

Break-In October 1957

## SILENT KEY



**R. J. ORBELL, B.E., ZL1AX (ex ZL3AA)**

It is with deep regret we record the passing of Mr R. J. Orbell, Chief Engineer and a Director of the Ultimate-Ekco (N.Z.) Co. Ltd. (formerly Radio (1936) Ltd.) of Auckland, who was connected with radio in its various phases since the earliest days of the science.

A Bachelor of Engineering of Canterbury University College, he became interested in wireless in the "spark transmitter" era before World War I.

At his home at that time near Timaru, Mr Orbell together with Mr Bell, ZL4AA, another pioneer in wireless, made many interesting records. He became recognised, even in those early days, as an authority on radio.

During the Great War, 1914-18, he served in France with the N.Z. Signal Corps. Traveling to England in 1924, he joined the General Electric Company in Birmingham to gain further experience. On the voyage Home permission was obtained to operate an amateur transmitter and receiver on the ship, and he again topped all previous performances for those days in long distance communication, using short-waves between the S.S. Port Curtis and amateur stations in this country.

Shortly after his return to New Zealand, Mr Orbell joined the original N.Z. Broadcasting Company and was for a period in charge of the Transmitting Station 1YA, when it was situated in the building of George Court & Sons Ltd., in Karangahape Road, Auckland.

In 1927 he joined the firm of Radio Ltd. as Chief Engineer, and was responsible for the production of the now famous "Ultimate" radio receivers, which are so well and favour-

ably known throughout Oceania. Two years later he was invited by Admiral Byrd to accompany his expedition to the South Pole, and duly sailed together with an "Ultimate" all-wave receiver on the S.S. City of New York, playing a large part in the success of their communications.

During the Second World War, 1939-45, Mr Orbell was responsible for the design and production of many thousands of transmitter-receivers for use by the Armed Forces. In 1944 he was selected by the New Zealand Government with a number of other N.Z. radio experts to go to England and assist in the production in that country of specialised radar equipment.

Mr Orbell has always been active as an amateur transmitter and of recent years spent a portion of his spare time contacting amateurs throughout the world with his ten metre transmitter installed in his home at St. Helier's Bay, Auckland. To those of us who knew him, Jack was not only one of the foremost design engineers in this country, but was also an operator of outstanding ability. His "fist" was "copper-plate" quality and his signal immaculate. His was a sterling character and he will be sadly missed from the amateur ranks of the genuine Old Timers. Ave atque vale.

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