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Rumour

TWICE last week the Minister of Defence had to deny baseless rumours about units of the Dominion's naval forces. On Monday the *Leander* "had engaged an enemy raider and had suffered casualties." On Thursday the *Achilles* had been "badly damaged in action." In neither case was there the slightest justification for such reports, but the second gained currency as easily as the first.

Now most people know that rumours flourish as freely in war as toadstools on a dunghill. Men and women everywhere sigh for sensations; some are malicious; others are simple and anxious and credulous, and easily worried by official reticence. There are a hundred reasons in war-time why those who in normal circumstances neither gossip nor chatter, listen to and pass on lies. For most rumours are lies. They are started without knowledge and they are circulated without verification.

In these particular cases, however, the circumstances that might have justified credulity just did not exist. The Government has not only promised to pass on all news that is news. It has given the most solemn undertaking that it will pass this news on promptly. At the same time it has asked, and is entitled to assume, that its confidence in the people in this respect will be repaid by public confidence in the Government. If it tells us nothing it ought to be able to believe that we shall suspect nothing; above all that we shall invent nothing.

And that, no doubt, can be assumed of most of us. But the trouble is, many who do not themselves accept rumours take no active steps to suppress them. We do not rebuff whisperers even when we believe that they are circulating nonsense. Which means, of course, that we are failing the Government as well as injuring the innocent.

Governments are entitled in such situations to the support of all reasonable citizens. Where public injury is being done they should know that the support will be active and hearty.

Radio Personalities

[4] JOHN BALL, of 2YA

WHEN he was seven years of age John Ball, now Station Manager at 2YA, was brought to New Zealand by his parents in the sailing ship *Hurunui*. They had an eventful voyage. There was a disastrous collision in the English Channel. The other vessel was sunk with all its crew drowned save one man. In the Bay of Biscay the *Hurunui* was caught in a violent storm, and the second mate washed overboard.

But the Ball family was saved for better things. They settled first in the Rangitikei district, but John was given his schooling in Wanganui and apprenticed, when it was ended, as printer's devil on *The Wanganui Chronicle*.

He became a compositor, and worked his way up from reporter to be editor for 20 years and, for some years Chairman of Directors.

Many Interests

The editor of a provincial daily must know everything and be in everything. Mr. Ball was constantly and intimately associated with all the affairs of his community. Much of his work in Wanganui is still well remembered.

He is a Justice of the Peace. He initiated and carried out a scheme by which £68,000 over all expenses was raised in ten days in Wanganui and the two adjoining counties, for the benefit of returned soldiers and their dependants.

He was largely responsible for the erection of the war memorial tower on Durie Hill, acknowledged one of the most impressive in the Dominion.

When the Wanganui Woollen Mills were opened, his work in furthering its interests was acknowledged by the Chairman of the Company.

When he left Wanganui the town paid him a wonderful tribute.

Opening of 2YA

His first work for radio was done at the invitation of A. R. Harris, manager of the old Broadcasting Company. He became Editor-Announcer, and Liaison Officer, and was in Wellington for the opening of 2YA.

In this key position, he became intimately associated with the development of radio in New Zealand and now prizes an illuminated address presented to him by the Company's Directors, as one who had created something where nothing had been before and, as the address words it: "given to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

Memorable Broadcasts

During the years Mr. Ball has been associated with many memorable broadcasts, but among the most notable he places the broadcast from Trentham at the time of the ill-fated Trans-Tasman flight of Lieutenant J. R. Moncreiff and Captain George Hood, in January, 1928.

"The scene during the anxious hours of that memorable night was one never to be forgotten," he says. It was his difficult task to broadcast the facts, when at the time no one knew whether the attempt would succeed or fail tragically.

Still another notable broadcast took place on a Wednesday in March, 1930, when six stations, the most distant separated by 10,000 miles, linked Admiral Byrd in the Antarctic with his home in New York through 4YA, 2YA, Sydney, and New York.

Mr. Ball was the first to speak for New Zealand. He greeted 2ME and then 2XAF. "I am putting you right through to 4YA, Dunedin," he added. This was perhaps the most remarkable broadcast achievement up to that time—friends and relatives who had been separated for 15 months talked from continent to continent.

Such a hook-up would now, of course, be a routine matter. Much has changed in Mr. Ball's time as a servant of radio in New Zealand.

He retains his beard, as you will see, and stories he tells suggest that listeners in 1939 make the same complaints as they made 10 years ago. But Mr. Ball has had more practice in dealing with them, and he handles a machine which almost daily gives less cause for them.



Spencer Digby, photograph
JOHN BALL