

7.4 Faksimile Broadcasting from the Summit of the Matterhorn

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BROADCASTING from the summit of the MATTERHORN

● A brilliant premiere was scored by Swiss Radio last month when, for the first time, live broadcasts were made by a climbing party on the summit of the 15,000-foot Matterhorn.

IN a country of mountains like Switzerland, the radio reporter's obvious dream would be to make an actuality on one of them. But the practical problems were great: if a mountain renowned enough for a story were to be attempted, then the gear would have to be light, to permit of carrying at great heights.

It would have to be tough to stand up to rough handling on the way up and sudden changes in temperature and pressure, and it would at the same time have to be powerful enough to give broadcast quality when put over the transmitter.

The Lausanne studio of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation managed it all, with the inventive help of Marcel Chassot, a Swiss amateur operator, better known as TRUPE.

Marcel constructed battery-operated transmitters, weighing a little over three pounds and measuring about 8 inches square by about 4 inches deep.

To go with them he prepared folded dipole antennae capable of being reduced to lengths of about two feet, weighing nearly nothing.

Things looked promising when we arrived in Zermatt, the resort town at the foot of the Matterhorn, about ten days before the broadcast was to take place.

The weather that first week-end was fine and clear; the days hot, the stars shining close and comforting at night.

On the Monday there was a tiny thin cloud in the sky—a danger-sign in this region: the Matterhorn was

not going to yield any more easily to radio than it had to man in the first place for until Englishman Edward Whymper climbed it in 1865 no man had ever set foot on its icy summit.

On Tuesday we tested for communication with the village of Zermatt from the Black Lake, 8,600 feet up the side of the Matterhorn under a sky

the old Whymper Hut and returned to base.

There was no sleep that night, for we were up at three to record the Mass which, on Sundays, precedes every climb for the guides of this Catholic region.

Paul Vallotton, Outside Broadcasts chief of Lausanne, who was in charge of the operation, and I awoke in the early morning light as we looked at the slim pyramid against the dawn sky.

Zermatt calling Matterhorn . . . Come in, Matterhorn . . . Change the antenna position, slightly—you're coming in fine . . .

IT went on all morning: the preparations, the departure, the description of the Ridge, the first tough part, the Old Cabin again, the Solvay Hut farther up, from the shoulder, even a broadcast from the ropes fixed on the two-hundred-foot high vertical wall near the summit.

We got Johnny Lamb's impressions, asked technical data of the guides. Then at noon, through the telescope, we saw them slowly making their way up the last ice and snow patches to the summit.

Just in time the apparatus was in order for us to catch the "Hurrah" shout they uttered. Then John played God save the King (which is also the Swiss National Anthem) on his mouth-organ. Then for an hour they answered questions in French for Studio Lausanne and Radio diffusion Française in English for the B.B.C. and N.B.C. reporters and myself. Finally Karl Lehner, of Zermatt, conversed with the guides in Zermatt dialect.

A storm rising from Italy—the Swiss-Italian border passes over the Matterhorn—brought the party down. The job was done. Another page in the history of alpinism and radio had been written—or spoken.

Radio Canada rebroadcast the Swiss Shortwave Programme, while transcription discs have been sent to the South African Broadcasting Corporation and the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, in addition to the A.B.C.

★ By Russell HENDERSON
Late of the A.B.C., now Chief of English Language Division, Swiss Shortwave Service, who assisted in the broadcast.

of high cloud. In the evening, showers dampened the fireworks of Switzerland's National Day, August 1.

THURSDAY had been chosen as the first climbing trial, as far as the Whymper Hut at a height of about 11,000 feet, but the clouds spurring from the graceful but inviolable peak put climbing out of the question.

Nevertheless, the climbing party left with six of Zermatt's best guides, led by the famous Otto Furrer, ski champion and with more than 100 climbs to his credit, known as Otto Matterhorn. The others were Johnny Lamb, British alpinist, ex-parachutist, 26-year-old student at Lausanne University, two technicians from Studio Lausanne, and two porters for the gear. (This, duplicated in case of trouble, weighed more than 150 pounds—no light weight for two men at those altitudes.)

They established themselves in the Hoerli Hut at the base proper of the Matterhorn, about a thousand feet above the Black Lake, to which the provisions and radio equipment had been taken by pack mule.

Miserably they sat through hail and snow inside the hiving quarters of the hut, and we down below, ourselves miserable, sympathized with them over the FM commercial transceivers we were using for intercommunication.

Friday was a little better; the guides were confident.

Early Saturday morning, August 6, the central meteorological station having promised 48 hours' clear and fine weather. Successfully test-broadcasting at every stage of the climb, they reached




MERVYN EADIE, who will produce the play *Daddy Was a Doctor*, to be broadcast at 9.15 p.m., on Friday, September 15, on Interstate.

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