

From A Small Room

IT'S not really so very long ago—23 years ago to be exact—since New Zealand's only wireless station was a tiny affair in the room beneath the clock on the Customhouse Quay frontage of the General Post Office at Wellington, and flimsy aërials, stretched across the top of the building, sent out their signals to the Ulimaroa, the Manuka, the Marama and the Riverina, which were then practically the only boats in New Zealand waters equipped with wireless.

The public's knowledge of wireless, too, was very limited and more than one man who should have known better referred to it as "this new-fangled nonsense." Text books on the subject were extremely few and conveyed only a vague idea of the principles and technique of radio. It was not long however, before the station in the city was replaced by one on Mount Etako, better known as the Tinakori Hills. From the first day of operation the work of the station has grown until to-day it does not cater for a few isolated ships on the coast of New Zealand but takes almost the whole world in its stride. It must be made quite clear that this station has nothing to do with the entertainment side of broadcasting. Its duties are purely utilitarian and it does not come under the jurisdiction of the New Zealand Broadcasting Board. It is controlled by the Government and its operators are attached to the Post and Telegraph Department.

From Mount Etako to-day are sent out messages to ships until they tie up at Southampton or London; from Mount Etako go out telephone calls between business men in Auckland or Wellington or Christchurch or Dunedin and their head offices in London. The whole thing to-day is as simple as ringing your next door neighbour—except the paying that is, for the fee is about £6 a minute!

In 1910 the Government entered into a contract for the supplying of two 30 kilowatt and five two and a half kilowatt "Telefunken" and "quenched gap" installations, and it was in 1912 that the first of these stations, the one at Tinakori, was brought into service. The old station on the G.P.O. buildings was then dismantled. Mr. L. W. Bourke, who had been in charge of this first station, was later placed in charge of the station that was built at Awanui. Later still, and just previous to his retirement, he was Superintendent of Telegraphs at Wellington. The station on Mount Etako was first in charge of Mr. H. Harrison.

At the time when the new station was built at Wellington, one was also erected at Auckland, to be followed, in 1913, by two more—one at Awanui in the extreme north and another at Awarua near Bluff. These latter were both 30 kilowatt long-wave stations. A fifth station, similar to the one at Wellington, was also built at the Chatham Islands. The two and a half kilowatt stations were decided upon principally for the purpose of communicating with ships visiting New Zealand waters, the one at Chatham Islands providing a very useful link between the Wellington station and ships on the Cape Horn and Panama routes, especially when they were still a considerable distance from the Dominion. The Chatham Islands station, too, has been useful—and still is—in providing a radio service to the residents. Before the station was built the islanders were wholly dependent for news and information on the infrequent boat service. A one and a half kilowatt "rotary gap" type of station was built at Rarotonga, Cook Islands, in 1918. Subsidiary stations have since been established at Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia and Mauke, these communicating direct with the key station at Rarotonga.

When the New Zealand troops invaded Samoa in

1914 the Germans already had a 50 kilowatt "quenched gap" type of station there. It had been partly dismantled prior to the occupation but the New Zealanders re-commissioned it, and it was used for communication with the Dominion, Awanui being used as the corresponding New Zealand station. When commercial broadcasting was permanently established in 1925, the



Two of the operators at work at the station on Mount Etako, Wellington. This was New Zealand's first big station and it has had a varied career since it was established in 1912. The officer on the left is transmitting to a ship, while the man on the right is receiving a message from Apia, Samoa, where the New Zealand Government established a radio station some years ago.

stations referred to above were converted to valve operation to minimise interference.

The Wellington station at Mount Etako also played a part in the War. Clive Drummond, now 2YA's well-known announcer, was stationed there and it was in 1915 that he picked up a message from one German warship in the Pacific to another advising of the departure the day before of the New Zealand Main Body. Clive Drummond immediately got in touch with the Naval Intelligence Office in Wellington and the result was that the Main Body was soon on its way back to port. A week later it sailed a second time, this time safe from marauding ships.

Of recent years there has been considerable development in short wave working, and communication channels have been opened between Apia and Wellington and Rarotonga and Wellington. This extension of the service meant the throwing into disuse of the Awa-