

Correspondence

THE OCEAN WEATHER SERVICE

SIR,

I was most interested to read (Vol. 1, No. 1) the article by Lieutenant P. G. Satow on the Ocean Weather Service now in operation in the Atlantic. I was a little surprised that Lieutenant Satow, after writing that 'ocean weather ships are not new to 1947', did not go on to mention what surely must have been the pioneer service of this sort and without a mention of which no account of this great service is complete.

I refer, of course, to the two ships, which, as long ago as 1932, the Deutsche Lufthansa A.G. placed alternately on station on the direct track Bathurst, Gambia to Natal, Brazil, in the area Lat. 03° S., Long. 30° W. These ships' main function was to assist the D.L.H. floatplane mail service between Bathurst and Natal, but the international aspect was maintained as the ships guarded international radio frequencies and gave radio navigational assistance to any who asked. I feel sure too that they would have participated in any rescue operations had the need arisen. Many mariners and one or two lone airmen will recall these two fine well-found ships of around 6000 tons with their excellent radio equipment, which included direction-finding gear, a beacon and M.F. and H.F. communications facilities as well as meteorological and maintenance facilities, of which the latter included a plane-lifting derrick and a launching catapult. If my memory serves me aright their names were the *Westfalen* and the *Schwabenland*, but there may have been others.

I mentioned lone fliers and it is interesting to note that the Lindberghs received considerable navigational assistance from the *Westfalen* on the Bathurst-Natal leg of their South Atlantic survey flight 6 December 1933. In her book *Listen! the Wind*, pp. 254-6, Anne Morrow Lindbergh pays a graceful tribute to the services rendered by them.

These ships were still on station in 1935, I believe, but I have no idea what happened to them after that, although no doubt they became war casualties of one sort or another later. Perhaps other correspondents can clear up that point. In any case I think we should give credit where it is due as I believe these ships to be the forerunners of the Ocean Weather Service of today.

Yours faithfully,

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