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TOKALON LIMITED, OXFORD STREET, LONDON.

# WE MEET A FAMOUS VOICE

## BBC's Leading Naval Commentator

WAS in the Royal Navy during the  
1914-18 war . . . later a pilot in  
the Fleet Air Arm . . . wrote the  
play "While Parents Sleep" in 1932,  
and one or two other plays . . .  
has written, directed and acted in films  
. . . directed all George Formby's  
films and some Gracie Fields films  
. . . directed "All At Sea," "Keep  
Fit," "I See Ice," "It's in the Air,"  
and "Trouble Brewing" . . . during  
this war has been one of the BBC's  
topnotch commentators, doing all the  
big naval broadcasts, eye-witness de-  
scriptions from Salerno, from a Malta  
convoy, about a naval action off Crete,  
and the Fleet Air Arm's raid on  
Petsamo and Kirkenes . . . is 44 . . .  
is here as Chief of Naval Information  
for the Pacific.



Spencer Digby photograph  
CAPT. ANTHONY KIMMINS, R.N.  
"God forbid that you should call me a  
literary man!"

AND so on. Those were the  
biographical facts about Cap-  
tain Anthony Kimmins, R.N.,  
that I could have gathered with-  
out meeting him. It was easy  
enough to get hold of the facts.  
But they don't make a portrait of the  
man. And trying to see enough of him  
to complete the picture turned out to be  
harder. Not that there was any difficulty  
about getting in touch with him. He  
was to call at an NBS studio to record  
two ten-minute talks, and I went there  
to meet him.

### On His Own Ground

Captain Kimmins is a big man, in  
more than one way. He is very tall and  
solid, with a big head, and a wide, frank  
face. And he has the habits of someone  
who has had to develop a technique for  
dealing with lesser people who seek  
something from him. When you are in-  
troduced he leans down with an over-  
whelming smile. In his way, he is not  
unlike Sir John Reith. He is polite, and  
he greets you. But it is his ground he  
is meeting you on. It is he who will  
be in charge of the interview. He yields  
up nothing of his personality to casual  
inquirers.

People started making preparations for  
the recording. Blank discs went on to  
turn-tables, the light went on in the dark  
little studio next to the control-room, and  
a glass of water was put on the table  
under the microphone.

Before Captain Kimmins made his test  
run, his offside, Lt. Stewart, a former  
Daily Express man, saw the opportunity  
to create a fitting naval atmosphere.  
There was an engine-room telegraph,  
part of the Drama Department's sound  
effects gear, in the studio. He signalled  
Full Speed Ahead with a distinctly  
nautical clang. Captain Kimmins enjoyed  
the joke, and opened his scripts.

When the red light went on and we  
were all watching from the outside, there  
was an opportunity to see how one of the  
BBC's crack war commentators goes  
about his job.

He doesn't put out his cigarette, for  
one thing. It stays alight in his right

hand, and he takes a short puff between  
sentences now and again. He doesn't sit  
back in comfort with his legs stretched  
out; he sits on the edge of his chair, with  
his feet tucked underneath, resting on  
his toes. The effect is of nervous energy  
being poised for a skilled performance.  
As he reads, he fiddles with the end  
of his tie, or pushes back the roll of  
his shirt sleeve when it slips. And while  
your eyes tell you all this, your ears  
hear that polished and precise but lively  
voice that you seem to have heard be-  
fore. That he is reading, or smoking,  
would never occur to you if you were  
only hearing him. With his voice he pro-  
jects your mind into the scene or the  
situation he is describing.

There was a bit of backchat after-  
wards—Captain Kimmins said he had  
been in The House the night before,  
and "one gentleman was putting up a  
very sound argument but no one would  
listen to him"—but I succeeded in get-  
ting him away and leading him to our  
photographer. On the way he asked me  
what *The Listener* wanted to know.

So I asked him what it was, about  
the Navy, that produced literary men—  
or was it a case of attract rather than  
produce? There was *Taffrail*, *Bartimeus*,  
Commander Gould, for instance.

He looked at me rather hard.  
"God forbid," he said, "that you  
should call me a literary man!"

This was in effect a closure on the  
topic. But I persisted. So he admitted  
that perhaps the Navy, of all the ser-  
vices, provides the best copy.

While the photograph was being taken,  
Lt. Stewart saw the need, and turned  
reporter's friend. He would try to  
arrange an appointment under less dis-  
tracting conditions.

### No Time Like the Present

Coming out of the building, he said  
to Captain Kimmins: "Our friend would  
like to have a talk with you, sir."

(continued on next page)