

In order to reduce the loss of revenue it was decided during the year to limit the application of bulk rates to separately addressed packages weighing not less than 4 oz. While this restriction does not entirely eliminate loss to the Post Office, it goes a long way towards that desirable end. With a minimum weight of 4 oz., four packages each weighing 4 oz., if posted at the bulk rate of 3d. per pound, yield in postage 3d. The same four packages if posted singly at printed-paper rates yield in postage only 4d. It will be seen, therefore, that bulk rates still offer to senders a postage concession. The concession amounts to approximately a 25-per-cent. reduction on ordinary postage-rates.

EXPLOSION AT MOTUEKA.

In July an explosion occurred at the Motueka Post-office, in a small detached building used as an engine-shed; and, unfortunately, it resulted in the death of an exchange clerk through burns and shock. It is believed, although there is no evidence to support the theory, that fumes given off from benzine stored in the shed exploded through coming in contact with a naked light carried by the deceased on his visiting the shed for the purpose of filling a kerosene-lamp. The Coroner's finding was that no blame could be attributed to any one.

GOVERNMENT LIFE INSURANCE AGENCIES.

Owing to the growth of Post and Telegraph work at certain offices it was found that the work entailed by Government Insurance business seriously interfered with the legitimate duties of the controlling officers, and the Government Insurance Department was requested to make other arrangements for the conduct of its business. After some delay satisfactory arrangements were completed. The offices relieved of Government insurance work are Blenheim, Oamaru, Thames, Westport, Palmerston North, Hastings, Dannevirke, Hawera, Whangarei, Ashburton, and Gore.

TRANSFER OF OFFICES.

On the 1st July, 1924, the Opotiki office and a number of small offices in the vicinity were transferred from the Thames Postal District to the Gisborne Postal District. On the same date four offices on the Coromandel Peninsula were transferred from the Auckland Postal District to the Thames Postal District. In each case the change was made with a view to meeting better the requirements of the district.

CUSTODY OF DUPLICATE KEY OF SAFE OR STRONG-ROOM.

The safe-deposit system was extended during the year to allow of Government Departments depositing with the Post Office for safe custody packets containing duplicate keys of safes or strong-rooms.

OVERSEAS MAILS.

Correspondence for Great Britain, Ireland, and the Continent of Europe continues to be forwarded by contract steamers via Vancouver and via San Francisco, except when a vessel sailing via Panama offers a quicker despatch than the next contract steamer, or when correspondence is specially addressed for despatch by a particular vessel or route. Mails from Great Britain and Ireland are still received via Vancouver, via San Francisco, via Panama, and via Suez.

During 1924 the average time occupied in transit of mails from New Zealand to London was in the case of despatches via Vancouver thirty-one days, and in the case of despatches via San Francisco, thirty days. From London to New Zealand the average time occupied in transmission by both routes was thirty-three days. Since the 1st April, 1924, the date of the coming into operation of the new contracts, the average time occupied on the inward voyage by both routes has been reduced to thirty-two days.

Early in 1924 alternative tenders were called in New Zealand and abroad for services between Auckland and Vancouver, Wellington and San Francisco, and Wellington and London, via Panama, and, although wide publicity of the Department's requirements was given through the Press, no tender was received. Negotiations were thereupon entered into with the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand (Limited)—the former contractors—for the carriage of mails between Auckland and Vancouver and between Wellington and San Francisco. Contracts were subsequently arranged for a period of five years from the 1st April, 1924, the subsidies payable being the same as under the former contracts—i.e., £20,000 per annum for the Vancouver service, and £25,000 per annum for the San Francisco service. Included in the contract, however, is a proviso that the contractors may, at any time after the completion of the second year of the contract, give the Postmaster-General in writing one year's notice of the intention of the contractors to terminate the contract. Fairly satisfactory terms were also made regarding freight charges. The contracts for both the Vancouver and San Francisco services provide for despatches at four-weekly intervals from Auckland and Wellington respectively, and the time-tables are so arranged that the two services alternate, giving a regular fortnightly service to and from America.

The contract time of the voyages between Auckland and Vancouver and *vice versa*, and between Wellington and San Francisco and *vice versa*, is eighteen days, which is a speeding-up on the old contract time of one day in respect of the Vancouver service and of three days in respect of the San Francisco service.

In the early part of the year 1925 the Union Steamship Company added to its fleet the "Aorangi." This vessel, which is a motor-ship, and has a speed of 18 knots, was brought into commission on the 6th February, 1925, on which date she left Vancouver for Auckland. The "Aorangi" is a vessel of 18,000 tons, and has accommodation for nine hundred passengers. The vessel generally, including the accommodation, is much in advance of anything previously provided for the service. The vessel was placed on the Vancouver service, taking the place of the R.M.S. "Makura," which