University Radio Station First Connected Arctic To Antarctic

By CHARLES THATCHER

North was north and south was south, and never the twain did meet —until W8AXZ, the University's own short-wave radio station, introduced them to each other.

Back in 1929 the station, which has just been put back on the air for the coming year, was keeping in touch with a University expedition in Greenland under the direction of Prof. William H. Hobbs of the geology department and at the same time was contacting Rear Admiral Byrd's Antarctic expedition.

One night Fred W. Albertson, W8AXZ's operator at the time, conceived the idea of putting the two polar stations in direct contact with each other. Excitedly he contacted one, then the other. A few minutes later NX1XL in Greenland sent out her first signals. A pause—and an answer from WFA, over 12,000 miles to the south. The poles had been linked by radio for the first time!

Nor is that the only experience the station has had with headline news. It contacted other polar expeditions as well, including the MacMillan Arctic Expedition. It also handled all the weather reports for an attempted northern-route Chicago-to-Berlin flight in July, 1929.

In addition to its role in these history-making events, the station maintained routine contact with a similar station in Bloemfontein, South Africa, where the University established an astronomical observatory, and has been used in recent years to keep in touch with the University's summer surveying camp in Wyoming.

The messages handled by W8AXZ are not all business, however. Albertson writes that in 1915 a game of checkers was played with Ohio State by radio. Checkers and squares were numbered, and the moves transmitted by short wave.

During the World War the Government took over the operation of the unit, using it to pick up German sending stations.

Albertson reports that the station has worked every continent, approximately 75 different countries, and has talked with ships on all the oceans. In one night, he recalls, he worked every district in the United States and most of them in New Zealand and Australia.

Run jointly by the electrical engineering department and the ROTC, the station was first opened in 1912

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