

TWO RADIO REFUGEES

Broadcasting Adventures In Malaya And Java

THE end of a gallant adventure in broadcasting was described to *The Listener* recently by two refugees from Singapore—Mr. and Mrs. Miles, employees of the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation. Michael John Miles will be remembered in Wellington, where he was born, and where he was formerly on the staff of 22B, as well as of 22A. Prior to joining the announcing staff of the Singapore station six months ago, he had been engaged in radio work in Australia for two years. His wife is an English girl, who has seen much travel and excitement in the past year. After surviving the blitzing of London, where she was a secretary, she sailed in June last for Australia via South Africa, and then flew to Singapore, where she married and entered broadcasting.

Chiefly Propaganda

Describing the operations of the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation's multiple station at Singapore, Mr. and Mrs. Miles said that its principal function was propaganda and that, given another two months' of life, it would have been the most powerful unit in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Britain's awakening to the importance of radio propaganda was late, but with assistance from the Ministry of Information, the Malaya corporation was expanding its activities very rapidly. The staff numbered over two hundred of various races and colours; there were one long-wave, and four short-wave transmitters; broadcasting was carried on in 19 languages and dialects; and there were never fewer than three transmissions going on simultaneously.

Naturally, with the differing languages and political outlooks of the multitudinous races and nations within the coverage of the station, the corporation required a large number of non-European experts, not only to translate the news bulletins and to recast them in ways that might have special appeals to special sections of listeners, but also to perform the subtler functions of dressing up the propaganda material, as distinct from news, which was issued by the Ministry of Information. Besides these experts, nearly all the engineers and technicians were either Eurasians

or Malays; so that Asiatic, formed about 60 per cent of the corporation's entire staff.

Chinese Like Women's Voices

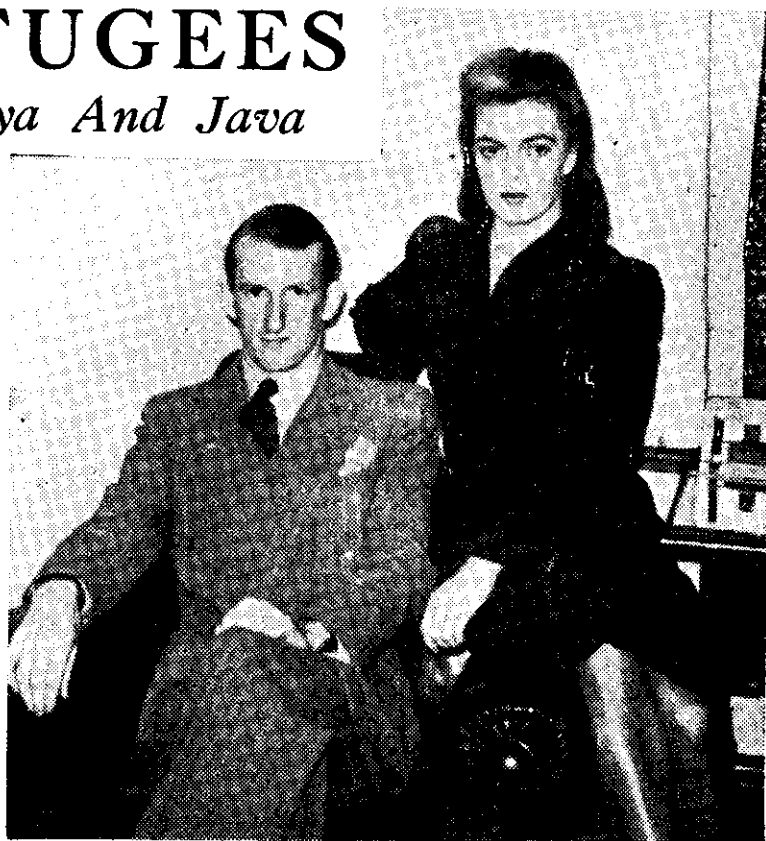
Mentioning some of the likes and dislikes that had to be catered for among the multitudinous groups of listeners, Mrs. Miles said that for the Chinese (and transmissions were carried on in three Chinese dialects), Chinese women announcers were employed, because Chinese listeners had a marked preference for women's voices.

From the European residents of the coverage area, said Mr. Miles, they had complaints that there was not sufficient entertainment in the programmes. This was unavoidable, because propaganda and not amusement was the corporation's chief aim, though, in the last few months of the station's life, the sustaining programmes were being built up considerably.

Two weeks before Singapore fell, the corporation decided that arrangements must be made to carry on transmissions elsewhere. Accordingly, it was decided to move a section of the staff to Batavia, and Mr. and Mrs. Miles were among those selected to go. Before they left, of course, the aerial bombardment of the island had started, and from the radio building they had a grandstand view of the devastating bombing of the aerodrome. The bombing, said Mr. and Mrs. Miles, was aimed mainly at military objectives, and did not worry them much until they experienced a near-miss on their own house. They took refuge under a table while the plaster tumbled down from the ceiling and bomb splinters tore through the walls.

"When we got out from under the table," said Mr. Miles, "we could hardly believe we were still alive, there had been such a noise. Then we thought the house was on fire, because it was full of smoke; but this was only cordite smoke from the bomb."

As the Johore causeway was being breached, the party for Batavia sailed from Singapore. The trip, occupying four days on a small cattle-boat, was not a particularly pleasant one. Mr. and Mrs. Miles slept among the deck cargo, which included five pigs, but they said they were so glad to be getting out that they didn't mind that, especially when they remembered that all their heavy



MR. and MRS. M. J. MILES
Their luggage was all safe as well

luggage, which they had taken the precaution of despatching some time previously, would by then be safely on its way to Australia. But that was a case of ignorance being bliss.

Courtesy From the Dutch

At Batavia, the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation's emergency party was received by the Dutch with the greatest courtesy and assistance. A building was placed at their disposal, but there was not much to be had in the way of equipment. It was a case of all hands to the pump, and here Mrs. Miles had her first experience as a control-room worker.

When Singapore radio went off the air, sufficient preparation had been made to carry on from Batavia as if it were Singapore itself. However, that was not to last long, for as everyone knows, the Japanese attack was switched to Sumatra and Java.

First, all women members of the staff were ordered out. Mrs. Miles, with

others, made the overland journey south to Tjilatjap, where, after a period of waiting, she sailed on a Dutch liner for Sydney.

When the hour came for the male staff to fly, Mr. Miles was less lucky in his travelling. "I sailed from Batavia itself," he said, "and the boat was a little 1,200-ton tub which hadn't been trusted outside sheltered coastal waters for 30 years. It was a 10-day trip to Fremantle, and we lived on bully beef and beans."

"A Terrible Scramble"

"It was a terrible scramble getting away, and just as the boat was sailing, someone told me he had seen some heavy pieces of luggage on the wharf with my name on them. At first I thought it was impossible, but I dashed over to have a look, and sure enough, there was some of my stuff that had been consigned weeks before from Singapore to Australia, but had never got past Batavia. Naturally, I grabbed it and put it on the deck of the tub."

And it happened in the end that Mr. Miles reached Fremantle two days before his wife reached Melbourne. And their luggage was all safe as well. "We have both been extremely lucky." They agreed.

Still more lucky do they appear in view of the fate of many other members of the corporation's staff. Some, said Mr. Miles, got away to India, and some to Australia, but many were on the ship which was bombed and disabled in Banka Strait—the famous "Bomb Alley." A small party of women off this ship were rescued by motor launch, but it was presumed that all the rest were in the hands of the Japanese. Still others of the staff had sailed from Singapore on a ship of which nothing whatever had been heard.

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Members of the Royal Air Force in Transjordan send personal messages home. A. L. Curry, of the N.Z. Broadcasting Unit, is holding the microphone

