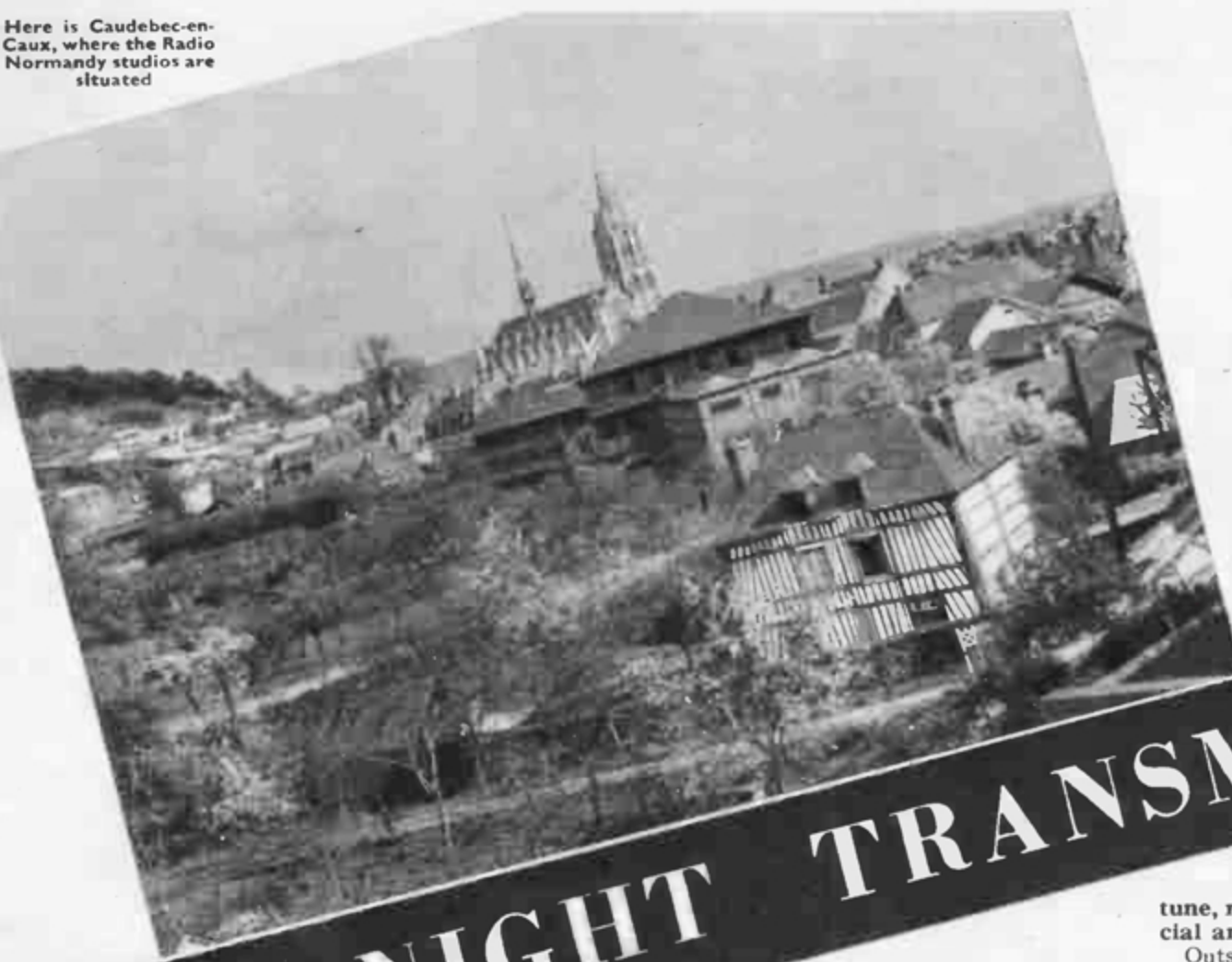


MAURICE GRIFFITH,

one of Radio Normandy's resident announcers, reveals the emotions he experiences when he is on duty for the late-night transmissions, in this amusing article of truth and fantasy.

Here is Caudebec-en-Caux, where the Radio Normandy studios are situated



LATE-NIGHT TRANSMISSION

clocks; control room seven seconds fast; must remember that in case some ship is using time signal to verify position, might make all the difference between safety and disaster.

Check discs and broadcast instructions—put everything ready. Twelve and a half minutes to go—time for a cigarette before taking over. Open the windows and put out the lights, otherwise moths fly in. Over the lawns again, under the rose pergola to the terrace.

The Seine is like a mirror. The ferry is moored for the night, with one white light at the mast-head. There goes a tanker up to Rouen, low in the water, one red light visible. Chug, chug of powerful Diesel engine as it fights the current.

Broken reflections, a chevron of bow-wave the same formation as duck in flight. Downstream comes a Norwegian freighter, holds empty, hull high out of the water, moving swiftly to the open sea, screws thumping the surface and throwing up foam white like feathers—seem to have birds on the brain to-night!

There goes an Irish cargo from Limerick—tubby thing, but powerful, steaming up the river with a streak of black smoke from the funnels. I wonder what sort of weather they had off Land's End.

Time 11.54—back to the control room.

Door locked in case anybody walks in while the microphone is "alive"; windows closed against moths and motor-horns and ships' sirens. Loudspeaker off, headphones on. Script in front of me, bells ready. A minute and a half to go; I wonder if they will be on time. The French transmissions still have thirty seconds to go: "Et maintenant, mes chers auditeurs..." Zero hour. Heart beating a shade faster. Take a deep breath. Red light on, mike "live." "Bonne nuit"—there it is; wait five seconds for them to switch over to the English studios.

Ding, dong, ding, dong! "This is Radio Normandy, wavelength..." The time is a few seconds after midnight on the morning of... Signature tune... opening announcement... fade in dance tune. Next part of the programme ready. Lean back for a minute.

After all the care I took there is a moth! May have been sleeping all day, hidden under a ledge somewhere. Beautiful white, lacey thing; hope it doesn't land on the record. I wonder what would happen if it did. No time to wonder, cross fade next

tune, red light, mike "live," second commercial announcement.

Outside the swan's wing has beaten northwards over the hills, and a shapeless black mass is hanging low over the river. The air is very close. A distant flicker of lightning floods the clouds for a split second and is gone. The trees hold their breath. Up at the transmitter the engineers curse the static: "Another storm; as if we hadn't had enough lately! If it comes as close as the last one did we might be forced to go off the air."

Last commercial announcement; signature tune; fade for time gong. "The time signal for half-past twelve. Working late? Remember, tea revives you. Radio Normandy." Play signature tune, the "Bells of Normandy"—"Dance music... two foxtrots and a waltz."

Now I can lean back again; I take the headphones off for ten minutes. Loudspeaker on... "And they swam, and they swam, all over the dam." Lucky little fishes, on a night like this!

The storm-clouded atmosphere makes the air sultry. Moths or no moths, I must have some air. Open the door. What rain! Like the tropics, and I didn't even know it had started; can't hear a thing with headphones on. And the lightning. Every twig like fish-net against the sky, wet leaves gleaming like photographic negatives of themselves.

Fourth record. Curse these insects; there's a mosquito now, and a whole kindergarten of midges. I shall be lumpy in the morning. Last record; running a little late—fade down.

"And now the International Broadcasting Company's transmission is drawing to a close..." Plenty of time; take it gently; it means something, not just words.

"To those of you who are keeping watch on board the ships of the seven seas..." Three days to Limerick in a cargo boat—and one fraction of a second for my voice!

"To those of you who are rising... police officers..." Even the one who gonged me for no rear light on the Kingston By-pass; decent chap; never heard anything more about it.

"Motorists..." Two in a coupé, returning from a dance; she says, "Nearly one o'clock; that's Normandy closing down."

"To bakers and newspaper workers..." Did I ever know a baker? I don't believe I ever did, except Heinrich, in Salzburg, but he doesn't speak English, unless he has learned it since.

"To young mothers, who tend their darling little ones..." Maybe they don't always call them "darlings" at this time of night.

"Officers and men of the Royal Navy..." I wonder where Lofty is now—half way to China, probably. I must write to him. The strains of the Last Post fade under.

"Good night, and happy dreams."