the state of the broadcasting was ?

CHALMERS: Yes indeed I did, this was one of the first things I did. I went with the Chief Engineer, John Murray and we went and had a look

particularly at the places where we were going to site transmitters, on a regional basis.

INT: John Murray, he had previous experience in Africa ?

CHALMERS: John Murray had been a BBC engineer at Daventry and he had been out in N. Rhodesia, as it was then, in Lusaka setting up a very similar kind of thing on a much smaller kind of scale. And yes he, for some reason I can't remember what it was, his term of office in Lusaka had come to an end and he was available on the BBC's books and I was offered him on a plate and there was really, I didn't have much choice about it. In a way I would have chosen somebody perhaps of a different character than John Murray, but there it was, I more or less had to have him and he came out.

INT: Who else did you have as you expatriate staff ?

CHALMERS: Noone to begin with, I arrived myself, John Murray came about a month later, in fact the first recruit was an African to help on the administrative side just to get offices and pencils and paper and things like that, noone, they all had to be chosen and prised out of the BBC which was the only source of recruitment, or almost the only source of recruitment, there was one very important exception and that perhaps we will come onto later.

INT: Tom, you really seemed to form around yourself a very splendid team of expatriates and Nigerians, how did you do this ?

CHALMERS: Well I don't think there is any simple answer to that. As far as the expatriates was concerned, they came mostly but not exclusively from the BBC. Don't forget that this was still in the aftermath of the war and there were a number of people who weren't settled in the BBC or hadn't got permanent jobs who were working in British Forces Network for instance and who were on the lookout for something else exciting to do, rather than go back to Broadcasting House or wherever.

So there were a number of people of my own age who were, as it were, interested in pioneering work, had worked in broadcasting in strange conditions during the war, both at home and overseas and who were available or could be made available.

INT: Who were those ?

CHALMERS: People like Leslie Perrone who had been with Forces Broadcasting, oh names, I'd have to think hard for others. Arthur Langford.

INT: He'd come from the education side.

CHALMERS: He'd come from the education side and he wanted some new challenge, he had a sort of missionary spirit, I just can't think of names at the moment but they will come to me doubtless. Several people on the engineering side, Sir Edric ^{cedric} Stansfield was one, who'd been in army broadcasting, people like that I was on the look-out for and people who were interested in the challenge of work of this sort. Yourself was one of them, doubtless you wouldn't have put your name down for a job unless you had been interested in a bit of adventure which is what it was.

INT: And you took some who weren't from the BBC.

CHALMERS: I took some who weren't from the BBC who I found on the ground, as it were. Our relationship with the government of the day, the colonial government in Lagos and the provincial capitals was a somewhat delicate one. They had very little confidence in broadcasting, they were old-fashioned in their outlook and they couldn't see that broadcasting was necessary, it was distracting funds which they could have used themselves for their own pet projects and we hadn't got, from their point of view, a professional colonial office background. Therefore we were rogues in a sense. So I thought it was rather important that we should get some of their number in important positions in the development of broadcasting, they would know the ropes and they would instill a measure of confidence

into the secretariats in the various parts of the country. And this was how a young man like John Wilkinson came to be chosen, Michael Elphick and there were others whom I can't remember at the moment.

INT: John Wilkinson, he was in the northern region.

CHALMERS: John Wilkinson was either private secretary or ADC, I can't remember which, to the Lieutenant Governor of the North. I heard of him first because his name came to my attention through the public relations officer in the north an extraordinary character called Captain Money, Captain Money said we have a young man here who has done a commentary on a polo match on a wire recorder, and this seemed a very enterprising thing to do so I heard this commentary and I asked if I could meet the person concerned and it happened to be John Wilkinson he seemed to me absolutely the right sort of person with the right sort of background for what I was looking for, which was to take charge of broadcasting in the north and develop it from nothing and he got the entree of course through government circles, could speak hausa fluently and so I asked him to join. And similarly Michael Elphick who was I think in the Education Department.

INT: Was he in the Eastern Region ?

CHALMERS: He was in the Eastern Region and I wanted somebody who knew the ¹⁰⁰ ~~Ebo~~ set up there or the tribal set up to develop matters in the east because communications were so bad you had to have people who could be left alone for weeks on end without a telephone call and trusted just to get on with the job, provided they had been given an adequate briefing. And these were two very excellent people.

INT: Now you were one of the rogues in the eyes of the secretariat who kept in close touch with Africans, now what about this recruitment of Africans for key jobs to make programmes and eventually later to have important positions in running the whole show ?

CHALMERS: Well we, coming from the BBC and not being died-in-the-wool colonial civil servants, we had none of the inhibitions about Africans and Africanisation as I think it was called, Nigerianisation, that the civil servants had. And so very soon, I mean it was quite apparent if you're going to broadcast at all in a country like Nigeria you must have Nigerians, mostly, to do it. Certainly in the latter stages. And it was quite obvious that after what had been happening in the Gold Coast that Nigeria would be on its way to independence fairly soon and at some stage Africans would take over the jobs, so we very early on got as broadcasters young men and women with a reasonable degree of education, mostly from, straight from school. There were very few Africans with university education simply because there was no university. ^{with Ibadan} (Till Ibadan) Till Ibadan, yes that was being hacked out of the bush by John Melanby at the same time as I was up there trying to get premises in ^{Ibadan} Ibadan for studios.

INT: ^{Ibadan} But among those Ibadan students you'd got ^{Chinua Achebe} Chenowa Ichabi and Victor

CHALMERS: That's right through the vice principal or was he? Yes he was the vice principal of the university, the Reverend James Welsh who had been director of religious broadcasting for the BBC for many years and had left to go to the ground nut scheme in E. Africa and when that packed up found himself over on the other side under Melanby creating a new university. And I asked him one day very soon after I got there if he could give me the names of a couple of students who might be future officer material for broadcasting, future directors general, I think I said, and he gave me three names and I interviewed them and managed to tempt two of them to join us when they had taken their degrees. ^{Chinua Achebe} Chenowa Ichabi as you rightly say who went onto a remarkable literary career and Erasmus ^{Badejo} Badejo who at the time I am recording this is a priest in the anglican church in S. London.

INT: But he was also the fourth director general...

CHALMERS: He was the fourth director general yes yes.

INT: And the first Nigerian director general (correct) of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (yes yes) and ^{Chinua Achebe} Chenowa Ichabi he was Director of External Broadcasting eventually.

CHALMERS: Eventually yes he was, I think he was in charge of talks at one time, a very remarkable pair those two, one ^{Yoruba} Uraba, one ^{Yoruba} Pajowa Uraba, an ^{Chinua} Chinowa an ^{Ibo} Ebo whose father I think had been a roadmender.

INT: How did you train these new recruits. I suppose you were very dependent on Leslie ^{Perowne} Perrone and Arthur Langford who really did a special job with each one of them.

CHALMERS: Yes indeed, well training was done on the job and many Africans seem to be natural communicators, broadcasters as well and they didn't require very much training, their training was done on the job, they just watched us and then of course as soon as we could we sent them to the only source of training which existed in those days which was in London at the BBC. The BBC was very good about doing this and this was the beginning of their enormous overseas training effort.

INT: Could we now go back to this great problem you had of building adequate facilities not only in Lagos but in ^{Ibadan} Ibaaten and Kaduna and ^{Enugu} Illugu. How did you set about drawing up plans for broadcasting houses and for putting up new transmitters ?

CHALMERS: Well I'm trying to think how we did it. Some suggestions were made in the Turner Byron report about the costings which turned out to be wrong in the sense that inflation had set in and equipment was very difficult to get and indeed everything was developing so fast in Nigeria, new schemes going forward, the sort of post war impetus had got hold of everything, that one was scrambling for facilities and even for architects, it was difficult to get any architectural drawings made, it was difficult to get houses for the staff, there just weren't any and we had to build all our housing, in the meantime one was dependent on expatriates in the colonial service going on leave

and we could put staff for a month or so at a time, in their houses, very inconvenient for everybody and a lot of complaints of course from the wives and that sort of thing. But it was very difficult indeed. One, I virtually with John Murray and Ted Milton's help, mostly Ted Milton I think, re-wrote the Turner Byron report in terms of something more realistic to the present situation and got the public works department to cost and prepare drawings and that kind of thing and then we ordered the equipment that we required for the electrical equipment through the Crown Agents. We weren't allowed to deal directly with the manufacturers though we did tend to by-pass the Crown Agents when we could.

INT: And all this was very slow wasn't it ?

CHALMERS: Very slow indeed because we had to work through the development branch of the secretariat and we had to do all out negotiating for land through the lands dept., etc., in other words we had to take our turn in the queue which already existed to make use of the government machine.

INT: Somehow or other you got your hands on an old transmitter which had been used during the war at the Normandy beachhead, now why did you acquire that and how did you manage to get it ?

CHALMERS: " Mike, Charlie Peter." Yes well that's in some ways a rather sad story. Well I realised that even before I went out to Nigeria that we had got to get something going quickly or we weren't going to get it going quickly unless we took extraordinary steps. I knew there were no transmitters out there, not of any power anyhow and when I heard that this old Normandy beachhead transmitter used by war correspondents in the march from the beachhead to well the frontier of the Rhine anyhow, I heard this was available in its caravan somewhere down in Woolwich Arsenal. So I had it tested and it was going for some ridiculously small sum and I persuaded the Colonial Office to buy it for us and we had it shipped out. And I thought this would enable us to get some sort of a service going quickly because nothing succeeds like success and if we had to wait

a couple of years as we were obviously going to have to do before our transmitters arrived from Marconis there was such a long queue with the Korean War taking all the equipment, I thought we'd make a very good start. And Mike Charlie Peter which was his call sign would enable us to get something going on a national basis, $7\frac{1}{2}$ Kw until our lovely new shining equipment arrived from Chelmsford.

INT: You had difficulties with the shipping of this.

CHALMERS: We had difficulties with the shipping, I can't remember exactly what they were, we did and it took sometime to get them unloaded and out of the crates and for a long time the crates stood on the dockside which didn't do them any good because the transmitter had not, it was an American transmitter, RCA, I don't think it had been adequately tropicalised and the damp of Nigeria got into the transformer wirings and when we first connected it up there was this cloud of smoke and that was that and we had to get a new transformer. But it, I think it was a failure really, it didn't live up to expectations, it would have functioned perfectly well in a ^{temperate} temporary climate but what I think none had realised was that it wasn't really in a fit state to be taken out to tropical humidity and all that sort of thing, high temperatures, because it ran very very hot indeed, it had to be taken out of its caravan and put in a shelter. It did enable us to do tests and to show what could be done but it wasn't the success that I hoped it would be.

INT: But you were under big pressure to get things moving.

CHALMERS: We were under great pressure from the administratin yes, who could see perhaps more clearly than other people, how the country was moving and how the regional tensions or the tribal tensions were building up. They wanted, Sir John Macpherson and others, the chief secretary, wanted something going as quickly as possible.

INT: And I think you felt that from the very beginning this should be a national broadcasting service ?

CHALMERS: Yes, yes I did definitely, they talked about national unity and a federal constitution all this kind of thing, I mean constitutions came and went with great rapidity while I was there, yes but it's a unifying broadcasting service that was necessary but it had to be regionalised just in the way that the BBC was, to take account of the divergant tribal characteristics and languages.

INT: And it was in the regions that the very active political leaders had their power base. How did you get on with Chief ^{AWOLOWO} Awollowa or Dr. ^{AZIKIWE} Asique ?

CHALMERS: Well personally one got on with them very well and of course through the regional controllers or whatever we called them in those days, they made it their job to cultivate them. When it came to broadcasting the stumbling block was....
RECORDING PAUSE.

INT: From the outset you had the view that the broadcasting service should be for the whole country ?

CHALMERS: That is so so long as there was something called Nigeria. But the political plans for how that Nigeria should be constituted were of course in the melting pot so one was, as it were, playing it by ear. But it was quite clear that there had to be a national service built in such a way that it reflected the very wide regional divergancies in culture and particularly in language. So it had to be a highly regionalised service capable of being formed into a national service exactly like the BBC.

INT: Can you tell us, about your relations with the leading politicians of the day who were very very active indeed at the time ?

CHALMERS: Our relations, our personal relations were very good. I got on very well myself with ^{AZIKIWE} ~~Asique~~ who even came and did an inter round boxing summary for us at the Glover Hall once; Awollowa, a reserved personality, he was not so easy but I had somebody who could deal with him, a Nigerian friend who got on

very well with him, and the ^{Sardauna} Sadana was very remote up in the north and he was dealt with by Johnny Wilkinson. Our personal relationships were good but of course they were madly jockeying for position in the making of a constitution which would not unduly favour the other region and it was here that trouble began.

INT: Now what were your relations with the chief secretary in the secretariat ?

CHALMERS: Well the chief secretary was my immediate boss. And with Foot they were very good. With Benson not so good.

INT: Was that Dingle Foot who had been....?

CHALMERS: No that was Hugh Foot, Lord Caradon, who was only in Nigeria when I was there for a few months before he went off to Jamaica.

INT: He was followed by Arthur Benson and Arthur Benson was a .. old fashioned type of person who I think I wanted to hasten very slowly as far as independence and Africanisation and that sort of thing was concerned. I think he had had some background in E. Africa and the difficulty came when I was perfectly prepared to let politicians go on the air but not so Benson and when there was a constitutional crisis and Sir John Macpherson had, I think, broadcast a rather injudicious speech written by Benson in which some of the blame was put on the intransigence of people like Awolowo Awolowo Awolowo rang me up and said could he reply to this broadcast of Macpherson who was the governor, and I was very much in favour of doing this in the best BBC tradition allowing the others to go on the air too but Benson wouldn't have it.

INT: What did he say when you approached him ?

CHALMERS: Oh I rang him up and there was a shocked silence at the other end at the thought of an African political leader, whose utterances, I may say, were extremely violent when you read about them in the newspapers. There was a shocked silence and he said "Chalmers, whose side are you on ?", As though one

could be on sides in this matter.

INT: You think that could have caused a very significant rift between ^{Awolowo} Awollowa and the west and the Federal Broadcasting System ?

CHALMERS: Certainly, it was a watershed and Awollowa realised that he was not going to be able to get what he wanted out of any broadcasting service controlled by the central government, Federal Government, or by expatriates and egged on by Rediffusion he decided to press for broadcasting to be made a concurrent subject in the next constitution being drawn up in London...

INT: Which meant the western region could have their own broadcasting service...

CHALMERS: Which they did exactly in parallel with the one run by the Federal Government or by an independent corporation whichever happened.

INT: Now you mentioned Rediffusion, that was a commercial company which had been in charge of the wired service in Lagos and the western regions ?

CHALMERS: That is correct and I only discovered this when I arrived in Lagos on 2nd January 1951. This had been kept from me in London, or perhaps I hadn't asked any questions and I was astonished to find that an agreement was being negotiated with Rediffusion to set up a Nigerian company in the West Region to develop wired broadcasting. This was done under, I think, the "Old Pals Act" the man in charge of overseas Rediffusion at that time was called Noel Sabine who had been a senior official in the Colonial Office and which he'd left after the war and he had gone in with Rediffusion which operated largely overseas and with his old chum Sir John Macpherson and Sir Hugh Foot they had decided to develop broadcasting in this way in parallel with wireless broadcasting and I was astonished to find this and very dismayed because their method of construction was comparatively quick and comparatively easy and inexpensive,

they simply strung up a pair of copper wires between adjacent dwellings and put a loudspeaker box on the end and this could be done quickly and they wanted programmes within a few months. Well we were in no position to provide 17 hours a day of entertainment which was the only thing they were interested in. We were still, we were building studios, we were buying equipment, we were training staff and of course this made them press for the right to originate their own programmes which was something which I certainly was not going to have under any circumstances.

INT: Now what range of programmes were you trying to develop for the broadcasting service ?

CHALMERS: Well it was a very Reithian concept. I smile to think how Reithian we were in outlook. We were trying to educate, largely and inform with the usual mix of education and information and entertainment, broad based, as ^{Hailey} Haley put it, the sort of cultural pyramid.

INT: You put a lot of importance to news.

CHALMERS: A lot of importance to news because the communications were so bad in Nigeria as indeed in most African countries, that news was of paramount importance. And so we had to organise a news service. I was more intent on the education and information aspects of broadcasting, in view of the rapid political development of the country, there was plenty of entertainment to be had all over the place but you didn't have to broadcast it actually, people just made their own entertainment sitting in the streets. So that the important aspects, in my mind the priorities were, education and information.

INT: Your principle news came from Lagos, was transmitted from Lagos.

CHALMERS: To begin with because simply of the difficulties of communication, telephone calls took days to mature and when indeed the lines weren't broken, so this was a number one priority.

INT: I should imagine it was difficult to exercise editorial control over the regional news bulletins and you just

had to rely on the staff you had.

CHALMERS: One did indeed. And if I hadn't had a very experienced news man who had served his apprenticeship on a newspaper called ^{Gaskiya} ~~Gascia~~, up in the north, ^(Norman) N. England, who had a sort of 6th sense as to what could be trusted and what news could be trusted and what couldn't. But most of the political news of importance was happening in Lagos and this is how you are quite right in saying that for two years our news came mainly from Lagos and was based there.

INT: And I imagine you, yourself being unable to get quickly round the country frequently, you were very dependent on your senior staff in the regions to keep good relations with the politicians ?

CHALMERS: Very, very much so. This is why I had chosen people who already knew the area they were in charge of and in one case could speak the language, John Wilkinson and Michael Elphick and their job was, as you say, to maintain good relations with the local authorities, the local politicians.

INT: Do you think you put too much effort into building up the centre and not enough into the regions ?

CHALMERS: Possibly, with hindsight I think one would have liked to have done a bit more for the regions but it was a question of to begin with, accommodation, one just couldn't get anymore people into the regions and even if one had...

INT: You just hadn't the money.

CHALMERS: We hadn't got the money to do it. But you had to make up your mind as to what the priorities were and it seemed to me that a powerful central station was the thing to go for.

INT: Now why did you want to change from being a department of government, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service, to being a separate corporation ?

INT: Now why did you want to change from being the Nigerian Broadcasting Service, a dept., of government, to being the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation ?

CHALMERS: Well because right from the beginning I had never intended that it should be anything else but a corporation, because I thought that was the best form of organisation for a country as deeply divided amongst itself as the Nigeria of 1951 and indeed for the next 15 or 20 years was. And to become a dept., of government was the easiest way of getting something off the ground quickly and therefore there was never any doubt in my mind that a corporation was the right thing for broadcasting to be in Nigeria.

INT: Now administratively how have you fared as being a department of government ?

CHALMERS: Well we had to take our place in the queue for services. We used all the government depts., posts and telegraphs on the technical side to get our frequencies from Geneva and provide us with landlines and this sort of thing; lands and surveys to get us plots of land to build on; public works dept., to supply the housing and furniture and all that sort of thing, we were absolutely dependent on government. There was no other way unless you were a powerful commercial firm of getting started in a colonial territory like Nigeria. Therefore willy nilly I went straight away for government status for the corporation of Nigerian Broadcasting Service. There was never any doubt in my mind, and I made this quite clear to Sir John Macpherson when I arrived, that the ultimate goal was that of a corporation.

INT: Now how was it, in relation to the recruitment of staff ?

CHALMERS: How was what ?

INT: Being a dept., of government.

CHALMERS: Ah yes, it was very difficult because you had

salary scales which you had to conform to whether you were an announcer, a clerk or whatever. And the original staff of the RDS stations, the relay stations and the wireless monitors as they were called were very lowly paid, they were clerical grades and the civil service structure, it was just not adapted to....

INT: The sort of staff you wanted

CHALMERS:creative staff, journalists, musicians, you name them whatever you wanted to get, it was a clerically orientated file based staff and service in government. One of the difficulties we had was when recruiting a very celebrated musician, African musician ^{Fela Sowande} Efele Showandi the well known family from ^{Abeokuta} all of whose family had been musicians and he was in London at the time, he was organist of the Kingsway Hall, a methodist organisation, he also I mean that was straight organ. He also played an electronic organ with Adelaide Hall at night clubs, he was a marvellous jazz player, equally good on Bach, he had been trained at the organ by G.D. Cunningham who was the Birmingham City organist. Efele had got his F.R.C.O., he had studied composition with Vaughan Williams and he was a mus(B)ac. And when I went to establishment branch to bring Efele over, he had agreed to come back and serve his country albeit in a less remunerative position, they said oh director of music, oh we've never had that before is cognate with bandmaster grade 2 ? That was the way they thought it.

INT:A SALARY SCALE.....(after recording pause)

CHALMERS: Indeed and when I persuaded Efele to leave England and come over to Nigeria to become our director of music a puzzled establishments branch said - oh director of music, is that a post cognate with bandmaster grade 2 ?

INT: Can you now say a few words about Efele Showandi ?

CHALMERS: I first knew Effele Showandi when he was in London, he was the well-known organist of the Kingsway Hall which I think is a methodist conventicle. He also accompanied Adelaide Hall on the electronic organ when they used to play at Quaglinos. He was a pupil of Vaughan Williams and had got his F.R.C.O. and Mus.B(ac) and he struck me as absolutely the right kind of professional to come and take charge of music in Nigeria. RECORDING PAUSE

INT: But there must have been in your mind the very real advantages of becoming, politically a separate corporation ?

CHALMERS: Well the advantages politically were in insulating broadcasting insofar as this was possible, given the intimate connection between broadcasting and everyday life, insulating broadcasting from the very fierce political pressures which even then were beginning to tear Nigeria apart which culminated in the civil war. And I felt that the one thing which could help in keeping one Nigeria was a unified broadcasting service.

INT: And in many ways you were setting up a system similar to the BBC with a central distribution and then separate regional broadcasting.

CHALMERS: That is absolutely correct, one had the BBC in one's mind as a model at the time, though with hindsight one wonders whether it was the best possible model in just the same way that the civil servants ideal of the best in parliamentary democracy was possibly not the best pattern for an emergent African state. However one did the best one could with what one knew.

INT: Now the bill for the new corporation was passed by the House of Representatives in August 1956 and almost immediately you were leaving Nigeria, now why was that ?

CHALMERS: Well partly I thought it was time for a new person and a new mind to get to grips with the various problems which were of a different order to those we encountered when we were a service with, under the cloak of government, as it were.

And partly physical exhaustion, six years was quite enough of that sort of pioneering work in that climate and therefore I thought that it would be a very good thing for a corporation to get off to a fresh start with a fresh person at the top.

INT: Now looking through the record of the debate in the House of Representatives, many very nice things were said about your work as director of broadcasting and it was clear that many would have liked you to have stayed on for 2/3 more years. But even though you thought no I must go ?

CHALMERS: This is so, because it is all too easy I think and having read the stories of other people, other English people in other lands, for instance Lawrence of Arabia, it is all too easy to imagine oneself involved and engaged with alien cultures and which is done for romantic reasons, sentimental reasons, cultures of which you can never really be a member, and this is a temptation I think.... for some people to get involved far too deeply in a country and a society which is not theirs. And I could see this nearly happened again in E. Africa, this was not the thing, one's roots are in one's own country and one must go back there. If I had been prepared to make a career in Africa it would have been a different matter but it was obvious to anybody looking at the scene all over Africa that it was just not possible.

INT: Now looking back over those five years, what were the high points for you professionally ?

CHALMERS: Oh I think the pleasure in seeing a professionally run broadcasting service with young Nigerians handling the machine and one felt that we'd done this, we'd created something and we were handing it over to them to run for the benefit of their country and themselves. I think pride in having done a professional job of work.

INT: Now when Her Majesty the Queen visited Nigeria in the summer of 1956, then I imagine all the outside broadcasts, the broadcasting service was shown, was what it really could do ?

CHALMERS: This is true yes. We certainly had a certain, a stiffening from the BBC who lent us very generously equipment and some key members of staff to make sure that everything functioned correctly but the actual operational work was done entirely by Nigerians and this was of course was a very proud moment for all of us.

INT: Presumably, all the reporting on the outside broadcasts ?

CHALMERS: No not all of it, I think some was done for the BBC's own use by was it Audrey Russell with Wynford Vaughan Thomas, I can't remember them now, but the BBC's own commentaries were done by their own staff but of course everything locally and in different languages was done by our own people, our own Nigerians.

INT: Now for you personally what had the five years been ? We all know you tended to identify yourself very much with the Africans, with the Nigerians themselves and I think that gave you great personal pleasure ?

CHALMERS: Yes it gave me great personal pleasure whether it was rega..well regarded by others I don't know, I doubt. I think there were some people certainly on the staff who felt that if I had done a bit more for them and less for the Africans things would have been easier. But I don't, I tried to make it clear to those who were recruited, we didn't go out there to do an easy job and it was quite obvious in my mind at any rate that what we were doing was building for the Nigerian future. I've really forgotten the beginning of your question....but yes I certainly did identify much more with others, but so did many of the staff. Of course this was a great, this was one of the reasons I think why so many complimentary mentions of the staff of the N.B.C. .. N.B.S., were made in the debate in 1956, August '56, because we genuinely did our best to enter into African society, we went out to African parties, we went dancing, we went picnicing, canoeing, all this sort of thing and insofar as Europeans could, we entered into certain aspects of African life.

INT: And many of those professional colleagues have really become your friends for life ?

CHALMERS: Oh but indeed, yes, yes and not only of myself but of other people, we keep up the contacts and this was a very rewarding aspect which was totally denied, as far as I could see, to the unfortunate civil servants who kept Africans at arms length or if they didn't certainly their wives did.

INT: And from boisterous, exciting Lagos you returned to the BBC and you were resettled in Manchester which was probably cool and dull and wintry.

CHALMERS: It was, it was foggy and horrible and the Suez crisis was on at the time, transport was difficult. I shall always remember my first night in Manchester with trams grinding round the curve, I think it was the Queens Hotel in Piccadilly and thinking well what a change this is from Lagos, how I am not going to like it. However I did for a while, it was a new set of problems to cope with and in many ways less tractable and.. than Nigeria, the resistance of the centre in London to doing anything for the regions so I was on the other end as it were.

INT: But that experience brought you very much in contact with television didn't it ?

CHALMERS: It did indeed, yes insofar as there wasn't any regional television or there wasn't much of it in those days. We were starved of facilities in Manchester but it did bring me into touch with television and I got to know a little bit about it just enough to know what a camera did and what racks were and what mobile control rooms, what a big part they played in one's life, that sort of thing.

INT: And so it wasn't really surprising that fairly soon afterwards you were beginning to think of going back to Africa but this time to the east side ?

CHALMERS: Yes, an opportunity offered in Tanganyika and I still couldn't make up my mind as to what direction my life should take. I still felt called by Africa, the sunshine,

the people, I think some deep personal need to satisfy it in Africa but I wasn't fully conscious of at the time and it was made clear to me that this job in Tanganyka was mine if I wanted to take it, very much the same as in Nigeria although there was already something on the ground but it involved leaving the BBC. Sir Ian Jacob the director general, said "What do you want to go back to Africa for, you've been there once already". And it was very hard to explain to him, this call this emotional call to go back and do something but it meant leaving the BBC and which I did.

INT: How soon after going to Manchester was that ?

CHALMERS: That was 18 months so I wasn't very long in Manchester. Long enough to come face to face with the same problem of being a young man in an old man's job and not really having very much to do with broadcasting as Controller of an enormous region such as the North region was in those days, you were expected to address Rotary Clubs, open rose shows at Stockport and prize givings... sit on the Halle Concert Society you know all that sort of thing, which to me wasn't very satisfying. Had I been ten or fifteen years older it would have been a very nice way of finishing a career but it's not something for a middle aged man of 45, I felt there was a lot more in me to do in a pioneering way which I hadn't worked out of my system in Nigeria so I accepted the offer, very regretfully, it was an exceedingly hard decision to make but on the whole I don't regret having done it.

INT: I think it's interesting that you refer to the North region as an enormous region after coming back from one of the biggest countries in Africa.

CHALMERS: Yes.

INT: Now when you arrived in Tanganyka in Dar es Salaam what first struck you, how different was it from Lagos and Nigeria ?

CHALMERS: Well apart from the fact there were black skins all over the place and I was going to say smiling faces, there weren't smiling faces... people say well it was still Africa, of

course it was Africa but ... I mean a Finn is a different person from an Italian in European terms and an E. African is that different from a W. African. There was a different culture out there. The political situation in E. Africa was different there was a bigger mixture of Asians and Moslems, the whole situation, the whole flavour of the thing was different. I can't explain it. It was much more sour, I didn't enjoy it nearly as much, the people weren't forthcoming, they felt to me they wouldn't... they were difficult to communicate with, I don't know why this was, a repressive government, again an evolving political situation which had to be sort of faced up to and re-assessed, the whole of one's effort in broadcasting re-assessed in the light of another developing situation.

END OF REEL ONE.

INT: I was rather surprised to hear you speak of the situation in Dar es Salaam as rather sour, because Dar es Salaam does mean the haven of peace and you certainly didn't seem to find, it would imply, paradise ?

CHALMERS: No it certainly was not, it was a very fraught situation when I got there in Broadcasting which is divided into two antagonistic parts, indeed in different locations under rival European chiefs and I don't think there's any point in naming names and indeed so fraught had the situation become that one of them in charge of the educational side of broadcasting, which was separate from the other part, had had a police investigation made into the private life of the head of the other Swahili speaking side and this didn't make for harmony and peace. Also the relationship between white and black was nothing like as good as it was in Nigeria. Partly because I suppose, white people, Europeans were being encouraged to invest and settle in Tanganyka whereas nobody in their senses would want to live the whole of their lives, or very few people would want to live the whole of their lives in Nigeria. The mosquito said Dr. *Nkrumah* is our best ally.

INT: That was for Nigeria.

CHALMERS: That was for Nigeria.

Well now, and indeed I remember one of the staff saying to me when in the course of getting to know them all as I did in Nigeria, I asked several of them if they'd like to come back and have supper one night, and one of them said very quietly, Sir, you must be very careful because if you do that sort of thing you will at once have the Special Branch following you around" and this was typical of the Twining regime. The Twining regime was totally repressive, Twining had got this multiracial thing on his mind, he was trying to form a multiracial party and of course the Africans under Nyrere would have none of this.

INT: And Sir Edward Twining he was the Governor then.

CHALMERS: Sir Edward Twining was the Governor. He'd stayed on too long, he'd extended his term of office and his final three years I think he was almost gaa-gaa. He would put on an act which was almost a caricature of colonial governor in which he would conduct local police bands in selections from Gilbert & Sullivan and this sort of thing. And he was obviously heading for a political downfall or in the last days of his regime, he'd almost made no progress towards sending Africans for university to universities, he didn't hold with he thought it was a hotbed of socialism and the result was that there were no senior service Africans or very very few indeed, almost on the fingers of one hand, and this made the task of finding a successor for myself very very difficult.

INT: I would imagine that Sir Edward Twining's relationship with Nyrere was not easy and he probably underestimated the force of nationalism and I could imagine that you were wanting to make as much contact as possible with young Julius ^{Nyerere} ~~Nyrere~~ the up and coming big politician ?

CHALMERS: Absolutely but of course there'd have been tremendous trouble with my chairman had I done that. I would certainly have liked to have done that and with other members of TANU, the Tanganyika African National Union. But it was very difficult and indeed all one's energies were taken up with trying to get the broadcasting service straight and in one piece instead of two pieces.

But Twining had really overstayed his time and when Richard Turnbull came from Kenya, although he had a rather bad reputation in Kenya because he'd smashed Mau Mau in the principal person who did this and many Africans were looking forward with some apprehension to the arrival, he in fact came with the single idea which had probably been given him by McLeod, that very soon, as soon as possible Tanganyka must get freedom, independence. And he worked towards this end right from the start. And whereas just as Twining left he was about to commit ^{Nyerere} Nyrere to prison the first thing Turnbull did was to quash proceedings against him.

INT: Now what were your relationships like with ^{Nyerere} Nyrere ?

CHALMERS: Personally I got on very well with him, not quite so well with some of the more Marxist members of his staff. But with Nyrere very good.

INT: Was he interested in broadcasting ?

CHALMERS: Not particularly no. Well let me put it this way. I think he was not interested in broadcasting in the way that I tended to see it, as an independent body. He wanted it made part of the political party which is in fact what he did eventually. He was not interested in seeing an independent or quasi-independent, semi-independent broadcasting organisation. No way. He wanted to make use of it in the Nation Building and I can quite see his point of view.

INT: And that must have made it somewhat difficult for you in the time you had in the run-up to independence ?

CHALMERS: Yes it did. although as I say, my principal job was to, was a bricks and mortar one and a constitutional one in getting a properly functioning broadcasting service. It was then up to the newly independent state to decide what happened.

INT: When you say a proper broadcasting service, I imagine that was really one centred on Dar es Salaam with some

small stations around the country, but not as in Nigeria with separate regions (no, no) it would be a more unitary system ?

CHALMERS: This was so because this was the way the country was organised and regional stations yes in Abeya, ^{Mbeya Mwanza} Monza and ^{Dadoma} Dadoma but not, there's no point in regionalisation as there was because the language was the same all over the country, Swahili, English as a second language and then various tribal dialects which weren't of very much significance, although perhaps the Kikuyu wouldn't agree with me on that.

INT: Did you find it difficult to build up a transmitter network that would cover the country ?

CHALMERS: It was extremely difficult because Dar es Salaam was in the wrong place as it were.

INT: Like Lagos.

CHALMERS: Like Lagos. It was on the coast in an area of very poor soil conductivity and you were wasting a lot of your power out to sea, like Lagos. By far the most sensible situation would have been at ^{Dadoma} Dadoma where the new state capital, I am talking about in 1982, where the new state capital is being established. But there were no communications. They were almost as bad, not quite as bad as in Nigeria.

INT: And those poor communications were also poor roads, I imagine you had difficulty in getting around the country yourself and in sending teams around to record programme material ?

CHALMERS: Very difficult, very difficult. We did manage and particularly during independence when there was an independence round up every night, one got reports flown back on tape, telephoned back very indifferent quality, but it was quite a feat of organisation to get that sort of thing.

INT: And I imagine from your early days in Dar es Salaam you were having to think, who am I going to get as successor ?

Now in Nigeria you'd been able to hand over as director general to Jack Knott, who was totally reliable, he was from the BBC, a first class administrator, also with programme sense and able to handle a board of a corporation. Now you were looking for an African, a Tanganykan to take over from you in Dar es Salaam ?

CHALMERS: Well let me say straight away that independence in Tanganyka crept up on us rather by surprise. When I went to the Colonial Office before going out to Tanganyka, Sir John Macpherson was then the permanent under secretary, he had taken over from Sir Andrew Cohen who had gone to Uganda and Sir John Macpherson with all his experience said "Well you have got about 15 years I think in Tanganyka before you need bother about independence". And I may say that Sir John Macpherson had a son who was a district commissioner in Tanganyka so he ought to have known what he was talking about. Instead of which of course independence came within 3/4 years of my arrival there. So it was a very sudden thing and it was Turnbull who really got things going. Whether Turnbull, as I say, had this remit from the Colonial Office under McLeod I don't know. But he completely reversed Twining's policy and the result of Twining's policy of no tertiary education of Africans was there were no Africans ready to hand. They were all sort of, I was going to say semi-gangster politicians around Nyrere, some pretty yobbish ones too. I am thinking of Oscar Kambona and Berkay ^{Eroke Mwanika} Mananka and other people like that, who were sort of corner boys. And there were very few educated people and the only person I could find who was in any way educationally qualified was the young man who had been to Makerere and he'd, such an unusual person, that he'd been made a district officer straight away and the first thing he had done was to fiddle the till and he'd been put in jail and he'd been let out. He seemed to be, I mean this happened to so many people. Anyhow I groomed him as being the only African within sight. He was also very addicted to the bottle I found out later and altogether a very bad choice. He didn't last very long. But I think I grasped at straws, I was trying to do things too fast.

INT: I think you were being forced to do that by the rate of political progress.

CHALMERS: Yes, oh yes, I made a bad choice, it would have been much much wiser of me to have said look we're not ready yet to have an African director general of broadcasting, or indeed an African director of anything but the pace of Africanisation was so fast, I think one was willing to be blinded to a reality.

INT: But he was followed by an African who had been on the staff, is that right, a programme man ?

CHALMERS: Yes, again, yes he was another of the very few Africans with tertiary education, if indeed he had had it. I can't remember, Paul Sasegwa. ^{SOSIGWA}

INT: You found him reliable you felt ?

CHALMERS: No I didn't find him, no... neither of them were good choices and neither of them have survived. I did get another.. university educated African as chief engineer from Makerere and he I am glad to say has survived and is high up in the councils of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Union.

INT: Did you have many BBC staff in Tanganyika to back you up ?

CHALMERS: Not very many no. As I wasn't seconded by the BBC it was more difficult for me to get BBC staff. We had plenty of short term loans, people coming out to do specific jobs for six months. Roy Hayward from Bristol, Geoffrey Seymour from London, oh various others. We got plenty of that sort of help and of course in training. But the long term secondment such as we had in Nigeria just politically wasn't applicable.

INT: When you were in Dar es Salaam, did you have professional contacts with fellow broadcasters in Kenya, in Nairobi or in Uganda in Kampala ?

CHALMERS: Very much so because there were BBC people involved in each place, particularly in Uganda, developing the services

and we in fact organised a weekly news round up over the air between the three centres which has not gone on. There was of course an existing link in the Common Services Organisation and the three countries were much closer together then than they have been now. Kenya also was the commercial part of E. Africa and most of our commercial revenue in Tanganyka came, commercial broadcasting revenue, came in the form of advertisements from the firms in Kenya so we had close contact.

INT: So you had a commercial service in Tanganyka but you had not thought of, or you'd resisted establishing one in Nigeria ?

CHALMERS: Yes I found a commercial service in existence when I went there, when I went to Tanganyka there was no point in destroying it, just for the sake of principle.

INT: And was that very necessary to bring in the revenue to run the organisation ?

CHALMERS: It brought in the revenue all right, not very much of it but it was obviously capable of great development which has in fact happened.

INT: Well fairly soon after independence you left the Tanganyka Broadcasting Service and took up work with the United Nations, what were you doing with them and where were you based ?

CHALMERS: Broadcasting Service, Broadcasting Corporation actually right from the start when I got there.

I was invited to join the United Nations headquarters in Dar es Salaam for their east and southern office by George Ivan Smith who had been in the overseas service of the BBC during the war, and whom I knew very well. And he was, until the death of Hammarskjold, Hammarskjold's personal assistant, had taken over after Connor Cruise O'Brien had left in the Congo and had been badly beaten up by Congolese mercenaries and was, as it were, recuperating in a less demanding job in Dar es Salaam administrating, administering

technical assistance. I think it was called the United Nations Technical Assistance Board and Special Fund. George offered me a job as his regional assistant, regional deputy director looking after all U.N. matters in (Southern Africa) Southern Africa, yes that was say Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories as they were then called. Basutoland, Swaziland and I can't think of the third one.

INT: I imagine that brought you into contact with a large number of the leading African politicians who were going to take over running their various countries, like Kenneth Kaunda or Hastings Banda ?

CHALMERS: Very much so. Kenneth Kaunda, yes, who was of course almost on the run at that time, he was certainly persona non grata with the N. Rhodesia government and he and his various lieutenants like Sama Kapepwa, Hastings Banda certainly in his cork-lined room in Blantyre and Joshua Nkomo in S. Rhodesia, again persona very non grata.

INT: Were you involved in a break-up of the Central African Federation and the setting up of the three separate broadcasting organisations of N. Rhodesia, Zambia, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, later ^{Malawi} Malawi ?

CHALMERS: This is so, I was. I was invited. George Ivan Smith managed to work it so that I was invited to go down and plan the redistribution of broadcasting assets when the Central African Federation was broken up. This wasn't very difficult because it was mostly bolted to the ground in the various places and S. Rhodesia had seen to it that the most of the junk was in Malawi, was in Nyasaland in N. Rhodesia and one tried simply to get a better deal for these two countries and get some compensation for the load of rubbish that they were landed with. All the best stuff stayed in Salisbury.

INT: Were you able to get an appraisal of the broadcasting in African languages to Africans in N. Rhodesia that had really been initiated by Harry Franklin when he was pioneering the

'Saucepan Radio'

CHALMERS: Yes well the language broadcasting services were far better in N. Rhodesia than they were anywhere else. Nyasaland had got a very rudimentary service and S. Rhodesia obviously spent very little money and didn't even have the studio in Salisbury. I thought that what Harry had managed to accomplish and he is still living there, was very remarkable indeed. We were able in Dar es Salaam, we were asked in fact by Nkomo I think it was to start external broadcasting from Dar es Salaam to aid them in their struggle because they had no access to local broadcasting, neither did Kenneth Kaunda. So we started a sort of external service of Radio Tanganyka and very improvised equipment, simply to help the.. the politicians who were then barred from their own local radio.

INT: This was the first indication that Tanganyka, later Tanzania, was going to be a base for supporting the liberation movements in S. Africa?

CHALMERS: Very much so but of course it was a base for SWAPO and other organisations like that, all the refugees came, all the refugee politicians and I frequently used to see Nkomo in Dar es Salaam, he was always with George Ivan Smith, Kenneth Kaunda I got to know very well, a very very fine man indeed. No it was a great privilege to be able to help in these small ways.

INT: And then from Southern Africa you returned to the BBC to Foreign Relations as the special adviser to the D.G. on assistance to developing countries with their plans for radio and television?

CHALMERS: And television. This was throughout the world yes in conjunction with the O.D.M., the Overseas Development Ministry who held the purse strings. And this of course brought me into contact with countries other than African ones, although of course Libya I suppose is an African country of a very different kind. This involved setting up coloured television and megawatt radio transmitting stations in the days when there was a king of Libya, Idris.

Also Peru, there must have been other countries that I.. oh Jordan was another one, in fact anywhere where BBC assistance was being sought. The BBC not having any source of finance to cover this sort of operation it all had to come through the British Government, the Ministry of Overseas Development.

INT: But I imagine with Libya the funding there was possible because Libya was already producing oil and it had money to invest into radio and in particular to television.

CHALMERS: This was so, this is quite true. Libya had plenty of money, it didn't stop it from asking the British Government for as much as it could get to help. Don't forget that the Libyan oil flow had not really started, it had certainly not attained the dimension that it has now and Britain was anxious to establish a presence in a N. African country in the *Mahgreb* and broadcasting was a very good way of doing it. Hopefully broadcasting would have continued as it were under benevolent BBC or Foreign Office influence, but things didn't work out that way.

INT: Now when you were in Lagos you had difficulties in getting out equipment and starting up the service. Now somehow one has the impression that you went to Libya and you got the backup of the BBC and the Foreign Office and you got a benevolent government there wanting to set up television, all things would go smoothly, did they ?

CHALMERS: No they didn't, largely because of the Libyans themselves, the regime there was very unstable and for instance our minister of communications and information I think it was, friends and relatives were always having pot shots at him in the dark to try and bump him off and bribery was rife and you couldn't get any, you couldn't get your transmitters of the ships onto the docks without bribing all and sundry, this was a very big matter in our lives and even in getting the contract. We tried to get the contract for British firms for Marconis but they had the same sort of difficulty and we were up against foreign governments too, the British, the Swiss Brown Boveri, the French, the W. Germans they were all trying to get contracts from the Libyan Government for

transmitters and studio equipment.

INT: So at the beginning of your shall we say, career in Africa, you had seen particularly in the english speaking parts that the BBC was almost a sole voice a sole aid, but in this latter part of your career you were seeing the competition of aid from other countries, from Western Europe in particular and Britain seemed to be losing out a bit.

CHALMERS: Britain was losing out, yes this was the age of the carpetbaggers, they were all coming round, as soon as a country had gained independence or was about to gain independence they were all there, including British firms of course trying to get their foot in the door and indeed even in Tanganyka there was a well known British company trying to sell television to Nyrere, television for a poor and sparsely populated country like Tanganyka, but this was so and yes all sorts of competitors in foreign aid equalling influence political influence, that's what it was all about. They were all crowding in.

INT: ^{Nyerere} At that time in the 60s you felt it was right like ~~Nyrere~~ to go first for radio and then at an appropriate later point introduce television ?

CHALMERS: Absolutely definitely. I said this on every possible occasion and I think I was absolutely right in this. In fact Tanganyka, Tanzania as it now is, hasn't got television to this day although they are thinking of it. I think it's... although there are many undoubted benefits that television can bring the first really necessary thing is a good strong radio coverage.

INT: Outside of Africa when you were doing this final job at the BBC, you went to Peru (yes) now have you any comments on that totally different scene, what were you doing there ? Advising them on the setting up of another system or ...?

CHALMERS: No the government wanted advice, as far as I can remember, on bringing some sort of order into a totally chaotic system whereby there was an abundance of private

stations both commercial and religious and one or two state-owned broadcasting stations, trying to organise a coherent system and to make some sense of it. And this we attempted to do with particular reference to educational broadcasting, it was a three man commission. Somebody from the British Council, somebody for the Centre for Educational Television and indeed we drew up a very comprehensive plan which would, I think, have worked quite well but at that moment they unfortunately had an earthquake and all the funds which were to have been diverted to reforming and modernising the very antique system had to be diverted to rebuilding.

INT: With many of these schemes to assist developing countries in the 60s you, for the BBC, were much involved with the British Council.

CHALMERS: Yes the British Council and the Centre for Educational Television Overseas. Certainly we've nearly always worked in ^{harmony} harmonies as far as we could.

INT: The British Council based in London as distinct from their representatives in the countries ?

CHALMERS: No usually their rep.... oh yes the British Council in London but of course one always when on the .. when on location worked very closely in the British Council in the country concerned.

INT: How did you assess the BBC's contribution to helping broadcasting develop in Africa ? Because I am sure when you came back to the BBC and you could take a continental view, particularly from this country, you would be able to get a sense of proportion as to what the BBC had done and how it had been helpful.

CHALMERS: Well the BBC had made a tremendous contribution to broadcasting in Africa... not actually ... not so much in controlling it but in lending its staff which it could ill afford to do and its resources in every possible way but not seeking to impose any kind of pattern on broadcasting in Africa.

To allow things to develop their own way in accordance with the needs of the country and the political situation.

The BBC's attitude was benevolent and very very helpful.

INT: There was (pardon) possibly in sending staff but in many other ways as well.

CHALMERS: Oh in many other ways, advice was always available to you if you wanted it, it didn't matter on what subject, on copyright shall we say on anything like that, on an engineering matters, on building, it was all there if you wanted to use it.

INT: I believe you brought out accountants to help you devise a new system for the broadcasting ?

CHALMERS: Oh yes and certainly Barry Thorne an accountant and we had salary enquiries, grading enquiries, mainly organised by BBC specialists. Anything one wanted one could ask for.

INT: And the African Service of the BBC, you sent people from Nigeria and from Tanganyka back to the BBC to spend a few months working with the African Service ?

CHALMERS: That's right. That was initiated by Elliott ^{Watrous} Watress (phon.) when he was on, the head of the African Service it helped him because he didn't have to pay very much for language speaking staff, although that's being a little bit unkind. But he, no they did they acted as programme assistants, they got invaluable assistance that way as well as of course on the more formal staff training.

INT: And with the more formal staff training, special courses were run ?

CHALMERS: Special courses were run financed by the Ministry of Overseas Development but this meant the BBC setting aside resources and in the staff and in equipment and in premises.

INT: Now at the Colonial Office there was a broadcasting officer or post for a broadcasting officer and sometimes that was filled by a BBC man. I think in particular I think of Oliver Whitley.

CHALMERS: Yes I was thinking of him, the first and in some ways the best of them. There was Oliver there taking a very forward view and he was followed by Dennis Winter and later by Elliott ^{Watrous} Watress.

INT: And you would have said they helped you and your successors to have some influence in those corridors of power in the Colonial Office to get things done for broadcasting.

CHALMERS: Very much so because they could explain to their Colonial masters in the corridors of power just what it was this madman out in Nigeria, or wherever it was, was.. why he was clamouring for more ^{money} ~~money~~. He acted as a go-between and a very important one indeed.

INT: One has the impression that Nigeria was your first love and your very real love. Can you say more about that as to, I think it has been a lasting connection for you ?

CHALMERS: Well yes it has. It was the shock, the first shock and surprise and delight of coming into contact while I was still of an impressionable age and able to react to a totally new civilisation, a new standard of values, a new everything and a very challenging and .. job which brought out all that one had, I mean I suppose one is always looking for a job in life which is going to fully extend you and this was something that never happened to poor Sir John Reith, he was lamenting it to the end of his days that he'd never been given a job big enough to bring out into play all that he had. I think it was Nigeria that enabled me to realise all this in my own nature, this is speaking purely personally, it's a very selfish way of looking at this I suppose. But on the engineering side yes one had to go into all kinds of technical details to understand it. On the musical side we had our musical society and giving performances, the Faure Requiem and the Messiah and usual standard classics and things like that and on personal relationships.

INT: You had good friends both in the Secretariat and among the senior colonial officials as well as....

CHALMERS: Oh yes there were many who thought the same way we did in the Colonial Secretariat. Men like Foley Newnes, Martin... what's his name.... Martin Hill, there were many of them who more or less hid their lights under bushels because they .. they.. there were many conformists and many pressures to conform to what they thought was the norm in behaviour as between black and white and we coming from the BBC, we didn't have to worry about these pressures quite so much because we weren't dependent for our careers on the Colonial Service. We were guaranteed our jobs back in the BBC. So we were much more free in our attitudes and we found it very difficult to understand the stand-offish attitude of many colonial civil servants to the Africans, whom of course, I mean they were, they exercised power and authority over them and like the centurion, we said to this man do and he doeth it, I mean this was their relationship, master and servant. Well this was very difficult for them to form any kind of personal relationship but we regarded ourselves as friends rather than masters.

INT: You felt you were trying to bring the best of the BBC to Nigeria (quite) and did you, or do you now look back and feel well there were some things we got wrong ?

CHALMERS: Yes I think there were. I think there were. We tended to feel that whatever the BBC did was right and I think perhaps we got the emphasis, perhaps I was too intent on building up a tidy organisation, one that ticked over nicely from an administrative point of view, I was perhaps too worried about untidiness and bad administration. But of course again one saw corruption all round and inefficiency and things not working and in broadcasting a thing has got to work, I mean you can't broadcast unless all your equipment is in perfect working order and you have got a staff structure that everybody knows where they fit in. Broadcasting tends to demand good organisation and I suppose one tried to bring this into a country which was in a state and still is in a state of chronic disorganisation.

INT: But you were very much a programme man.

CHALMERS: Yes but I was trained as an engineer, to get things tidily down on paper.

INT: Yes and so you felt in Nigeria you wanted to get it tidy and working but at the same time the best possible programmes ?

TONE INJECT OR HOWL ROUND.

INT: And you also had a missionary spirit ?

CHALMERS: I think it's true to say that and I think many people within the BBC did certainly in those early days, certainly if you admired, as I and many others did and still do, John Reith. That was very much broadcasting was a missionary thing to enlarge the frontiers of human experience as far as a mass of people were concerned. And then some people in the BBC felt that way and found personal satisfaction and perhaps solutions to some of their personal problems in working in this sort of environment and bringing, as we thought, the benefits of broadcasting to under-privileged countries, developing countries. Whether it has done them as much good as we hoped it would is another question which it doesn't matter, we don't need to go into now. But that I think was very much the spirit that animated us, of going out into Macedonia to help them.

INT: At one time you had a very large number of BBC staff working on projects with you ?

CHALMERS: Yes in Nigeria itself I think the maximum number when I was there was 23, which is a very large number for the BBC to make available from a workforce which was already in the process of being cut down in those days and that doesn't take any account of those who were involved in the BBC itself in London, particularly in staff training and other people spending a proportion of their time working on our problems.