

Early Wireless Telegraphy in PNG

The history of telegraphy in Papua New Guinea (PNG) began with two major milestones in the early 20th century, which utilized **wireless telegraphy** due to the country's rugged geography:

- **First Attempt (March 1911):** The first recorded wireless telegraph transmissions in PNG were made by a Catholic priest, **Father Shaw**. He erected a wireless aerial on **Paga Hill in Port Moresby** to assist in searching for lost Australian officials, though he was ultimately unable to establish a connection with the relay station on Thursday Island in Australia.
- **First Official Service (26 February 1913):** The first successful, permanent public wireless telegraph station officially opened in **Port Moresby**. Operating under the callsign **VIG** (later changed to VJZ), it was established by the Australian Postmaster-General's Department (PMG) to service shipping routes and improve regional communication.

Early Telephone Exchange

The historical records kept by the early local administration leave us with a mix of specific data and gaps regarding Port Moresby's first telephone exchange:

The Date It First Opened

The precise calendar date (day and month) of the 1923 opening is not recorded in broad public colonial records. Official territorial gazettes and historical overviews from the [Papua New Guinea Department of ICT](#) log the system's establishment to the broad year of **1923**. Because it was built incrementally by a tiny, local Department of Posts and Telegraphs crew stringing physical overhead lines street-by-street, it likely transitioned into operation as soon as the first few government buildings were physically wired up, rather than celebrating a single grand opening day.

The Number of Initial Subscribers

The exact number of initial subscribers from its opening month is not definitively recorded. However, historical context of Port Moresby in the 1920s gives us a very clear picture of how small this network was:

- **Exclusively Government & Business:** The earliest manual magneto switchboard was installed primarily to link the local Australian Administrator's office, the government treasury, the local constabulary (police), the hospital, and the main shipping wharves.
- **Estimated Scale:** Based on colonial census records of Port Moresby's small European and administrative population at the time, the original exchange would have launched with **fewer than 20 to 30 initial connections**.

Even decades later, when the Australian administration formally structuralized the network into the joint Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1955, there were still only **17 manual telephone exchanges** serving the *entire* country.

However, in **March 1931**, Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd (**AWA**) completed a massive modernization project in **Port Moresby** that transformed telecommunications in Papua New Guinea.

The 1931 AWA Development

On **10 March 1931**, AWA officially opened a brand-new, **high-speed wireless telegraph station** situated in the main street of Port Moresby.

This project replaced the old, out-of-date facility at Konedobu (located about 1.25 miles away) and introduced several major advancements:

- **Direct Sydney Connection:** It established the first high-powered, **direct wireless link between Port Moresby and Sydney**, completing a critical missing unit in the broader Pacific wireless network.
- **Advanced Equipment:** The development featured a brand new **5 kW out-of-town transmitting facility** keyed directly from the downtown Main Street telegraph center.
- **Regional Hub Infrastructure:** The station rapidly evolved into a regional communication nexus. Aside from the direct line to Australia, operators handled schedules to regional centers like Samarai, Wau, and Townsville, alongside short-wave telephony with remote inland outstations (using portable pedal-powered radios).
- **Aeradio and Shipping:** The 1931 upgrade allowed the station to manage 600-metre maritime shipping frequencies as well as vital long- and short-wave **aeradio work** to guide Guinea Airways and other early aviation pioneers through PNG's treacherous skies.

This facility remained the backbone of the territory's communication network until 1941, when it was repurposed to support military operations during World War II.

Following the war, in **1955**, the Australian colonial administration formally established the **Department of Posts and Telegraph** to oversee expanding postal, telegraph, and telephone networks across the territory.

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