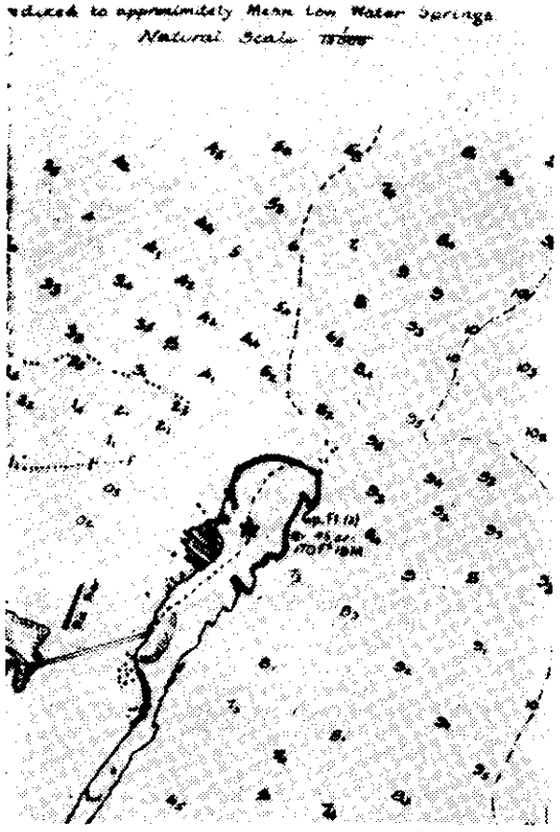
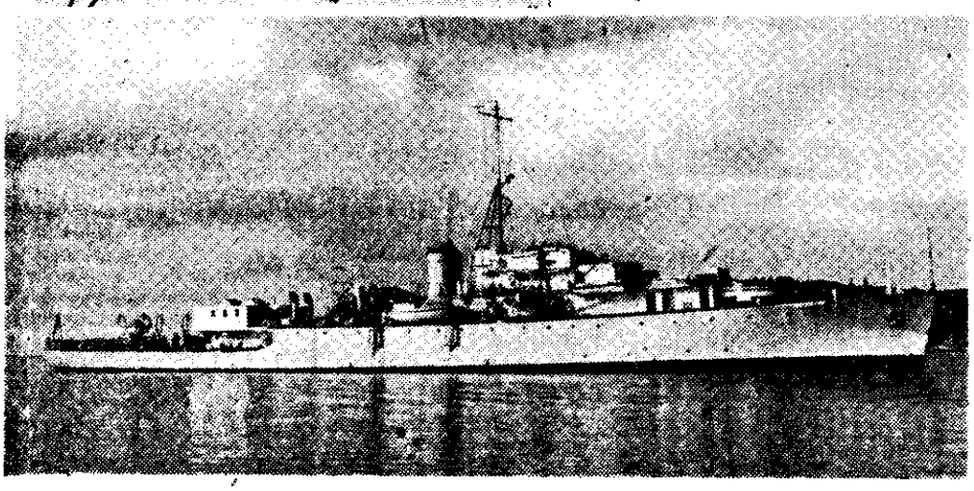
New Soundings



A SHIP that ticks, that "shouts" at the sea bed and listens for the answer, is the chief character in a new NZBS feature, *An Ear to the Ocean*, which will have its first broadcast this week. The ship, which has been around the New Zealand coast for several years, is "a curious sort of vessel, a man-o'-war that carries no guns, a frigate whose key officers and men are as much at home with pen and ink and a calculating machine as they are with tides and winds." This is the survey ship Lachlan, a Royal Australian Navy frigate on loan to the Royal New Zealand Navy, and now engaged in sounding the waters around the New Zealand coast. A few months ago Trevor Williams, of NZBS Head Office Talks Section, and himself a former naval officer, went to sea for four or five days in Lachlan. With a portable tape-recorder slung over his shoulder—the first time one of these had been used by the NZBS—he talked to some of the people engaged in the survey, from the Commanding Officer, Commander C. C. Lowry, R.N., down. Linked with some interesting sound effects and Mr. Williams's commentary, these interviews add up to the feature that listeners are now to hear.

Since *An Ear to the Ocean* was recorded, Lachlan has paid a short visit to Fiji, and spent a month off the Samoan coast—where, by the way, she sailed in 340 fathoms of water over a "reef" that mariners have been avoiding for years. The frigate had not been long back at Wellington when *The Listener* went aboard to ask some questions. In the after deckhouse, where most of the paper work is done, it found Commander Lowry, a tall, pleasant, bearded man, who next Boxing Day will complete 20 years in survey work. We discovered that he is used to explaining his job to outsiders. Not only has he had the NZBS and the National Film Unit aboard recently—he was also technical adviser for a documentary film, *Charting the Seas*, made soon after the war by the Central Office of Information and the British Council and available in 12 languages.



H.M.N.Z.S. LACHLAN and, immediately above, a small section of one of the sketch surveys prepared on board. It shows (on a scale of 1000 feet to the inch) the inshore soundings around Castle Point. At the top of the page is reproduced part of the present chart of the coast between Honeycomb Rock and Castle Point (extreme right). This chart is based on the survey made by H.M.S. Acheron and H.M.S. Pandora in 1849-55

Though Commander Lowry has been with Lachlan for only a little over a year, the ship, as most people will know, has been on the New Zealand coast since 1949. In that time she has finished her work in an area from Foveaux Strait to a little north of Dunedin, and from Banks Peninsula up through Cook Strait almost to Wanganui, and to Honeycomb Rock on the east coast of the North Island. She has also completed new charts and plans of Wellington, Lyttelton, Port Chalmers and Bluff Harbours, as well as such other inlets as Akaroa, Porirua, Paterson Inlet and Port Underwood. Though publication of new charts by the Hydrographic Office naturally lags a little behind the completion of survey work, three new coastal charts and six harbour charts and plans have already been published and two coastal charts and one harbour chart will be published soon.

"The two big launches which do the harbour survey work should finish Gisborne harbour by the end of October," Commander Lowry said. "When the weather improves we will complete our soundings between Honeycomb Rock and Castle Point—there's about another two months' work there—and the charts for this area and for Gisborne should be published next year. By that time we'll be working further north up the east coast. Our next harbour survey will probably be at Napier."

The work of the survey depends very much on the weather. We had heard it said that it would take something like another 30 years to complete the re-surveying of the New Zealand coast and harbours, but Commander Lowry wouldn't commit himself on that one. All he would say, with what we gathered was a certain amount of wilful exaggeration, was that if the weather was no better than it had been this year the job would take "hundreds of years." Rain and mist — lack of visibility for taking "fixes" on points ashore—rather than wind is the main obstacle, though high winds also add to the ship's difficulties. Very good weather is needed if the ship's two small motor-boats are to do the inshore soundings. Generally speaking, Lachlan doesn't go closer than a mile and a half from the shore, though it can get as close as half a mile if the bottom is known to be flat and sandy. In the last section of the survey completed, between Cape Palliser and Honeycomb Rock, the motor-boats were able to work on five days in about two months—which, from what he had learned of the New Zealand weather in the past year, Commander Lowry thought was "pretty good." Roughly two-thirds of the inshore soundings have been taken for the chart of this area.

While *The Listener* was examining the sheet of pale blue tracing paper which showed the gap in these inshore soundings, Commander Lowry was explaining the difference between this sheet, which is called a "collector," "plotting sheets," on which all important points are marked, "fair tracings"

(continued on page 7)