

GETTING THE NEWS THROUGH

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THE first intimation of the Hawke's Bay disaster heard in the Philips Lamps premises, was received by chance in their Technical Department, when one of the staff (whilst testing apparatus) picked up an urgent call for medical and nursing assistance.

The Philips organisation, realising that regular telegraphic and telephonic communication had failed, immediately placed at the disposal of the Government any apparatus needed for the establishment of emergency radio stations. The offer of both receiving and transmitting equipment was promptly accepted.

An offer was also made to the Press to supply complete equipment and personnel for despatch to the stricken area by aeroplane. As the plane had already left Wellington, the necessary transmitting and receiving gear was rapidly assembled, and with essential food supplies loaded into one of the firm's cars. This, with Mr. W. M. Dawson as passenger, left for Napier with the minimum of delay.

While in Carterton, replenishing petrol, it occurred to Mr. Dawson that food in the stricken area must be scarce. Having a certain amount of space available in the car, he sought to augment the supplies already provided by knocking up Mr. Croad, a local baker. Without hesitation, the latter turned over his entire stock, amounting to approximately 50 loaves of bread and numerous bags of buns, scones, etc., with the comment: "No tally on these, boy, if you get them to the right quarter." The first of many instances of the wonderful spirit prevailing everywhere.

The first duty on arrival was the handing over of the food to the proper authorities. A report for duty was then made to the Commissioner of Police, and finally a suitable location for the radio station decided upon. The lawn of the Hawke's Bay Club premises was chosen, mainly because of the presence of a sturdy flagpole which provided support for the aerial. The gear was rapidly assembled on a table commandeered from the club's premises. The transmitter and receiver had of necessity to operate on



Mr. W. M. Dawson, technical engineer of Philips Lamps (N.Z.) Ltd., operating in the grounds of the Gentlemen's Club.

dry battery supplies, normal power supply being, of course, completely broken down.

By this time Press messages had commenced to pour in, and contact was obtained with ZL3AW, who took personal telegrams.

While 3AW was despatching these, a contact was made with ZL3AD, operated by Mr. Banwell, of Christchurch, who immediately agreed to accept the Press traffic. Several thousand words were sent to him under difficult conditions, the reception being on occasions marred by commercial interference. While at the Napier end, too, interference from locally operated spark transmitters made reception conditions at times absolutely impossible.

Additional private messages of an urgent nature were also passed on. Communication then temporarily ceased to enable Mr. Banwell to hurry to the Linwood P.O., where the messages were lodged and transmitted to Wellington by the usual channels.

A further schedule had been arranged and immediately on 3AD's return a further large batch of Press and private traffic was handled. Eventually, however, when word was received that all further messages were to be despatched through official channels, the station was dismantled, loaded into the car again, and an all-night drive for home commenced.

The arduous of the return journey were greatly lightened by the excellence of the emergency food depots established in each little district centre. From these food and hot drinks were dispensed in huge quantities to all users of the road, and as the evacuation of women and children from Napier was then well under way, literally thousands of cars were streaming past.

The Hawke's Bay Club is behind the building—Dr. Moore's Hospital, illustrated—Marine Parade, Napier. The flagpole on the left was used by Mr. Dawson, BXP, for an aerial mast.

