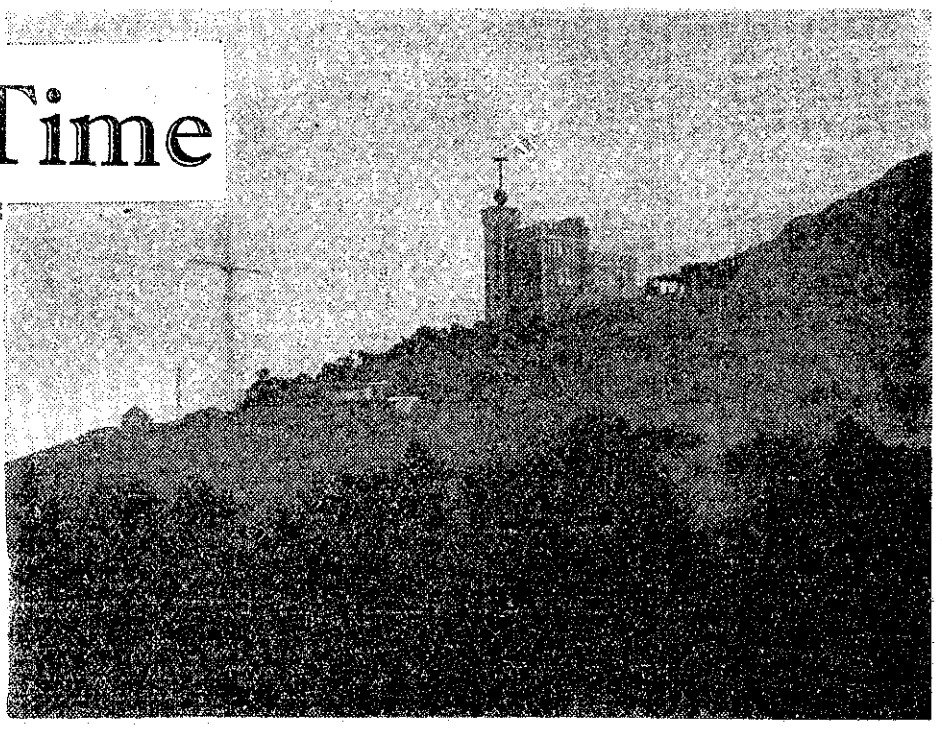
Right Time



LYTTELTON LANDMARK.—The time ball and tower standing on the hillside at the entrance to Lyttelton Harbour. Time signals are transmitted by the dropping of the ball at four hours, G.M.T. on Tuesdays and Fridays. The time is supplied by direct signal from Wellington.

In a room which seemed filled with instruments, observations were being taken to check the time of the standard clock. Firmly mounted on a brick and cement base was an impressive brass telescope—the same telescope that was used when New Zealand's longitude was first determined accurately in 1883, when time-signals were obtained by the newly-laid cable from Sydney.

THEN, as 10.30 approached, more people came into an adjoining room, and everything was prepared. An ingenious machine, which automatically sends the preliminary signals, was started, and we heard them through a small loudspeaker. At the same time a record of the signals was taken on paper in a manner vaguely reminiscent of those inexplicable instruments sometimes seen in watchmaker's windows. This was afterwards checked to discover how accurately the signals had been sent. They are seldom more than a quarter of a second out, and are usually much more accurate than that, the reporter was told.

Though the signals are used mainly within New Zealand and by ships in New Zealand waters, they have been heard at considerable distances from the Dominion, the farthest being over 4000 miles way.

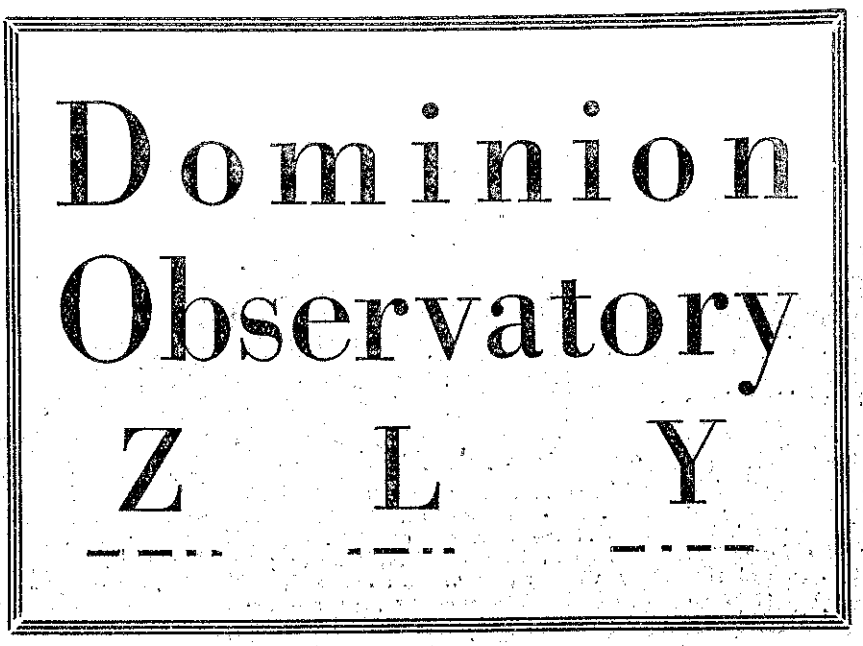
The first signal is transmitted from the Observatory at an exact hour of Greenwich mean time, and its commencement denotes the beginning of the hour. The signal is repeated at the first, second, fourth and fifth minutes. Each signal is approximately three seconds in duration. This completes one set of time-signals.

AT Auckland time-signals are given by means of lights supplied from the flagstaff on the Ferry Buildings by extinguishing three electric lights at 9hr., G.M.T. (Greenwich mean time). The lights are shown vertically and are 6ft. apart, white light is uppermost, red in the centre, and green below. The green light is shown 50 minutes, the red ten minutes, and the white five minutes before the signal. Simultaneous extinction of all the lights at 9hr., G.M.T., is the time-signal. Should the signal fail, the red light continues burning until 9hr. 05min., G.M.T.

The lights are extinguished by direct signal from the Observatory, Wellington, on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Wellington also has this type of signal from the flagstaff at the Dominion Observatory, 416ft. above high water, given by extinguishing three electric lights at 9hr., G.M.T.

At Lyttelton time-signals are supplied by dropping the time ball at 4hr., G.M.T. The ball is dropped by direct signal from the observatory at Wellington. The signal is made on Tuesdays and Fridays only. The accuracy of the time ball at Lyttelton, however, cannot always be relied upon.



MORSE CODE FROM WELLINGTON.—Hanging in the Observatory at Wellington is the card printed above. The three letters, with the Morse beneath, form the Observatory's call, which is given before the time signals are transmitted.