

Keeping the Navy in Touch with Whitehall



Wireless Plays A Huge Part In Life On Board The Australian Warships

Cruisers off the New Zealand coast . . . thrusting their lean grey noses through a squall of rain . . . silhouettes against a stormy sky. If you would appreciate the full beauty and strength of Britain's navy look upon it through a rift in the storm clouds with a northerly gale lifting great spumes of foam from an angry sea. Look upon it, as I did, from a windswept Wellington headland in the dim, wild morning light . . . thrill to it, and whisper to yourself, deep, deep down, "Thank God I'm British." And, had you been there that morning, you would have forgiven me for singing "Rule Britannia" to the wind and the loneliness.

The harbour was sunlit and still the next morning when I took myself down to the H.M.A.S. Canberra, now safely moored beside the King's Wharf. But there was still that impression of immense activity, even as the ship lay quietly at her berth. From below decks came the buzz of life, every line of her shouted strength, bringing to mind that trite phrase, "the bulwarks of the Empire." A man-of-war never sleeps. Let us swing the clock round to two in the morning . . . Wellington still and quiet, the occasional echo of a motor horn as a car speeds along the Quay.

But the sailor knows that both night and day make demands on him. The middle watch—and there are sharp eyes on the quarterdeck, a keen lookout kept from the signal bridges, attention being paid to dynamos and refrigerating machinery. The cooks are already busy in the galleys—it takes a mighty long time to cook eggs and bacon for 750 men.

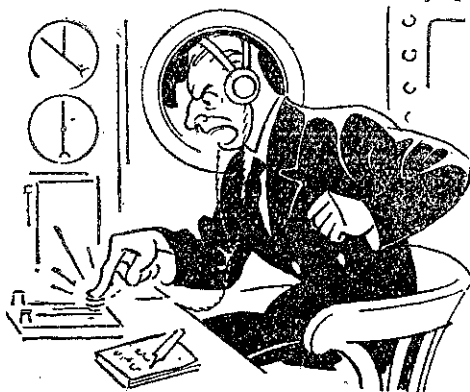
And now down, down into the ship, where the only sound is the faint swish of the ventilating fans—the wireless office. The operators are all concentration for a message from the Admiralty is expected at any moment, and the dial of the high-frequency receiver is sweeping ceaselessly—ready to pick up the faint message from the other side of the world. Ah! Here it is.

It comes direct, for every vessel in the British Navy, every naval station in the world, is in direct communication with Whitehall. The message is immediately whisked up the pneumatic tube to the bridge, from which post it is distributed to the people concerned.

Even to the men who are in the wireless cabin every day the receiving of messages is still a thrill—all the way from busy, daytime London to little New Zealand sleeping under a September sky.

The man-of-war is, at sea, very different to the placid creature we last saw at a Wellington wharf. Every piece of machinery is humming,

vibrating, putting every ounce of energy into its task of making the wheels of the navy go round. And the wireless—it is working at top speed too. The ships are cutting across a circle of lonely sea, but signals ordering alterations of course and speed are being rapped out just as fast as the keys can transmit them.



Gunnery practice may be the order and the guns are working under wireless control, aircraft may be aloft, the movements also being controlled from the wireless cabin. In wartime this ship-to-plane communication will be of inestimable value—the aviator may see and direct from his perch above the ocean's face. Reports and replies are being made at the same time to the Commander-in-Chief, and everything must be arranged so that no one message delays another.

But our navy does not rely entirely on wireless for speedy communication. Since the day when Nelson strung his famous flags across a blue sky in Trafalgar Bay (and for a long while before that), right up to the present, flags have been used for sending messages—and with amazing speed, too.

So take heart, you mournful souls who discuss the possibilities of war in the Pacific. The Empire's fleet in this corner of the globe, while it may be small, is mighty efficient.