



Some people never let their heads go for anything less than a lottery or two. And then again, nothing surprises others, our friend, for instance, who includes a crib over the next-door-fence as part of her "good-neighbour" policy!

She knew all the answers . . . that mother and child were feeling fine because they had PROTEX-ed themselves!

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FOURTEEN YEARS IN THE "BACK ROOM"

NBS Chief Engineer Retires

WE interviewed, when he retired the other day, the head of the silent branch of the NBS—a section which does a vast amount of exacting work, but whose voice, except under abnormal conditions, is seldom heard over the air. He is John R. Smith, Chief Engineer, who has been with the Service for 14 years. His resignation took effect as from March 31, but he will continue to act as adviser to the NBS on the technical side. He told us, in passing, that apart from occasional testing periods, he had done only the minutest amount of actual broadcasting. Once he played the part of a railway porter, saying a few words in a recorded programme; and on another occasion, when effects were wanted in a hurry, he obliged with some sheep and lamb noises. "That's as far as my microphone technique has developed," he said.

We asked Mr. Smith to tell us what had made the deepest impression on his mind during his work as chief engineer. Undoubtedly, he said, it was the loyalty and enthusiasm of the technical staff, all of whom worked, as it were, backstage. They had done fine work during the difficult war years, and were highly regarded by their colleagues of the BBC engineering department. Then he told how, during the war, the Service had maintained its radio coverage without a break. Staff depletions were serious and the work for those remaining was strenuous. Leave was at a minimum and was, in fact, stopped altogether for a period.

Only the "Pips" Were Lost

Throughout the war the NBS had to scour the world for supplies of many types of equipment, from high-powered valves to gramophone needles. When equipment broke down it was replaced with substitutes and with improvised gear made locally. The staff was fortunate in the policy of the Service of keeping 18 months' to two years' supply on hand of parts obtainable only overseas. Valves were used well beyond their normally useful life.

"When we changed over from premises in Waring Taylor Street, Wellington, on October 10, 1942, to the Terrace building, it was for safety's sake. The Government had instructed us to find a safer spot for central control, as the old site was too near the wharves, which might have been bombed, and there was a fire risk. During that move—and all through the war—the only loss of time to listeners was a few seconds taken by the time signals which, on one occasion, failed to go out owing to a slip-up in the transfer of that circuit," said Mr. Smith.

The head office engineering section used all sorts of equipment which had seen its best days. But the programmes went on. And there were only two days when full reports of the war news were not received. Both times the failure was due to abnormal ionospheric conditions which upset radio reception all over the world. Otherwise the news was regularly broadcast several times a day. Equipment and sites for overseas reception were improved during the war, culminating in the installation at Makara. The

making of recordings was developed gradually. Recently a programme recorded in Wellington was sent to the BBC for an opinion. The BBC's comment was: "Recording excellent—immaculate, in fact."

Mr. Smith, who planned the 2YA transmitter which, excluding short-wave, is the most powerful in New Zealand and Australia, started his career as a message-boy with the Post and Telegraph Department. For 20 years he was in the engineering branch; he was engineer for Wellington City when the first automatic telephone exchange was installed and cut over. Then he became engineer of the P. and T. laboratory, having oversight of the first radio-telegraph station at Mount Wakefield, behind Wellington. He was also in charge of the installation of the first radio-telephone providing communication between New Zealand and Australia. He joined the NBS when the Broadcasting Board took over from the Broadcasting Company in 1932, and has been chief engineer ever since.

Service in First World War

When New Zealand troops occupied Samoa during World War I, he went to Apia with the rank of captain, to take charge of the radio station there. This had been built by the Germans, who had afterwards wrecked some parts and hidden others. Erected just before the war broke out, the station had done its work. A small transmitter had been carried with the expeditionary force and this was used before the German station could be re-built. But the station was more or less back in commission by the time Mr. Smith arrived.

As both the Navy and Army used the station, Mr. Smith had to take a course of instruction from each of the Services. So he can claim to have been in both the Navy and Army at the same time. After returning to New Zealand from Samoa, he was sent to Rarotonga to instal a station and came back to New Zealand again the day peace was declared. By an interesting coincidence, when he returned from the Broadcasting Conference in London, in May last year, he landed in New Zealand on V-E Day.

Plans for the complete coverage of New Zealand by radio are not yet complete, Mr. Smith told us. But authority had been granted for a station on the West Coast of the South Island and another in the Bay of Plenty. This is part of a comprehensive scheme designed some time ago by the Director to bring about improvements, but which had been delayed by the war.

Mr. Smith will be at 2YA during the mornings for advisory work, but he hopes to have a little more time for his favourite sport—bowls. At this game, he will admit, he has been moderately successful. Records show that he has won the singles, pairs and fours in club competitions and several times has been in the winning fours and pairs in the Wellington centre's competitions; he was once runner-up in the singles. He gained fourth place in the Dominion championship singles four years ago.

Walter L. Harrison, B.E., B.Sc., M.I.R.E., A.M.I.E.E., who has also

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