

Putting the Air Show on the Air

NOT the least spectacular thing to be seen at the opening of Wellington Airport was the crowd which gathered to watch. Between the appearances of such high-bred types as the Voodoo, Vulcan and Vampire, the powerful Hercules, and the pregnant Beverly, radio observers noted that the skyline about the airport was a continuous fringe of people and that the cars shining in the sun looked much like a necklace of glass draped carelessly across the hills. Estimates were that some 30,000 persons watched the display from the airport and its vicinity and that more than 60,000 watched from the "Scotsman's stands" of the surrounding hills.

To reach this widely scattered crowd, the Air Display Committee and the NZBS combined to create a novel public-address system. It was the Wellington commercial station 2YD. For the first time an NZBS station fulfilled the function that will probably fall to the whole of radio in a television age. It catered for those with radio sets in their cars or transistor sets in their pockets. So very much on-the-spot was the cover of 2YD that a limited number of loud-speakers attached to the high-priced stands outside the terminal buildings were plugged in to the station's programme. Persons slightly farther from the centre of events had only to stand close to a motor-car with an antenna, or to one of those disconcerting individuals who emanate radio programmes these days without any visible means of broadcast.

During the two days which rain dictated the opening of Wellington Airport should take, 2YD diverted the crowds with music in the uneventful places, broadcast interviews with men in charge of aircraft, or parachutists, or supervisors of the static display, tuned in to the 2YA commentaries on the major events of the pageant, and, in addition, sent out more than 60 messages for the Display Committee, the traffic controllers, and the Police. Bulletins teletyped from the Airport's message centre direct to the temporary NZBS studios

went on the air within two minutes of the time of the need arising.

Much of the work was routine. Soon after 2YD went on the air at 7 o'clock the morning of opening day, traffic officers were advising motorists over the air that 1500 parking places were available at one point, that a motorist should remove his green Morris from another. At times they flowed thick and fast. "The captain of the Friendship is requested to report to his aircraft." "Malcolm Collins, aged 10, of Upper Hutt, has become separated from his brother..." "Wing Commander Rogers is requested to contact Operations." "The public may not smoke on the tarmac as refuelling points are exposed." "If persons encroach on the runway, the flying display will be stopped." "Miss Wellington Airport will drive around the airport commencing at 12.25 p.m."—this last an entirely anonymous ride, an enthusiast for aviation or for beauty having souvenired the placard for her car.

On the air from 2YD went crises great and small. There was young Christopher, up from the South for the show, who landed lost in the hands of the police, and stayed there for several hours. His mother may not have owned a portable, not heard the message perhaps, and the boy was distraught in no silent way. Other messages reflected the more spectacular events of the show. "All passengers for R.N.Z.A.F. Sunderland who were to assemble at Evans Bay are now to assemble at the rear of the terminal building." The flying-boat, holed in its bottom, would not be settling in Evans Bay. Its passengers would have to catch a real land-plane home.

A message marked "urgent" came through at 4.6 p.m. on the Sunday. "Will the Comet crew report immediately to their aircraft! Will the Comet crew report immediately to their aircraft!" A few minutes later the jet was in the air, bearing the commander of the R.A.F. contingent, following in the fuel-sprayed wake of the badly-damaged H-bomber, the Vulcan. Fifty minutes later the teletype chattered out an explanation:



MAURICE TURNER, one of 2YA's team of commentators, shelters from wind and rain as he describes the scene on the tarmac. "All extraneous noises were excluded by this highly selective microphone"

"Touched short of runway... port undercarriage damaged... opened throttles... damaged fuel line... impossible to retract undercarriage... crash landing... no member of crew injured... details awaited." Two minutes later the message was on the air. The wilder rumours expired on the spot; most of the crowd breathed relief that not a man had been hurt.

With the howling of the wind, the noise of an excited crowd, the monstrous snarl of turbine jets, radio commentaries on the day's events might have been very hard listening indeed. New microphones recently obtained from Australia ensured they were not. The 2YA team of commentators, high above the airport on a windy raft like Kon-Tiki on stilts, and the 2YD announcer in his busy and far from soundproof room, spoke into the dynamic microphones first used at the Melbourne Olympics—and only they were heard. All that was extraneous—the Vampires' screaming "bomb-burst," the thud of the Voodoos' after-burners, the gunfire of the armoured-car which surprisingly emerged from the Beverly, the bystander roundly abusing the weather—all were excluded by this highly selective "mike." Two other microphones, specially placed for the purpose, provided the producer at his panel with any exciting sounds the programme might require.

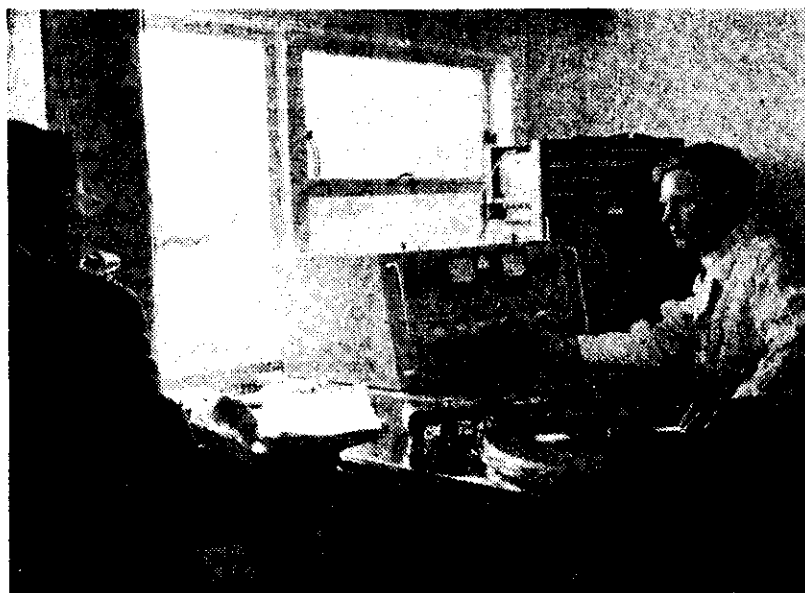
Those who broadcast in New Zealand have come to expect this kind of

equipment from their technicians and engineers. It is always there, in the correct place, at the required time, and it almost invariably works. How it works may best remain surrounded in some slight air of mystery. Like the wise answer to the small boy attending the static display. With an air of puzzled wonder he observed a "flying saucer" floating over a lunar landscape and asked how it stayed aloft. "Simple," said the saucer man. "There are three green men inside."

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BROADCASTING THE PAGEANT

Announcer Bernard Reeve (left) and technician Reg Russ, who conducted 2YD's service at Wellington Airport