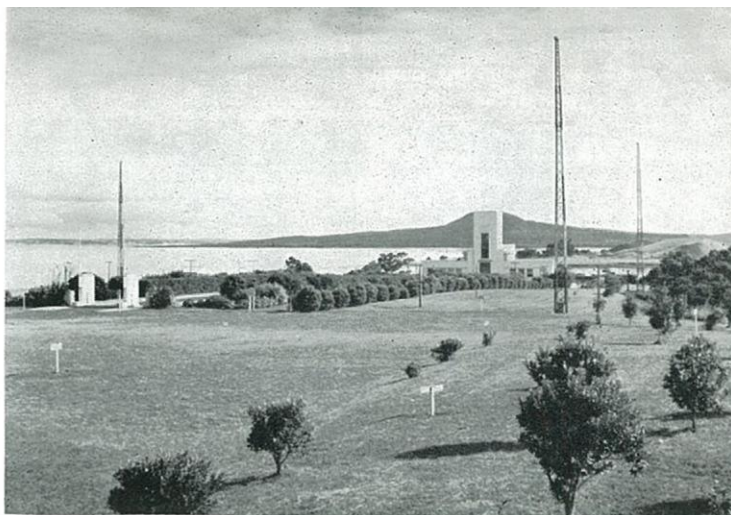


TELEGRAPH
CENTENARY
ISSUE

POST OFFICE MAGAZINE

During the war years Musick Point Radio was part of a para-military radio network. Daily, Dakotas of No. 40 Squadron shuttled regularly from Whenuapai to Norfolk Island and other points north, often in company with several Kittyhawks or Mustangs who relied on the larger planes to navigate and signal for them. In the chill first light of dawn the Dakotas' aircrew radio operators made their ground checks. At Musick Point the Post Office operators on the air/ground/air watches first heard the rough, raucous tuning dashes weakly. Then, as the



Musick Point today.

MEMORIES OF MUSICK POINT

airmen tuned their transmitters, the signal increased in volume until it fairly rattled the earphones.

The tuning dash was followed by a pause, after which the test call was made; as often as not stumbling with the ham-fisted morse of a war-trained operator. "ZLF ZLF ZLF de 26B626 26B626 26B626 INT QSA INT QRG K" (To Musick Point from aircraft. What is my signal strength? Is my frequency correct?) The reply from Musick was crisp with the sureness of the seasoned telegraphists who manned the station.

Activity on the air/ground/air watches generally increased during the day. QTO (take off), QTH (position reports), and QAL (landing messages) jammed communication channels, so that the Post Office ground operators had to be constantly on the alert in case an emergency message was lost in the bedlam of chirping morse. Bumble-handed at the beginning of the war, as hostilities dragged on the Royal New Zealand Air Force operators gained in experience until they could hold their own with the best.

There were anxious moments such as when the raw operator of an American Flying Fortress, when signalled to "land at Whenuapai" again and again asked for repeats of the word after "when". Unable to understand "when uapai", in desperation he switched to R/T and demanded, "Say, which patch of grass do I land on?" This was the same aircraft which disastrously blew up later on its next flight while still over Auckland. Forced landing, engines on fire, and lost aircraft were the order of the day in those troubled times. Emergency messages were merely grist for the mill for such veteran Post Office telegraphists as Henry Putt, Charlie Bai, Doug Henderson, Lionel Holdsworth, Norm Boyle, Bush Forrest, Bill Kirk, George Brain, and Lindy Lindegren. For the

Post Office operating room it was another service, one which reached out directly to New Zealand and allied airmen in the Pacific war theatre.

Those familiar with the watches (coded: quart, brass, and topaz) nowadays in idle moments when they might otherwise be humming a catchy tune to themselves are wont to softly imitate the intriguing sound of a wartime Dakota calling ZLF. "Chaw Chaw Chit Chit Chi Chaw Chit Chit Chi Chi Chaw Chit". And what a flood of memories this old familiar sound recalls.

Unsolved Mystery of the Ether

In the immediate post-war period whilst a Royal New Zealand Air Force Dakota was en route from Rarotonga to Aitutaki, the Air Force operator on board believed he heard an SOS message.

Other operators on the island network did not hear the message. They chided the airman for imagining things. In spite of this, he continued to worry and puzzle over the incomplete message he had heard. The following day, whilst the plane was passing through Tonga, he learnt that the radio station at Niuafuou – better known as Tin Can Island – had been unheard for some days. The pilot was persuaded to divert so that on the next stage they flew over Niuafuou. They found the island was in the midst of a volcanic eruption. The inhabitants were in a pitiful plight as evidenced by an SOS message displayed on the ground. The situation was notified to the authorities after which the population's rescue was speedily arranged.

It subsequently transpired that the weak SOS the airman heard led them to discover the Niuafuou catastrophe, it did not originate there. The origin of the weak signal which had such a fortuitous result is a mystery.

milestones

1861	Privately owned line linked Dunedin with Port Chalmers.
1862	Government-owned line erected between Christchurch and Lyttelton.
1863	Realising improved telegraphic communication essential the Government created the Electric Telegraph Department and commenced construction of a South Island trunk telegraph line. North Island's first line opened linking Auckland and Drury, a purely military line. Bluff-Invercargill line constructed.
1864	Auckland-Drury line extended to Te Awamutu.
1865	South Island trunk line completed and construction begun on a line between Wellington-Napier via Masterton, Tinui, Porangahau.
1866	Direct telegraphic communication established between White's Bay in the South Island and Lyall Bay in the North Island by submarine cable across Cook Strait.
1868	Wellington-Napier line completed, extension to Auckland hindered by Maori opposition to trespassing on their lands.
1872	Auckland telegraphically linked to Wellington.
1874	Duplex working inaugurated in Cook Strait cable.
1876	Colony linked to outside world by Eastern Extension Telegraph Company's cable between Wakapuaka, Nelson, and La Perouse, Sydney.
1877	A second cable laid across Cook Strait to handle increasing traffic.
1896	Introduction of 6d. telegrams added impetus to growth of telegraph service.
1902	Pacific Cable laid. Known as "All Red" route, system opened linking Canada, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia.
1911	Wellington Radio Station established.
1921	Introduction of teleprinter machines, marking beginning of end for the morse era.
1960	International Telex link established by radio.
1962 July	Tasman section of new Commonwealth cable to be opened.