

LONDON: DERRY CO. MICE. N

The biting wind which howls across *Sea Eagle's* parade ground and comes straight off Lough Foyle is one of the many typical Northern Irish phenomena which beset us in our daily round—even tonight it threatened to tear my books and writing gear from my clutching arms. However, I pressed on and the lights of Londonderry City, on the west bank of the Foyle, seemed to wink facetiously across the dark waters. Night had closed in, and the well-known phrase 'You shouldn't have joined if . . . etc.' echoed in my ears as I entered XMHQ—home of MGK/MHS—for yet another night watch.

Blinking in the strip lighting, which is a feature of so many Comcens, I dumped my gear on a convenient ledge and listened to my 'turnover'. Next item on the agenda, a 'wet' of tea or coffee—entirely dependent upon the financial state of the ever-fluctuating teaboard. Have I only been on watch for thirty minutes? It seems like thirty hours. It's all in the mind, or so I am told.

What is in my mind? "Nothing!" you may have replied, in which case, you are wrong as it is a kaleidoscope of people, places and events. Take for example the latest shock in the C.R.R.; our longest-standing member has received a draft! He has not been forgotten, as we had all assumed. We have a sort of floating staff here; they come in and go out as regular as the tide. Until recently it was considered that the Wrens were the only ones that stayed, but now this idea has received a knock with two recent departures and three new arrivals. New faces, new places—the kaleidoscope whirls on. . . .

The thought of places brings me to Londonderry which sits on the banks of the river Foyle, its rows and rows of terraced houses clinging to the hilly slopes. From the parade ground (where, you will remember, that biting wind howls) most of the city can be seen in its grey entirety; the uniform roofs relieved only by the spires of two cathedrals and the brown tower of the Guildhall. In the distance the hills are greener than usual, caused by a liberal rainfall sprinkling the area with monotonous regularity (another of the phenomena).

Recent events in the communication field have not proved monotonous however. We now have quite a formidable array of equipment which is guaranteed to deter all but the strongest—the writer having, at last, discovered why *Mercury* teaches a mysterious subject known to all as 'A.T.' On the sports field the various strengths of Communicators have been much in evidence, and on the cricket field and in the swimming baths they have run or splashed their way to victory (weather permitting).

A dry spell . . . yes, that reminds me, another wet of coffee would be just fine, thanks very much. What is that I hear, a SHIP on C.C.N.? . . . Now to do some work!

GIB. COMINIS. I.Q.

During August and September, Gibraltar T.V. screened "Who knows?", the equivalent to the U.K. programme "Pencil and Paper". It ran for eight weeks and the final contest was between the two teams who had scored the highest total of points during the contests.

The "Wrens Comms" team took part in the first programme and they remained unbeaten until the fourth week when they went down by three points to "Windy Hill" team. The latter remained undefeated until they met the Wren Comms team again in the final, when the ladies had their revenge and won by three points—the same margin by which they had suffered their earlier defeat! The winners received suitably inscribed trophies from Commander Watson, R.N., the Commanding Officer of *Rooke*.



Among the victims of this combined assault were a team of school teachers, a group of Leeds University students and the Pilot, Navigator and Electronic Officer of a Gibraltar based Shackleton. P.O. Wren Chestnovitch, P.O. Wren Harrison and Wren Cook formed the "Wrens Comms" team and the "Windy Hill" team consisted of CCY Panter CY Hood and CY Constantine.

MARITIME HEADQUARTERS

ROSYTH

As the result of two exercises in quick succession and the influx of supernumeraries to swell our watch bill, a greater number of people are now aware of the "different" way of life we lead here.

MHQ Rosyth stands in the grounds of a Royal Air Force Station which is the Headquarters of Number 18 Group, Coastal Command. It is natural, therefore, that we have been sharing a "joint" existence for some time. Our officers mess with those of the RAF, and the ratings, while having their own living spaces, share dining rooms with RAF personnel and are victualled by our sister Service. I believe that the profits in the Sergeants' bar are considerably swollen by the almost voluntary contributions of some well-known naval Communicators! Accommodation is very limited and

we take as many as we can, but ratings drafted *Cochrane* (supernumerary) have to be accommodated in *Cochrane* and consequently have "duty free" privileges.

This situation, where some of the Communication ratings are borne in a base ship, presents some training problems but we try to overcome them by holding training classes whenever exercises are not in progress. The parent ship of the Headquarters Reserve is also in the grounds of the H.Q. and we are able to use its facilities for training purposes, so that if we also have a supernumerary Senior Rate to help out, a fair amount of training can be undertaken.

When the present exercise is completed we intend to hold the second of the new style Fleet Boards. The number of applications so far received is very encouraging, but we hope that all aspiring candidates will take to heart the warnings they have been given. We make no apologies for saying "No Swot—No Pass".

The modernisation of the MHQ is still progressing but, meanwhile, the interim (and very much Joint) Comcen often surprises newcomers—"quarts in pint pots" and so on—but we all agree that the authors of this layout made a splendid effort. Nevertheless, the Comcen is packed into the old L.C.H.Q. The C.W. and RATT bays are sited in what were originally the cubicles for the various Duty Controllers and the passage behind the cubicles. It is rather like an enlarged version of "Monopoly"—if you drop in, you either "buy" the Watch or try to get out before you throw a six! The Main floor resembles platform 1 of Waterloo underground station during the rush hour!

Members of our H.Q.R. Unit spent part of their training fortnight in the Portsmouth area and this included three days at *Mercury*. They were very impressed with everything which they had seen and had been told and particularly by the welcome they received. It was the first time they had undertaken a trip of this kind and their view of the "rest of the branch" helped them and we who train them considerably as was shown in subsequent exercises.

Finally, there is a little "band of braves" who must also be included in this article. They are the crew of North Queensferry Signal Station. N.Q.S.S. is situated under the northern end of the railway bridge and provides a fine view of the new road bridge. The crew live on the station (not railway!) and always have good food to eat. They have their moments, of course, and these include catching the splashes when the railway bridge is being painted at that end, and chasing cows from the edge of the quarry or off the Chief Yeoman's garden. They also have their adventure, as recently publicised when the trio Brown (K), Smith (J) and Hewitt attempted to rescue a kitten which was trapped on a ledge in the quarry—their gravity-defying efforts were thwarted by the local PDSA Inspector who reached the kitten using a canoe!

Recently, the NQSS was involved in one of those telephonic interchanges which are often regarded as being of doubtful origin, but this one really did happen and it went as follows:—

An LRO rang a certain U.S. ship and was answered by an American who said, "Officer of the Deck, Number One messenger speaking".

LRO: "N.Q.S.S. here. I have a gale warning for you".

U.S. Ship: "Just one moment, please". (Pause of two minutes).

U.S. Ship: "Commander here. What do you have for me?"

Slightly puzzled, the LRO repeats: "I have a gale warning for you, Sir!"

U.S. Commander: "Godammit, man, I was told you had a girl waiting for me".