

# TOMMY'S DYING VOICE

By Don Jensen



## The British Forces Broadcasting Service is a falling star in the

□ *"Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,"* penned Kipling, voicing the plaint of the typical British soldier, who for centuries has guarded the far-flung corners of the Empire.

Since World War II, the British government has tried, with its Forces Broadcasting Service, to combat the loneliness and isolation of its overseas troops. At its postwar peak, the BFBS, now known as the British Forces Broadcasting Service, operated medium and shortwave stations in nearly a score of countries, from Gibraltar to Singapore.

Operating much like our own Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, the BFBS provides a service of information and entertainment, as well as a link with home for Her Majesty's forces. Over the years, British Forces shortwave stations in Palestine, Malta, Trieste and elsewhere also have provided good DXing for SWLs around the world. But now those days are nearly over.

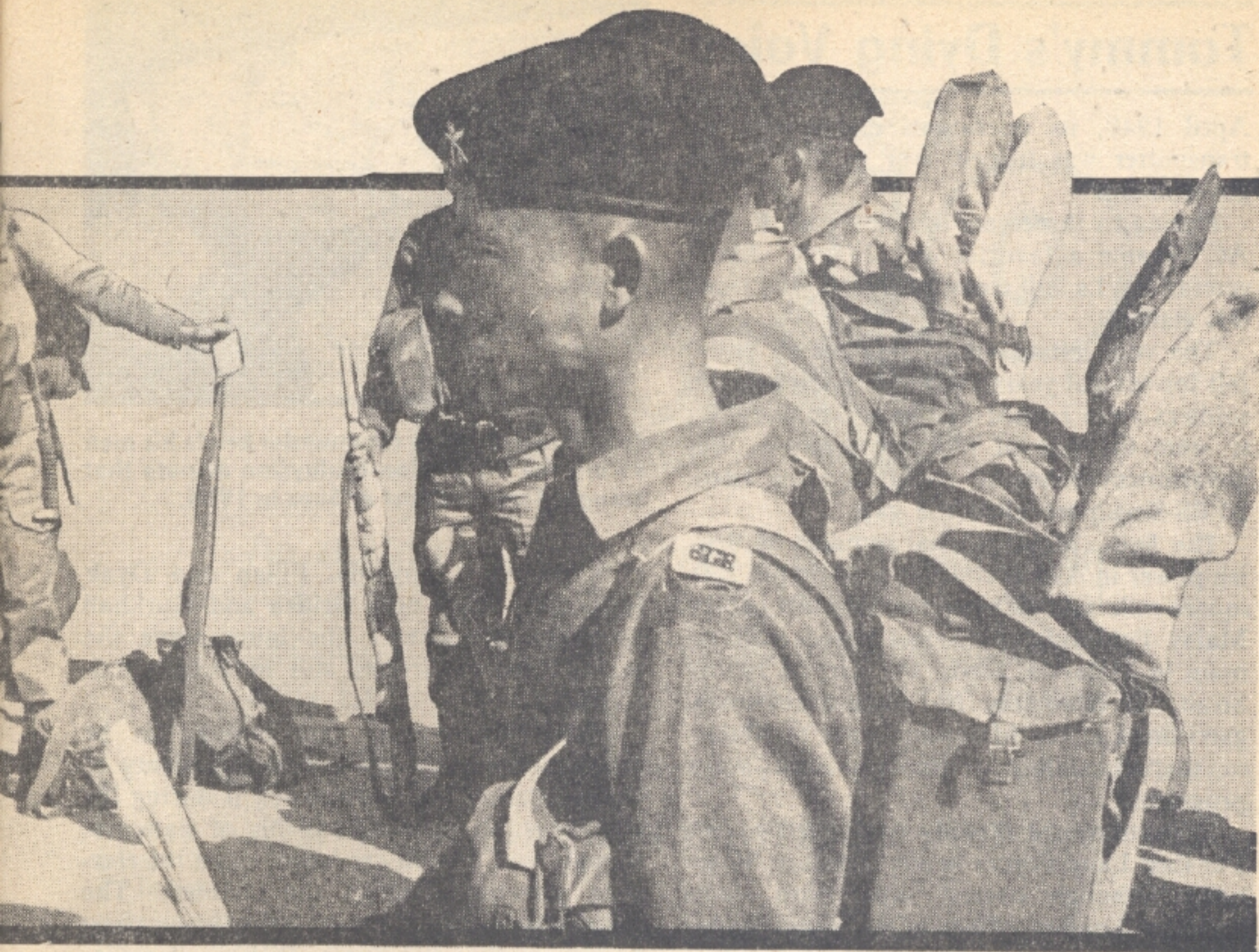
With the sun rapidly setting on Britain's global empire, her multi-million man war-

time army has shrunk to just over 400,000. Plans have been announced for the withdrawal of 32,000 troops from the Far East. By 1971, the Union Jack will fly over a mere handful of garrisons east of Suez.

The need for a military broadcasting network lessened, the chain of BFBS stations already has been cut to a scattered few local medium wave and FM outlets and a single shortwave transmitter.

**The Beginning of the End.** Britain's last shortwave outpost is BFBS-Singapore, a 10,000-watt station broadcasting on 5010 and 6040 kHz, from the tiny, but important Asian nation. If you want to log this one, the last of the British battledress broadcasters, you'd better hurry. Before long, it too, will be gone, like the "thin red line" of military might.

British Forces Broadcasting Station—Singapore became a part of the network in the mid-1950's, when battalions of Commonwealth troops were battling the communist terrorists in Malaya. During the 1963-65 confrontation between Malaysia and Indo-



## failing light that once never set on the British global empire!

nesia, British highlanders, patrolling the jungles and waterways of Sarawak and Sabah, tuned the station's programs on transistorized portables.

The Singapore operation today is the

stepchild of its powerful predecessor, R. SE-AC, which broadcast from Ceylon during the immediate postwar years to the 1.3 million men in the South East Asian Command.

**The Beginning.** Though experimental programs date back to Christmas Day, 1932, when King George V broadcast his holiday message to the fleet in Malta, regular service was not established until 1943. Stations in the Middle East, North and East Africa brought radio enjoyment to members of the three armed services. Staffed by Army and Royal Air Force personnel, these transmitters presented special interest programs, musical requests and sports events outside the scope of the BBC's overseas service.

Planning for R. SEAC also began in 1943, though it did not go on the air until May 1946. The most ambitious Forces station in the world, its 100-kw transmitter, located in a palm grove 15 miles from its Colombo studios, pumped out six and a half hours of programming daily. Special "home folks" broadcasts were beamed to Great Britain each Sunday evening on 19 meters. But in

### ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Company
<b>BFBS</b>	British Forces Broadcasting Service
<b>DXers</b>	radio listener interested in long distant reception
<b>DXing</b>	long distance, distant (contact or country)
<b>FM</b>	frequency modulation or frequency modulated
<b>GMT</b>	Greenwich Mean Time
<b>kHz</b>	kilohertz (kilocycles)
<b>kW</b>	kilowatt
<b>MW</b>	medium wave
<b>QSL</b>	decorated postal card or letter from station acknowledging reception report
<b>R. SEAC</b>	Radio Southeast Asia Comamnd
<b>SW</b>	shortwave
<b>SWL</b>	shortwave listener

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April 1949, its operations ended and the transmitter was turned over to the Ceylon government.

During its three-year life, however, R. SE-AC became a favorite with DXers. Many veteran SWLs still treasure their QSLs from this station.

The void left by its passing wasn't really felt for several years. When Commonwealth soldiers were rushed to Malaya in the '50's to stem the tide of terrorist activities, the government belatedly recognized the need. BFBS-Singapore filled the gap.

**The End.** Most of what remains of British power in Asia is concentrated on the 200-square-mile island nation at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, but some forces still remain in Malaysia, across the narrow Johore Strait. It is mainly for these servicemen, garrisoned in the Malaysian state of Malacca, that the station transmits its short wave programs.

Operations are directly controlled by the Far East Land Forces headquarters in Singapore, although overall supervision stems from the London offices in the Kings Buildings on Dean Stanley Street.

Its British-made Marconi transmitter and colinear dipole antenna are located in a hilly area near Jurong, a brand new industrial satellite town on the island's southwest coast, a few miles from the city of Singapore.

Though the schedule once listed programs



Parachute battalion commander briefs his men during the Indonesian-Malaysian dispute that brought Tommies east of Suez in 1965.

in Kiswahili, Chinyanja, Fijian and Dyak languages, today only British and Gurkhali programs are aired. The latter serve the fierce Nepalese troops still in British uniform.

BFBS-Singapore is rare enough to be considered a good DX catch, but plenty of sharp listeners managed to log it during the past year. It does take a bit of patience, though, and a good ear helps, since interference sometimes masks the channel. The frequency is easy to locate, being just a short jump up the dial from WWV's familiar "ticks".

English programs are heard from 0630 to 1230 GMT, with a two-hour Gurkha program following. North American listeners can hear the station best after 1130 GMT,

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## BRITISH FORCES BROADCASTING CASUALTY LIST

Station	Location	Ceased SW Operations
FBS Middle East	Jerusalem, Palestine	1947
Radio SEAC	Colombo, Ceylon	1949
FBS No. 4	Lakatamia, Cyprus	About 1951
FBS Middle East	Malta Garrison, Malta	About 1951
FBS Experimental	Trieste	1954
FBS No. 5, North Africa	Benghazi, Libya	1957
FBS No. 2, East Africa	Nairobi, Kenya	About 1964
BFBS—Singapore	Singapore	?

**Other British Forces Stations (MW and FM, Past and Present)**—Cairo, Kabrit, Fayid, EGYPT; Tripoli, Tobruk, El Adem, LIBYA; Nicosia, Valetta, Limassol, Episkopi, Akrotiri, Dhekelia, CYPRUS; Gaza, Haifa, ISRAEL; Basra, IRAQ; Beirut, LEBANON; Mombassa, KENYA; Graz, Klagenfurt, Zeltweg, Vienna, AUSTRIA; Hamburg, Hannover, Langenberg, Herford, Berlin, Bonn, GERMANY; Rome, Naples, ITALY; Algiers, ALGERIA; Wellington Front, GIBRALTAR; OMAN; ADEN.

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with West Coast DXers finding reception better during the last part of the schedule.

**QSL Today!** BFBS-Singapore responds to correct listeners' reports with QSL cards, provided return postage is sent. International reply coupons, available at your post office, may be used. Reports go to BFBS, c/o

### BRITISH FORCES BROADCASTING SERVICE

SINGAPORE—HQ FARELF, c/o GPO SINGAPORE

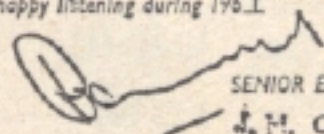
TRANSMITTER TYPE Marconi BD268A AERIAL Co-Linear Dipole

EFFECTIVE RADIATED POWER 10 K/WATTS

Thank you for your report concerning our transmissions on 59.88 Metres

5.010 K/cy covering the period 1131 hrs to 1154 hrs

on 12 September, 1961. The contents of your report have been checked with our Station Log for that day and found correct. May we take this opportunity of wishing you good luck and happy listening during 1961.

  
SENIOR ENGINEER  
J. M. CAMPBELL

Singapore, the gateway to Asia and the land of the vanishing British Forces Broadcasting Service QSL card. The author pulled in the above valuable prize two years ago when Tommy and friends were stationed there.

GHQ, FARELF, General Post Office, Singapore.

How much longer will the station be around? Probably even Parliament couldn't answer that one now. But surely its life expectancy is short. So get busy, Bunky. Time's running out! ■