

A WORD IN YOUR EAR, PLEASE

Portishead Radio is very well known to the Navy (in fact, the station should be more properly known as Burnham Radio for that is where the receivers and staff are, whilst the transmitters are at Portishead, some 20 miles away). It has a total staff of 119 and handles about 44,000 messages per month, rising to 77,000 in December.

Recently, it has come to notice that some Navy Communicators have been expressing dissatisfaction with the service they have been getting. Complaints of 'cloth ears' for HM ships but 'loud and clear' if you have commercial traffic. However, despite RN Signal Order S2/69, such complaints only reach the head office by word of mouth. Perhaps the following points will assist you to realise that difficulties do exist (what *is* perfect in this world) but the operators at Burnham are as keen as ever to maintain their traditionally excellent service—whoever calls them:

- (a) The RN calling band is always at the end of the band.
- (b) There is only one working frequency in each band, as against two or three for each merchant ship. This will cause delays if there is already a ship working on that particular band.
- (c) Delays are often caused by ships tuning to the wrong frequency band. This should be overcome if proper use of S7 is made, or by copying the Optimum Frequency Guide which is world-wide. (See details below).
- (d) A frequent source of non-contact after a ship has called and has been given a QRY number, is that the ship waits until it is ready to be worked before changing to the working frequency. Once an operator at Burnham has been given a ship to work he expects the ship to come up on the working frequency, and if nothing is heard, he will immediately revert back to his normal duty. It is felt that if only

ships will pay regard to this point, much delay will be saved.

- (e) Do not be put off by the QRY number you receive. There may be six or more operators at the shore end busy whittling down that list.

An interesting sidelight on all this is that since the reduction of naval operators at Burnham from 26 to 5, and despite the increasing use of RATT ship-shore the naval traffic so far handled in 1969 is twice that handled in 1968.

And finally, to dispel a big bogey. There is no extra pay awarded to the operators for the amount of commercial traffic handled. They get standard pay whatever the type of message received, they are there to give service to all.