The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 385
“The Thingamabob That’s Going to Win the War”
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

It’s the girl that makes the thing
That holds the oil that oils the ring,
That makes the thingamabob that’s going to win the war.

Barbara Gordon and Basil Thomas, “The Thingamabob That’s Going to Win the War.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 385. The Thingamabob That’s Going to Win the War.

As of the first of September 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland, there were regularly scheduled television broadcasts in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany.

In the US and Germany, these continued through the war, but not in the UK. At 12:05 PM that Friday afternoon, the BBC broadcast the 1933 animated short film, *Mickey’s Gala Premiere*, starring Mickey Mouse and produced by Walt Disney. After the film came some test patterns, then an announcer explained that the BBC television service was shutting down. No further explanation was given, but in light of what was happening in Poland, it was easy to guess this was in preparation for war.

There were only 20,000 or so televisions in the UK, a comparable number in the US and fewer than that in Germany. TV sets were expensive and complex devices, and their manufacture required materials that would be needed for the war effort. Since the production of new TV sets would come to a halt in all three countries anyway, the end of TV broadcasts in Britain didn’t affect many people.

Television broadcasting would resume in Britain in 1946. There is a story, which is not true but is too good not to mention, that when BBC television resumed, the announcer began his broadcast with, “As I was saying before we were so rudely interrupted…” This, I say again for

emphasis, is not true. The actual announcer, who was a she, opened with the words, “Good afternoon, everybody. How are you? Do you remember me, Jasmine Bligh?” The BBC resumed its programming with a repeat broadcast of *Mickey’s Gala Premiere*.

Apart from the facts that television programming was expensive to produce and required expensive equipment to watch, television required powerful transmitters, and it was feared these transmitters could be used to guide German bombers, hence the suspension of broadcasts.

Similarly, before September 1, the BBC broadcast two separate programming streams, the National Programme and the Regional Programme. As the names imply, the National Programme was the same everywhere in the UK, and was the more “serious” broadcast, consisting of talk, discussion, educational programming—sort of like podcasts, actually—and classical music, because all serious intellectual programming includes interludes of classical music, wouldn’t you agree?

The Regional Programme included some programming that was distributed nationally, but also programs of regional interest that were only broadcast in that region. These programs were lighter fare such as popular music and comedy. Again there was concern that these broadcasts might aid German bombers. If a bomber crew could tune into different broadcasting stations and pick up different programming, and if the programming gave away the location of the station, Luftwaffe navigators might be able to use this information to calculate the position of their own planes.

The two programming streams were therefore combined into one, now called the BBC Home Service. Programming consisted largely of light music, official announcements, and news bulletins.

A word about news on the BBC: Since British broadcasting began, its news offerings were minimal. That’s because the UK’s numerous and vigorous newspapers objected to a government agency moving in on their turf and persuaded the Postmaster General to impose strict limits on news broadcasts. If you remember our episodes on radio in the United States, you’ll recall there were similar controversies. The BBC pledged not to do news broadcasts until 6:00 PM, after everyone had already bought their newspaper for the day, and the news it did broadcast was no more than brief summaries of what everyone had already read in the newspaper. The Corporation did not have its own news division.

The war changed that. First of all, with the war came shortages of newsprint, forcing newspapers to downsize at a time when public interest in the news was tremendous. Second, Germany was broadcasting propaganda into Britain; the British government saw a need to counter it. Since newspapers were letting go of their reporters, it was simple enough to find and hire experienced people to gather and report the news.

BBC leadership was determined to contrast their news reporting with the highly exaggerated propaganda that was coming out of Germany, and later Italy. This meant BBC policy was strict accuracy and neutrality, which gradually earned it a reputation for integrity in its reporting. By 1944, BBC employee Eric Blair, better known to us today by his pen name, George Orwell, could boast that when Britons said, "I heard it on the BBC," they meant it as synonymous with "It must be true." The BBC has enjoyed a reputation for honest and accurate reporting ever since.

This reputation for truth proved to be an effective weapon against the overblown lies the Germans and Italians routinely broadcast. BBC Overseas Service transmissions into occupied Europe provided a valuable source of real news on the state of the war for anyone brave enough to listen to them.

A listener had to be brave. When the war began, the Germans made listening to the BBC punishable by death. In poor Poland, the country the Nazis were reducing to a pre-industrial economy, the mere possession of a radio was a capital crime. Despite these draconian prohibitions, it was an open secret that when the upper echelons of the German government and military wanted to know what was really going on, they tuned in to the BBC.

The British government could and did regularly censor news reports when they contained information that might be of use to the enemy. Any talk of movements of military units or ships was banned. British Army units could not be referred to by their names. When the Battle of Britain was in progress, the BBC was limited to making vague reports that there had been a bombing and there were casualties. It was feared anything more specific would provide the Luftwaffe valuable information that would help them determine which of their bombing raids had been most effective.

So here was this new BBC Home Service, with broadcasts consisting largely of news and information accompanied by light entertainment and music, but after the fall of Poland, as you already know, came the period often called the "Phony War," in which nothing much happened, at least not from October 1939 through the invasion of Norway in April 1940. The Home Service, primed as it was to report on the war, didn't actually have much of interest to say. The BBC had, in a word, become boring.

Do you know what *was* interesting? A little radio program named *Germany Calling*, a propaganda project devised by Joseph Goebbels that beamed English-language programming toward Britain. This program also offered news and entertainment. The news carried a heavy Nazi slant, but people listened anyway, because the program was the only source of information for what was going in Germany and the occupied countries. Anyone who had a loved one trapped in Europe or shot down over Europe or lost in a ship at sea had good reason to tune into *Germany Calling* and listen to the names of those taken prisoner; it was the only way to find out if your friend or relative were still alive.

Germany Calling also provided entertainment. There was comedy, which tended to mock the British government and its policies. And there was music. Jazz and swing, to be precise. The Nazis disdained jazz or swing or any other music created by Black people as “degenerate art,” the Nazi catchall description for anything they didn’t approve of. The Nazis banned jazz at home, but had no compunctions about using it to draw in British listeners, who turned to the German broadcast for entertainment because you couldn’t find anything that good on the BBC.

Germany Calling used several English-speaking presenters in its programming. One particular announcer, who was among the first, spoke English in such a careful, erudite manner that he could have been mistaken for an educated upper-class Englishman. The presenters did not identify themselves by name, which prompted the radio critic for the *Daily Express* newspaper to dub the well-spoken one “Lord Haw-Haw,” and write that the presenter’s voice brought to mind P.G. Wodehouse’s fictional upper-class dimwit Bertie Wooster.

In the past, BBC presenters didn’t announce their names over the air either and were coached to speak the same ever-so-precise English of the Received Pronunciation. With the war came fears the Germans might exploit this to imitate a BBC presenter, so the policy changed and presenters began to give their names and, shockingly, even began to speak in a more distinctive, personal manner, although the BBC house style of cool, detached delivery remained. It made a sharp contrast with the bombastic presentations of Axis propaganda programs.

The popularity of *Germany Calling* in Britain caused concern in the government and at the BBC. Some thought was given to putting government representatives on the air to give detailed rebuttals to each of Lord Haw-Haw’s broadcasts, but that idea was quickly dismissed, as it would only serve to heighten the reputation of the program and encourage more Britons to tune in. It would also likely be dull. People were tuning into Lord Haw-Haw because the BBC was boring. Making it more boring was hardly a solution.

Presenting the BBC as an honest and accurate news source, more trustworthy than what was coming out of the fascist nations, was a good first step, but the Corporation was on the watch for other ways in which it could help support Britons at war. When rationing severely limited what British people could buy for food and other necessities, this created demand for informational programs that helped explain how to get by on what you had. The BBC answered the demand with *The Kitchen Front*, a program that offered tips on how stretch your rations and *Back to the Land*, which guided Britons in how to grow their own vegetables.

The BBC had begun a program of entertainment for youngsters called *Children’s Hour* in 1922. It ran every day of the week in the 5:00 to 6:00 PM timeslot. Even this program got into the act, advising children on how to collect scrap metal for the war effort. When urban British children were relocated to rural homes for their own safety, the BBC increased its broadcasts of educational programs, to help supplement rural schools, which now found their enrollments swelling. Princess Elizabeth, accompanied by her younger sister, Princess Margaret, made an

appearance on *Children's Hour* to offer good wishes to the nation's children and commiserate with them on their separations from their families.

The Home Service also broadcast light entertainment. There were variety programs such as *Band Waggon*, which cheerfully mocked itself, announcing to listeners that the very existence of their show demonstrated to the Nazis how much the British public was capable of putting up with, and *Monday Night at Seven*, which after the war began was pushed back an hour and renamed *Monday Night at Eight*, because people were working longer hours.

And there was straight-up comedy. These variety shows included comedy skits, but the most popular comedy of the war was the program *It's That Man Again*, which debuted in July 1939. During the run-up to the war, the expression "It's that man, again," was commonly understood as a mocking reference to Adolf Hitler, who kept coming back into the headlines with ever newer and more outrageous territorial claims.

In the world of *It's That Man Again*, by contrast, the man in question was Liverpool comedian Tommy Handley, who played the fast-talking central character surrounded by dozens of supporting characters. The plots were never as important as the distinctive quirks and catch phrases of these side characters.

When the show began, it was set aboard a pirate radio station at sea and was not a success. The BBC was on the verge of cancelling it when the war began. Since a pirate radio station did not sound like suitable material for a wartime show, the show got a makeover. The setting was changed to the fictional British Ministry of Aggravation, and the comedy poked fun at British wartime regulations and bureaucracy and mocked German propaganda broadcasts.

The revised show became a big hit, the most popular comedy program of the war, a much bigger draw than Lord Haw-Haw, and very much contrary to BBC management's initial tendency to favor more somber and practical programming in wartime.

After the Battle of Britain, making fun of the British government, and particularly making use of a fictional government department that sounded a lot like "ministry of aviation," seemed less appropriate and drew criticism from the sorts of people who were always writing in to the BBC to complain that its programming was too vulgar or too lowbrow. *It's That Man Again* was retooled again. Its protagonist became the mayor of a rundown British seaside resort town named Foaming-at-the-Mouth, and the title adjusted slightly to become *It's That Sand Again*. The show remained topical, but setting it in a fictional small town allowed the show to parody government bureaucracy in a more allegorical manner that was largely opaque the sorts of people who wrote those letters.

By 1942, the program was so popular it became the first to record a show at Windsor Castle before the Royal Family. The occasion was Princess Elizabeth's sixteenth birthday.

It's That Man Again enabled members of the British public to go to work the following morning and quote punch lines from the show, which teased British officialdom but never condemned it. Still, laughing at the show felt a little bit naughty, which made it all the funnier. The lesson did not escape the leadership of the BBC: what people needed was something cheerful to take their minds off the war.

They took the trouble to poll listeners at home and British soldiers stationed in France in the early days of the war to see what they wanted from the Corporation. One popular response was good music.

What did the British public consider good music? Jazz and swing, which were rarely heard on the radio. One of the most popular songs in the Britain of 1939 was "Beer Barrel Polka," also commonly known as "Roll Out the Barrel." It was originally composed by a Czech musician in 1924. The Czech lyrics are about unrequited love, but in 1934 an American publisher acquired the rights to the song and hired two Americans to provide English-language lyrics. They ditched the romance angle in favor of a celebration of beer drinking, which was very much in tune with the times in America, as Prohibition had just recently been repealed. The song remained obscure for a few years, finally gaining notoriety when the Andrews Sisters recorded it in 1939. What could be more British than getting drunk on beer while singing a song about how much fun it is to drink beer? It made an escape from the war, anyway.

[music: The U.S.. Army Blues, "Stardust."]

Another common public request was that the BBC provide connection. Soldiers abroad wanted to hear about home. The public at home wanted to hear about their loved ones serving abroad.

And this brings me to Vera Margaret Welch, an Englishwoman born March 20, 1917 in Essex. She began singing professionally at the tender age of seven in 1924. At the age of 11, she took the stage name Vera Lynn. She began singing and recording records with dance bands in the Thirties, while supporting herself by working as a secretary.

In 1939, shortly before the war, when Lynn was 22 years old, she was out shopping for sheet music when a particular song caught her eye. It was titled, "We'll Meet Again." The song is about, well, what it says on the tin. The chorus goes, "We'll meet again/Don't know where/Don't know when/But I know we'll meet again some sunny day."

The songwriters, Englishmen Ross Parker and Hughie Charles wrote "We'll Meet Again" during the final days of peace in 1939, because war was looming and they wanted to have a wartime song ready in their inventory, just in case it came. I suppose songwriting is a competitive business and it pays to keep ahead of the curve. "We'll Meet Again" is a bittersweet, sentimental ode that might touch the hearts of those separated from family or lovers by the exigencies of war. Not satisfied with this one effort, the duo also penned a more rousing little patriotic number called "There Will Always Be an England."

Both of these songs, but especially “We’ll Meet Again,” would become associated with Vera Lynn. She recorded “We’ll Meet Again” in 1939, with an accompanist playing a Novachord.

The Novachord, by the way, was the world’s first commercial music synthesizer, or electronic keyboard. It was manufactured by Hammond, an American company founded in 1935 by Laurens Hammond, inventor of the electric organ. The Novachord was not an electric organ; it was an all-electronic instrument that produced synthetic tones which could be modified by the musician by adjusting controls above the keyboard.

The Novachord was introduced to the public at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. The first production instrument was given to President Roosevelt as a birthday present. The Novachord, like all analog electronic synthesizers, produced sounds that often didn’t resemble any of those produced by real world musical instruments, or any other sound you are likely to hear in the real world. Instead, it more often produced tones that ranged from eerie to robotic. Its futuristic sound led to its use in the musical scores for science fiction films and television programs such as *This Island Earth* and *The Outer Limits*, although to be fair, it was also used in such surprisingly non-science fictional places as the films *Gone With the Wind* and *High Noon*, and on the television program *Hawaii Five-O*.

The sad truth is that electronics technology of 1939 just wasn’t ready to handle the job of synthesizing music. The Novachord was the size and weight of a piano and considerably more expensive and difficult to maintain. It included 163 vacuum tubes, so it ran pretty hot, and it had a reputation as a cranky machine, highly susceptible to changes in temperature and humidity. As if those problems weren’t enough, after Pearl Harbor, wartime demand for electronics forced Hammond to discontinue the Novachord. Only a thousand were ever made.

The involvement of both Vera Lynn and the Novachord in this 1939 recording of “We’ll Meet Again,” makes the recording historically significant for two entirely separate reasons. You can listen to it on YouTube; I will post the YouTube video on the podcast website.

Vera Lynn was by this time a popular dance band singer. When the Battle of Britain began, she sometimes entertained the crowds sheltering in London tube stations during air raids. In August 1940, she got a leading role in the musical revue *Apple Sauce*, which opened at the Holborn Empire, a London theatre. Less than three weeks into the show’s run, the Holborn Empire was destroyed by a German bomb. The show reopened in 1941 at the London Palladium.

On November 9, 1941, while *Apple Sauce* was still running, Vera Lynn made her first appearance on a new BBC radio program called *Sincerely Yours,* which aired every Sunday at 9:30 PM. The show was performed primarily for the benefit of British service members abroad, presented in the form of a letter from home. Vera took requests from the armed forces and read out personal letters from folks at home to their loved ones on the front lines. And she closed every show with “We’ll Meet Again.”

Another song the show made popular in the UK was "(There'll be Bluebirds Over) the White Cliffs of Dover," written by two New Yorkers, composer Walter Kent and lyricist Nat Burton. The song offers the promise that after the war, the angry skies over Britain would transform and, well, there'll be bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover, and it was intended as a gift from the United States, a gesture of solidarity with beleaguered Britain, though lyricist Nat Burton confessed that he'd never laid eyes on the White Cliffs of Dover at the time he wrote the song. He apparently also didn't know that the bluebird is indigenous to North America and therefore the prospect of them appearing over the White Cliffs before, during, or after the war was decidedly unlikely. But it's the thought that counts, I suppose.

This song was performed on the very first broadcast of *Sincerely Yours*. A month later came Pearl Harbor and Americans found themselves fighting the war alongside the British. They embraced the song and its sentiment as well, even though while America has plenty of bluebirds, it suffers a distinct shortage of white cliffs. Multiple performances of the song were recorded and released in the United States in the weeks after Pearl Harbor, including ones by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra, Kay Kyser and His Orchestra, Sammy Kay, Jimmy Dorsey, and Kate Smith. Italian-American bandleader Louis Prima recorded a jazz version.

Vera Lynn also toured British military posts and performed live for the soldiers and sailors, but she was best and most fondly remembered for the radio programs. She has been called the second most prominent radio personality of the war, after Winston Churchill. Vera herself disputed that ranking; she joked that Winston Churchill had been her opening act.

Vera Lynn was popular with the public; an estimated 20% of the radios in Britain tuned into *Sincerely Yours* every Sunday evening. She was popular with the soldiers and sailors; the British press regularly called her "the sweetheart of the Forces."

But there was one class of people with whom she was not popular. I am referring to the management of the BBC. One executive wrote of her show that "the program is solidly popular with the ordinary rank and file of the Forces. On the other hand, it does not do us any good to have a reputation for flabby amusement." Some of those cranky letter-writers agreed with him. A correspondent to the *Daily Telegraph*—of course it was the *Daily Telegraph*—wrote, "If our Armed Forces really like this sort of thing, it should be the duty of the BBC to hide the fact from the world," suggesting that instead the radio should be playing "something more virile."

You'll recall that Britain experienced two grave military setbacks in the first half of 1942: the fall of Singapore, and the fall of Tobruk. These were disastrous events for many people, they ruined the careers of some military officers, they drew Churchill and his government two motions of no confidence…and they led to the cancellation of *Sincerely Yours*. Could it be that Vera Lynn was de-virilizing British soldiers? Best stick with classical and martial music and not take any more chances.

The BBC went back and forth a few times during the war on the question of whether it was sufficient excuse to play a piece of music merely because people liked to hear it. It formed what was officially the Dance Music Policy Committee to review music selections and decide what was or was not appropriate to broadcast. The Committee came to be known colloquially as the "anti-slush committee."

The committee banned a number of songs for being too sentimental including Bing Crosby's "I'll Be Home for Christmas," which the committee thought would depress the troops. Even the popular playwright and songwriter Noel Coward, whose most famous song is probably "Mad Dogs and Englishmen," found one of his works getting the axe.

You'll remember that during the last war, the German Army did some pretty terrible things in occupied Belgium and France, but even so, lurid, over-the-top stories of even worse German atrocities also circulated. This was unfortunate, because these stories tended to cast doubt on the real war crimes. Once stories of Nazi atrocities began to appear in the Britain of the Second World War, there were a few people who expressed skepticism and defended the Germans, on the grounds that these stories would likely prove just as false as the ones from the last war.

Anyway, Noel Coward wrote a song titled "Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans," meant as a subtle mockery of the Nazi defenders. Unfortunately for him and his song, too many BBC listeners missed the point and took the lyrics at face value, which led to a ban from the anti-slush committee.

As for Vera Lynn, the cancellation of her radio show was for her only a temporary setback. She went on tour, singing for British troops in places like Egypt and India. She appeared in three movies: 1943's *Rhythm Serenade*, 1944's *One Exciting Night*, and notably her first film, also released in 1943, inevitably titled *We'll Meet Again*, a dramatization of her own life story.

As I said, the BBC went back and forth on its music policy; in 1944, they relented and put Vera Lynn in front of the microphones once again.

Morale boosting wasn't only for soldiers. Workers in British factories were putting in long, tiring days, and they were important to the war effort, too. This inspired the BBC to provide programming specifically for them. There was *Workers' Playtime*, a variety show broadcast at lunchtime three days a week on location at various factories up and down Britain. A program called *Music While You Work* was another road show, in which famous bands appeared at factories and performed light music at 10:30 AM and 3:00 PM, because those were found to be the times when assembly line workers grew most weary. They also did some shows after dark for the night shifts.

Singer Gracie Fields did her part. Her recording of "I'm Sending a Letter to Santa Claus," was a big hit over Christmas of 1939. Her most notable song, though, was "The Thingamabob That's Going to Win the War," which I quoted from at the top of the episode. This song was just the

thing for a bored assembly line worker—and let's face it, assembly line work is dreadfully boring. The song imagines a woman—because many factory workers were women during the war, and "girl" was how they pronounced the word "woman" back then—a woman manufacturing some little widget over and over again without even knowing what it was or why she was making it, but the song raises the prospect that the particular thingamabob you make might become the thingamabob that's going to win the war.

Another notable wartime singer was a nine-year-old girl with a talent for imitating Vera Lynn whom the BBC discovered and put on the air in 1942. Her name was Petula Clark, and she quickly became popular on radio and on tour. They called her the "Singing Sweetheart." She sometimes toured military bases in the UK accompanied by another little girl singer three years her junior named Julie Andrews.

I told you back in episode 312 that in the Thirties the BBC disdained American jazz and swing music, thanks in part to those letter-writers again, who never seem to like anything on the BBC. During this time, jazz connoisseurs in Britain were in the same position white American jazz fans were a decade earlier; that is, you couldn't find your favorite music on the radio or in the record store. Your only option was to do your research and exchange notes with other jazz lovers to identify the catalog numbers of the records you wanted to hear and then place special orders through catalogs or your local record store. Most British jazz fans had never heard their favorite music performed live.

In June 1940, the darkest days of the war, the BBC signed a non-aggression pact with jazz, as one journalist of the time put it, and introduced a weekly half-hour show called *Radio Rhythm Club*, where jazz was officially sanctioned. The show broadcast live concerts, jam sessions, and played gramophone records, after which the presenter would be careful to give out the catalog number for the convenience of listeners who might want to order a copy.

Radio Rhythm Club had its own house band, the Radio Rhythm Club Sextet, led by Welsh clarinetist and band leader Harry Parry. Parry was the UK's premier home-grown jazz musician of the time, essentially a British Benny Goodman. He was also like Goodman in that his band was interracial, featuring jazz guitarist Joe Deniz, a fellow Welshman of African ancestry, who played alongside white musicians like the blind English jazz pianist George Shearing, who was eventually granted a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II in recognition of his services both to music and to Anglo-American relations.

The UK did not have the same kind of agonizing race issues as the United States, but it did have its own problems, and the moment the BBC agreed to present the music of Black people performed by Black musicians has to count as a milestone.

Earlier in this episode, I spoke a little about the propaganda program *Germany Calling* and Lord Haw-Haw. Before we close the episode, I'd like to tell you a couple of other stories about German radio programs and their influence in Britain.

You'll recall I quoted a British journalist who wrote that Lord Haw-Haw's voice brought to his mind Bertie Wooster, the addled young gentleman who appeared in the best-known works of British writer P.G. Wodehouse. His stories about Bertie and his much shrewder and more perceptive valet, Jeeves, who always finds a way to extract Bertie from whatever mess he's gotten himself into this time, reached their pinnacle of success in the 1930s. I talked about this a little in episode 298.

Success meant that Wodehouse was at this time making in income in excess of £100,000 per year, which was quite a lot of money during the Great Depression, equivalent to an income of at least five million US dollars per year in our time, and both the UK Inland Revenue and the US Internal Revenue Service wanted to tax him as a resident, as he spent time working in both countries. He and his wife decided to move away from both countries as a tax dodge; they chose to settle in France, because honestly, who wouldn't? They took up residence in the resort town of Le Touquet, near the Pas-de-Calais and the Belgian border.

It was a lovely place to live most of the time, but in 1940, not so much. When German soldiers marched into northern France, Wodehouse and his wife attempted to escape, but were stymied by a broken-down car and the floods of other refugees choking the roads. They were stranded in occupied France. In July, Wodehouse was imprisoned as an enemy national. His wife Ethel was not imprisoned, as the Germans did not intern women.

Wodehouse was moved to a prison in Silesia later that year. After an American journalist discovered him there and reported on his imprisonment, prominent Americans petitioned the German government to release him. The Germans wouldn't go that far, but they did give him more liberties.

Just days before the invasion of the USSR began, the Gestapo moved Wodehouse from the Silesian prison to the exclusive Hotel Adlon in Berlin, where he was able to live in comfort and was granted access to the royalties owed to him from the German editions of his books.

German authorities then invited Wodehouse to make a series of radio broadcasts to the neutral United States via the Berlin bureau of the American radio network CBS. His broadcasts were titled *How to Be an Internee without Previous Training*; they were humorous little essays about life in German internment, told as only Wodehouse could tell them.

These broadcasts provoked a storm of outrage in the UK, including many who accused him of treason. Wodehouse discontinued the broadcasts when he learned how they were being received back home, and the official verdict was that Wodehouse was guilty of nothing worse than poor judgment. After France was liberated, Wodehouse was freed, though it was not until 1946 that he received official notice that no charges would be brought against him.

Nevertheless, there were those in Britain unwilling to forgive or forget. The Wodehouses chose to emigrate to America and lived the rest of their lives on Long Island. Wodehouse continued to write, though his work never achieved the same level of success in the post-war world.

P.G. Wodehouse was awarded a knighthood in the 1975 New Year Honours List, an event *The Times* called "official forgiveness for his wartime indiscretion." He died six weeks later, of a heart attack. He was 93 years old.

And I'll end today with a happier story. In 1915, during the last war, a German soldier named Hans Leip composed a poem titled *"Das Lied eines jungen Soldaten auf der Wacht,"* or in English "The Song of a Young Soldier on Watch," in which the lonely soldier yearns for his girlfiend, Lili Marlene. Leip created the name by combining those of two different women he knew.

The poem was published in a poetry collection in 1937. In 1938, German composer Norbert Schultze set it to music. A German singer who used the stage name Lale Andersen had some success in performing the song as part of her cabaret act, so she recorded it in 1939, under the title "Lili Marlene." The record was not a success; it sold only 700 copies.

In 1941, after the fall of Yugoslavia, the Wehrmacht set up a powerful radio station in Belgrade, meant to provide entertainment for German soldiers throughout Europe and North Africa. A radio station in Vienna donated some surplus records to Radio Belgrade; one of them was "Lili Marlene."

The song, with its mood of melancholy longing, became a hit with German soldiers, and then with British soldiers. The station played it often, and then began a practice of playing it at 10:00 PM every night. During the fighting in North Africa, British and German soldiers would cease fire to listen when "Lili Marlene" came on the radio, then resume combat after it ended.

The song was translated into many languages and many singers recorded it, including English versions by British singer Anne Shelton and an American version sung by the German expatriate singer and film star Marlene Dietrich.

The song was more popular among British soldiers than even "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" was among German soldiers, and for all the times they listened to "The White Cliffs of Dover" or "We'll Meet Again," the British armed forces' most favorite song of the war was, arguably, "Lili Marlene."

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Antonio for his kind donation, and thank you to Jay for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Antonio and Jay help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn once again to India, a nation struggling for independence and now on the front line of the war. Do Or Die, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Vera Lynn's singing career continued after the war. In 1954, her recording of "My Son, My Son" reached number one on the singles chart in the UK. Two years earlier, her recording of "Auf Wiederseh'n, Sweetheart" topped the chart in the United States, the first time a foreign performer reached number one in America.

And I know a few of you have been waiting the whole episode for me to mention this, so here goes: In 1953, she released another recording of "We'll Meet Again," this time with instrumentation and backed up by a chorus of British military personnel. Eleven years later, American film director Stanley Kubrick used this recording at the end of his 1964 film, *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Its use in the film is deeply ironic, as it is played over scenes of a nuclear war. I suppose if you've heard this recording at all, this is likely where you heard it.

Vera Lynn continued to perform on radio, television, and on the stage. In 2009, her compilation album, inevitably titled *We'll Meet Again,* reached number one on the British album chart. She was 92 at the time. Another compilation album was released in 2017 to mark her 100th birthday.

Vera Lynn died in June, 2020, at the age of 103.

[music: Closing War Theme]

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