

FARR

ENST

After Chiang Kai Shek's Government started to totter in November, 1948, one of H.M. ships was kept continually both in Nanking and Shanghai, and destroyers and frigates took their turn as S.B.N.O. (A) in these ports. They gave moral support and material assistance to the British community in times of unrest and assisted the Diplomatic Staff in handling the growing signal traffic and making plans for possible evacuations. Thicker and thicker grew the wads of pink paper, and Doc., Senior, Sec., and the rest took their turns on the books and machines ("shouldn't this come out in plain language?" said the Flotilla Supply Officer, after pounding for fifteen minutes). A circuit called North China H.F. was brought into being with Hong Kong W/T as Control, and proved more effective under these conditions than the use of broadcast and ship shore. The emergency plan for the evacuation of British Nationals from Shanghai, which was never actually brought into force, called for communication between ships, landing parties, embarkation and concentration points, and a net of transportable type T.C.S. was set up. A pool of telegraphists was kept in the Consulate to assist ships in manning this and regular tests were carried out. Trials were also carried out from vehicles in the streets and from buildings behind the skyscrapers on the Bund with some most intriguing propagation results. It was desired to be able to broadcast to British residents warnings which they could receive on their normal commercial receivers at pre-arranged times, and regular tests were made of this by S.B.N.O. (A). Some piece of plain language had to be used, the same each time, which would be instantly recognisable to the British Community tuning their receivers, yet would not disclose the purpose of the test transmission: we hoped Lewis Carroll did not turn in his grave every time the slithy toves gyred and gimble in the wabe over Shanghai.

When the fall of Shanghai became imminent and the major evacuation plan was not required, the British guardship was withdrawn from Whangpoo to the reaches of the Yangtse below the Forts of Woosung. There, from a prudent distance, she watched the battle of Shanghai while other units of the fleet (Force 68) waited at Alacrity Anchorage, in the Saddle Islands off the Yangtse estuary. North China H.F. became Force 68 H.F., and touch was also maintained with A.N.A. Shanghai, who had retained some telegraphists in order to keep open a naval link in addition to the normal Diplomatic wireless. Over this link we heard the hourly details of the city's capture and were relieved to know that none of our many friends there came to any harm. When the battle was well and truly over the fleet returned to Hong Kong, leaving a guardship off the Yangtse, a duty that has persisted ever since, due to the Nationalist blockade, and at which destroyers

and frigates have all taken their turn.

At this time *Amethyst* was lying under Communist guns up the Yangtse. The part played by communications in every phase of her story is well known. *Consort* also suffered heavily in the original action; a shell in the main wireless office and hits on the fore superstructure causing a large proportion of casualties in the communication department. The emergency wireless position aft was brought into use, but visual signalling continued from the bridge throughout. When *Amethyst* made her escape, *Concord* was Yangtse guard and went up to Woosung to meet her, being challenged by the Nationalist guardship on the way, but replying with IMI until out of sight, a ruse which went against the grain. *Cossack* sailed from Sasebo in Japan and took over escorting *Amethyst* south from the Yangtse. An H.F. voice link and V/S were used between the two ships, with *Cossack* guarding the area broadcast and a fixed service with F.O.2 I/C F.E.S. The traffic was heavy, and unusual in that so much was congratulatory telegrams and messages in addition to the operational signals.

Malayan patrol is another duty performed by the small ships of the Far East. Ships and M.L.'s work with the police in their continual watch against bandit activity, using the police wireless net (with single-operator periods on the area B/C) and police codes. This duty is not so arduous as it sounds, and the hospitality of the small ports of Malaya is most generous.

Operational commitments have not prevented large-scale exercise programmes from being carried out. Requirements for the defence of Hong Kong entail a set plan for army support and exercises in this have been most valuable in co-operation with the Army and R.A.F. Bombardment and air communications in particular have gained from these. There have also been important exercises with the U.S. Navy. The 8th D.F., during their Autumn Cruise off Japan in 1949, exercised with U.S.N. units, including a cruiser, destroyers, a submarine and aircraft, while more extensive combined fleet exercises took place off the Philippines in the spring of 1950, during which Captain (D) was Screen Commander of five British and six U.S. destroyers. U.S. Signal Publications were used on each occasion; little difficulty was experienced and, although there had been extensive planning for these exercises, the general conclusion was that the two fleets could work together with little or no preliminary discussion.

There is, in fact, seldom a dull moment for destroyers in the Far East. One may be salvaging a tramp off the China coast one day (with a Russian Master, a Portuguese Mate and a Chinese Wireless Operator producing amazing signals), or recapturing a commandeered British merchantman the next. One comes to be surprised at nothing, even at the Nationalist gunboat which, when challenged with "What ship?" gave the ostrich reply, "There is no ship here." The wicket is a little sticky at times, but we have yet to be bowled by a Chinaman.