

NEWS FOR THE SEA-FARER TO-DAY

A Radio Officer Looks Back

(Written for "The Listener" by FRED G. SHAW)

THE news services available to the sea-going world to-day by the miracle of modern radio, provide a great contrast with those available during the last war.

Poldhu MPD . . . Nauen POZ . . . Eiffel Tower FL . . . These names will bring memories to those sea-farers of the last struggle and especially to those wireless operators who strove with Marconi's magnetic detector and the later crystal and catwhisker to glean from short transmissions the progress of Armageddon.

But wireless ranges were small in those days, and after a few days out from home the familiar buzz of Poldhu wireless in Cornwall and the piping note of the Eiffel Tower faded away and we were left without news till we reached port.

Occasionally we came across an operator who, with bowed shoulders and furtive glances, produced from a box a mysterious glass tube which he called an "Audion valve" and with this could receive the news double the distance. But in his presence we youngsters stood with trembling knees and troubled breath—he was a superior person—a great scientist!

Times Have Changed!

But the years have changed all this and in the large Dominion-trading cargo liner in which I have the fortune to serve to-day as Radio Officer we have instituted a news-service which I dare say is unequalled elsewhere.

In pre-war days there were several shortwave receivers on board, but with the advent of war these were not allowed.

The Captain was informed that only one tested non-radiating broadcast receiver would be permitted to be used by the Radio Officer of the ship to the best advantage so that all the ship's company would have the opportunity of hearing the news.

So the idea of our own news service was born and the co-operation of the various departments on board soon had the scheme in full operation.

Recorded Music, Too

Now, we had on board a Record Amplifier with a microphone and two loudspeakers which we used to use for the ship's dances in earlier lighthearted days.

The broadcast receiver was installed in a corner of my cabin on the top desk—the engineers built a framework to hold the microphone in front of the receiver, and the electricians extended the loudspeaker cables so that one speaker was installed in the crew's quarters and the other speaker was placed in a cosy spot at the after end of the main deck which was then enclosed in a canvas screen and covered with the awning. There were teakwood seats and tables in this enclosure; it was cool in the tropics and sheltered in the cold weather, and 20 or more people could foregather for the news.

Checking Up on Berlin

The chief item of interest is, of course, the Daventry News Bulletins, of which we usually have about three a day.

Berlin's broadcasts to North America provided a diversion and many a smile, and one enthusiastic listener kept a chart of all the warships reported sunk until the total reached a fantastic figure. Then his enthusiasm waned.

Other stations listened to were Rome and Moscow, but these were not half as interesting as Berlin. They never gave us such tit-bits as when the Berlin announcer referred to our then First Lord as "Roly Poly Winstie Churchill."

They Liked America

Mention must be made of the American news and its spectacular presentation in some cases. We all seemed to like the American voice as it cracked out "News Flash—London"—then the staccato rattle of imitation morse signals followed by a commentary at a speed of over 300 words a minute.

The Ship's Time at which these broadcasts would occur had to be calculated each day. Mathematics were

ever a weak point with me and it was no easy task to reduce Greenwich Mean Time, British Summer Time, Berlin Summer Time, Eastern Standard Time, Pacific Standard Time, and New Zealand and Australian times to a common Ship's Time each day.

Mixing the Days

An amusing incident occurred one night when owing to the change of time a Sunday Service was being received from America and almost on the same wavelength and quite audible was a variety recording from New Zealand on a Monday.

By a slight manipulation the following were heard quite clearly:

U.S. Station . . . "And When He Came to Himself He Said . . ."

N.Z. Station . . . "Left—Left—I had a Good Home and I Left . . ."

U.S. Station . . . "I Will Arise and and go to My Father and Will Say Unto Him . . ."

N.Z. Station . . . "We'll All have a Holiday in the Summertime . . ."

U.S. Station . . . "But the Father Said Unto His Servants . . ."

N.Z. Station . . . "Sitting Among the Clay, On Good Old Salisbury Plain . . ."

Naturally we receive a large number of suggestions and requests. The prize goes to the humorist who requested a musical programme during meals and gave a few suggestions such as "Handel's Water Music" with the soup, "Finlandia" with the fish; and with our inseparable "Dromeskie a la Russe" he gave "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life."

The Chief Steward was not amused.

And so 25 years have seen great changes in sea-faring radio. From a couple of hundred words radio-telegraphed daily in the early days—just a terse communiqué—we now have over a hundred thousand spoken words each day to choose from—from many countries—giving all sorts of versions.

We're surfeited with news; inundated with it.

Is this really a great advance? We get so much news we can hardly assimilate it. When I come to the end of the day's work and the voices of the ether are silent I wonder how much better off we are than in the days of the old "communiqué."

Crossing the Pacific in the old days we soon lost touch with the wireless station at Panama and for 20 days we heard nothing till we picked up the buzz of the old wireless station at Awanui.

Yes! the tempo of life has changed.

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