

The Round of an Ordinary Day at a Wireless Station

By E. W. KELK

Vancouver Sun March 25, 1923

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There are certainly more lucrative and better occupations to follow, but few so interesting full of action as wireless operating at a busy terminal coast station.

Through the twenty-four hours of each day, week after week, month after month, year after year and right into the future too far distant to bear thinking of, the juice will be ready for the switching on, the operator with head-phones adjusted will be seated at his instruments speaking and in turn, being spoken to, steadily keeping his line of communications clear over land and sea.

The coast station men are the cream of their profession and invariably of long and wide experience, as indeed they need to be, for frequently they are called upon to exercise all the skill of their craft, and dive deep into the well of experience in order to cope with a rush of traffic, or meet the emergency which at any moment may arise.

As wireless services go the British Columbia Radiotelegraph Service is somewhat unique, insofar as it plays a dual role.

In addition to serving deep-sea and coastal shipping, it bears quite a respectable volume of commercial traffic. It provides the sole means of communication between the Queen Charlotte Islands and the mainland and gives the only telegraphic outlet to several big industrial concerns operating on the coast.

The service has a record to be proud of. There has been nothing flashy or spectacular about its methods, but just a steady progress of hard-slogging efficient working, often under trying conditions.

When lead wires have failed under the stress of a storm, thereby depriving whole districts of a means of communications with the outer world, (illegible word) radio, plodding steadily along, has stepped into the breach and borne the brunt of extra traffic in order that the wheels of industry may continue to turn; and still with it all giving service is speed and accuracy second to none.

But I fear I have been wandering, so let us return to that tour of the (illegible), besides it's much nearer.

Wending our way along Marine drive, we admire the scenery, which the ducks and "Irish pigeons" perform their morning calisthenics, take stock of the lower cliff of shifting sand on the left of the road, wondering when our prognostications of the inevitable landslide will materialise.

Long ere we reach the station we hear the twang of the spark and well we know the night man will welcome his relief.

Taking over we are soon weltering weather and air reports from north, south, east and west; a belated night letter from the States, we take a ship's report and give the results of the English cup ties to a wireless fan.

DISTANT CABLES

Turning over to the land wire we take a cable from the Old Country for an exile in the remote north.

We answer the telephone, scan the horizon and then inform the gentleman at the other end "the tow-boat with a red and black funnel and towing an empty scow is not within our range of vision, visibility being rather low today."

We turn back to our wireless working and continue uninterrupted for a few minutes when it becomes necessary to break off abruptly to inform a lady on the phone that so far as we are aware there is no foundation to the rumor that the "Empress" has been held up by boot-leg pirates.

And so we go on throughout the watch, phone, landline and wireless. Later in the day we feel the earth rumbling about as, the sight-seeing special is due. As it comes to a stop outside the station a big man emits the following through his megaphone: "Here we have Point Grey wireless station, the most powerful station in America."

Four p.m. 15 more to go.

BUSY HOURS START

With the closing of the business houses the evening rush is on wireless, phone and land wire all want our immediate attention. We do the best we can with the five xxx at our disposal but wish sometimes we had been issued with a double ration.

Presently we are able to settle down to a little steady working and are going great guns when our equilibrium is disturbed by a heavy thumping on the door.

In response to our not very amicable "come in", a motorist appears.

"Hay ho, could you loan me a couple spanners, a lifting jack and a (illegible) plug?"

"We'd love to do it", we reply, "but them days is gone forever, we loaned a guy a brand new tire about a year ago and still it's owing yet."

Sorrowfully we allow him to depart to play it over on his (illegible).

Work has slackened off somewhat and our mental balance is returning to normal. A colleague up north taking advantage of the opportunity wishes to send his grocery order.

Making a slight readjustment to the instruments in order to cut out a little interference we "bull" right on somebody's concert subduing the lady's voice a trifle, we give him "go ahead," to the accompaniment of the grand finale of Toste's "Farewell" we copy the following: "Ten pounds of sugar (white), one doses teething powder, one sack spuds, etc."

The bewitching hour arrives and comparative quiet through the night watch. We have only the day's clerical work to clear up, despatch and receive night letters; look after the ships; clear the early morning meteorological reports and take a long list of shipping positions from Estevan point; make the office nice and tidy, and then at 7 a.m. we may step out of the door.

We will take whiff of pure ozone, survey Burrard inlet, admire the snow-capped range on the opposite shore and feel comfortable at the thought that in this wonderful atmosphere about us there are millions of other waves oscillating between the havens and earth, "good, let 'em wave, we're through for the day."