



Godfrey Talbot

From the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942 to the fall of Rome in June 1944, War Correspondent Godfrey Talbot was among the half-dozen or so best-known voices on BBC radio. For countless listeners at home he seemed to provide a much-needed link with the men of the Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy.

Godfrey was born in 1908, in the village of Walton near Wakefield. He left Leeds Grammar School at 16 and started work at the Yorkshire Post as an office boy, working his way up to a junior reporter within two years. In his early twenties Godfrey was first Assistant Editor, then Editor, of the Manchester City News, before joining the BBC in 1937 as a Press Officer. When the war came two years later his employers

summoned him to London as a news sub-editor and occasional reporter. Then, when sources close to the Government indicated unease about the optimistic reports that Richard Dimbleby in Cairo was putting out about General Auchinleck, whom Churchill was about to replace, Godfrey was chosen to take up the broadcasting baton in Egypt. He did not disappoint, managing to record discs in the sandy desert, which satisfied government, the BBC and an ever-growing listening public. The broadcasts displayed a natural flair for descriptive detail, including the arrival of Churchill in Tripoli, the fall of Monte Cassino and finally the entry into Rome.



Godfrey Talbot behind the lines shortly after El Alamein battle.



Diary entries from 22 October - 24 October 1942



Godfrey Talbot surveys German wreckage after El Alamein battle.



Following the war, Godfrey remained with BBC Radio as Court Correspondent and accompanied many Royal Tours. After his retirement from the Corporation in 1969, he began a new career as a popular speaker on various lecture circuits, regaling his audiences with amusing anecdotes about royalty.

The Centre is fortunate to hold a substantial collection of material donated by Godfrey's family, including his manuscript diaries, transcripts of some of his better-known broadcasts and a series of wartime photographs. In the summer of 2000, Godfrey's thoughts on the war, seldom expressed in post-war years, were tape-recorded by his son David, who has subsequently taken on voluntary work on behalf of the Centre, including an impressive number of interviews as well as generous financial support.



The BBC party (Talbot in Centre) with 'Belinda'; the BBC recording truck. The thirty hundred weight army truck was memorably described by Godfrey as "large and fat and friendly-looking; a bit slow, always over-burdened, long-suffering but great hearted".

Transcript of Audio Clip

Regarding the 2nd Battle of El Alamein:

I knew it was going to happen that night mind you, but it was dramatic all the same. Absolutely dramatic, absolutely quiet, when the signal was passed and somehow, at any rate, it was passed straightaway, simultaneously, right along the Alamein front, until a voice, or whatever it was, some signal, was given, "Fire", or whatever the word was, and then whether you were a soldier, civilian, whatever you were, suddenly all hell, absolutely cracked and nowhere in any war has there been such a barrage at dawn. Something like 900 field guns along miles and miles of front simultaneously burst into flames. The most dramatic, theatrical thing you had ever seen.



Inventory of the Donation

- Large collection of original photographs
- Original diaries (including North Africa and Italy)
- Newspaper cuttings (about or written by Talbot)
- Radio copies of his broadcasts for the BBC radio, London
- Collection of letters and airgraphs sent by radio listeners
- French newspaper, *Le progres Egyptian*, dated Samedi, 7 November 1942
- Tape-recorded
- Obituary notice and tributes to Talbot written after his death and order of service book from funeral



Entry into Tripoli, 1943.



Godfrey Talbot broadcasts in front of a large crowd from Rome on 5.6.44



Radio Times report of June 1944 relating to Godfrey Talbot's broadcast from liberated Rome on 5 June 1944.



Croydon 15th IV 1943

Dear Godfrey Talbot,

I listened to you a short while ago when you asked wives and relatives to write to their men as they did enjoy having letters. Well, if it makes them happy, you may like to know how happy you make people feel, and how they listen to your lovely broadcasts. You would probably be very surprised.

You cannot imagine how many people say to me, "Have you heard Godfrey Talbot?" or "Do you listen to Godfrey Talbot?" And the many lovely things they say about you. I have a friend who's (sic) boy is with the 8th Army, and who is now in hospital. She said I feel very happy and do not worry about him because of Godfrey Talbot's broadcasts. So you see, we all think of you too - no doubt thousands of mothers, wives and sweethearts feel like we do.

I am not putting my address. I do not want you to write. But I do want you to know what we think of you, and every night and morning I pray that God will keep you safe, and now Goodnight and God Bless.

Yours sincerely,
DBW 'A Red Cross Nurse'.



One of the many letters Godfrey received from people at home who anxiously listened to his broadcasts to hear about progress of the battle and news of their loved ones. (Transcript on left)



Godfrey Talbot being presented to the King in Italy, July 1944.



David Talbot working on his father's diaries

Transcript of Audio Clip

When King George VI visited Italy:

About four of us war correspondents were brought back so that the King could meet war correspondents, experienced war correspondents in the field. I was one of the people brought back and lined up (in one of my books there is a picture of my, being, shaking hands with by the King) and when the King saw me, and I was introduced as Godfrey Talbot, the King said "G, G, G" (he didn't stutter very much in private conversations at all, his stutter was alright unless he had to make a speech and without the Queen being there), he said, "Talbot, Talbot never seen him before, BBC does make 'em tall, don't they? But by golly I've heard you a lot, say something else, I've heard you a lot, back at home, at Windsor, in the Palace, and mostly, mostly at Windsor in the evenings, mostly we heard, the Queen and I listened to Godfrey Talbot and now I see you" and then he paused and smiled just a little, and he said "Do you know, as a matter of fact I think Talbot, you, I shouldn't say this, you are about our favourite broadcaster. You broadcast very frequently in the news bulletins. I think you are our favourite, and then he paused and he said, You and Tommy Handley. . .!"