

# WE ARE "EAVESDROPPERS"

## Visiting BBC Expert Tells Us About The News We Hear

**A**N ambassador from the BBC to its listeners in Australia and New Zealand, N. C. Tritton, is now in this country making preliminary inquiries and preparations to establish what the BBC calls "listener research."

"I am here", he told *The Listener*, "to find out how far we are succeeding, and how far we are failing; to learn what more we can do—or what we can do better—rather than to tell you what has already been done."

Mr. Tritton comes from Queensland, where he took arts, commerce, and accountancy degrees, and became a barrister at law. He was connected with adult education in Queensland and then was private secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies. At present he is on loan from the Australian Government to the British Government, which appointed him Pacific Intelligence Officer for the BBC.

### In Nearly 50 Languages

"The aim of the BBC is to provide from the heart of the Empire a news service to all parts of the world, and accurately to convey a picture of British life and aspirations, not only during the war, but in the post-war period, too. In addition it acts as a link between soldiers fighting overseas and their home countries, and between all allied countries. The BBC now broadcasts in nearly 50 languages, all involving the use of expert staffs with an understanding of the language and habits of the audience addressed."

"In what is known as 'The Empire Service' there are four transmissions, the Pacific, the Eastern, the African and the North American service. It is in the Pacific service, beamed towards this part of the world between 5.45 and 9.45 p.m., New Zealand time, that I am specifically interested."

"With the news, the BBC tries to provide a truthful factual account of the war; comment and opinion is eliminated as far as possible except when it is necessary for a clearer understanding of the issues involved."

"But in the presentation of news there can be some variation of emphasis and method, within certain severe limitations. While the BBC recognises that certain countries must be more immediately interested in events near at hand, in a world news service, events must be treated according to their world significance."

### "Eavesdropping Audience"

Mr. Tritton explained that the "eavesdropping audience", as the BBC calls it, has to be taken into account when script writers are distributing emphasis on the news items. An "eavesdropping audience" is one which listens to news directed towards some other part of the world.

"Some bulletins used in New Zealand are in fact usually parts of services primarily destined for other quarters. New Zealand would naturally have a more immediate interest in the Solomons or in the deeds of New Zealand troops abroad; India on the other hand might have a more immediate interest in events in Burma. Yet the Pacific bulletins are used in India, and the Eastern service is used in New Zealand."

"The BBC must therefore take care that whatever emphasis it may lend to particular items, it does not destroy or impair the true picture of world importance. Only last year in its desire to give the Dominions a full account of the deeds of their troops, the BBC failed to give a complete picture of the activities of United Kingdom troops, with the result that not only the Dominions, but even neutral countries concluded incorrectly that the United Kingdom troops had not been pulling their weight. Nor was the enemy slow to seize on the point; he used it in an attempt to sow dissension among Empire countries."

### New Zealanders in BBC

"One of the things I am to do here, then, is to find whether the emphasis is going on the right spots. We want our audience to feel that we are fully cognisant of their own dangers."

### Behind The Microphone

*OF the BBC's total roll of about 10,000 employees, certain specialist departments carry out enormous projects of which the effect is only indirectly noticed by overseas listeners, if it is noticed at all. Some details of the work done "behind the microphone" were given to us by Mr. Tritton.*

*The "listener research" department produces a daily bulletin with which the BBC claims to be able to know within a few thousands the number of people listening to certain programmes, and how much the programmes are enjoyed.*

*"They have a 'barometer' and 'thermometer' to indicate quantitative and appreciative levels in the listening audience. I have worked with statisticians myself, and I can tell you that this unit is doing a very efficient job.*

*"The monitoring department is a vast concern, too. This is a unit of about 500 persons listening to every radio programme every day that can be received in Great Britain, and compiling a report. Programmes are cabled to us week by week from other countries too, to enable us to know how to provide alternative programmes."*



N. C. TRITTON  
*He is here to learn*

"It is already our policy to have the various services staffed by men and women who have first-hand knowledge of the requirements of the audiences addressed. At present there are several New Zealanders working in the Pacific Service. The director is George Ivan Smith, on loan from the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Ormond Wilson, the former New Zealand M.P., is in the news talks department; Noni Wright, a New Zealander, is in charge of 'Calling New Zealand', and the names of Tahu Hole and the late Nesbit Sellers are familiar to this Dominion. I can hardly say enough about the help we have from Mr. W. J. Jordan, the Dominion High Commissioner in London. He is always ready with help and information."

### Criticism Wanted

Mr. Tritton asks for criticisms and comments from New Zealand listeners to the BBC whether they listen by shortwave, direct, or only to re-broadcasts. Communications may be addressed to him in care of the NBS, which will forward them if he has left when they arrive. He will return to Australia soon and will come back here in April.

### They Served Mankind

THIS Sunday at 3 p.m., 2YA will present a feature, "These Served Mankind", commemorating certain celebrities and others who died during the first half of last year. This programme is becoming an annual event, designed to remedy the complaint voiced by Mark Antony that the good that men do is oft interred with their bones. And primarily it is a tribute to civilian heroes and benefactors—scientists, authors, philanthropists and others who served the arts of peace rather than those of war. On the following Sunday, January 24, the feature will deal with those who died in the latter half of 1942.