

# TRAIN TO GO ALOFT OR UNDERGROUND

He started with a 2-foot pole. It was a difficult ascent. He sat himself on the ground, put a belt around his waist, then adjusted the strap from the belt round the pole.

Then he heaved himself to the top of the pole. He had done a good job, and would now be allowed to climb a 10ft. pole.

We were watching one of the 21 future linemen training at the PMG Lineman Training School.

Yard in Lord-st. was filled with 70 poles of different sizes up to 28 feet. Students with belts and ladders were conquering their fear of height and learning to be workmen in the air.

But this is only one of the many phases of the course which covers 18 months before a student is considered qualified to call himself a lineman.

## Pass Exams

Before these men even begin training they had to pass educational and health exams. When they enter the school they are thoroughly taught how to cope with the dangerous work and exciting life they are to lead.

Without this training no lineman could handle the difficult modern constructions, without endangering life.

In the days when WA was still on the simple single line construction, linemen had all the training they needed from the older hands on the job. But when the American Automatic Telephone System began, and the city was growing too large for overhead wires, a new type of lineman was needed. He works under the

of lineman was needed. He works under the ground in the city and up poles in the country.

Damage to the lines in Perth during the 1920's kept a whole gang of men to mend them. A man walking down St. George's Terrace had only to get his swinging umbrella caught in the overhead lines and considerable damage could be done, and was. Complex underground wires in the city were needed.

## School Idea

In the line construction of the old days, each district had a different method, right or wrong. With their head office in Melbourne the PMG found that their instructions might not make sense to a WA lineman.

Linemen couldn't get jobs in other parts of Australia unless they had been trained there. They spoke another language. Time had come for a standard method.

Idea for the school was suggested by George Gale, former lineman inspector and first supt. of the Lineman's School, which began in Perth in 1934.

School, now superintended by Clem Wall, teaches telephone prin-

tended by Clem Wall, teaches telephone principles, testing and climbing poles, their transport and mechanical aids (such as radio), cable jointing, conduit construction, drawing-in stores and engineer storings.

**Only the healthiest, and the toughest should think about becoming a lineman.**

Any and every situation must be prepared for, especially up in the North-West where each lineman has 200 or more miles of line to look after under some of the worst conditions.

"It is up in the North West that a lineman's mettle is judged," said George Gale, and he should know. He was up there when the 1941 eve-

lone did tremendous damage to the lines between Onslow and Broome. One of the first on the scene, his job was to assess, with another man, the amount of damage done. It took them 5 days, and they crossed 150 miles of territory.

When they had finished George Gale spent 4 days in hospital. They had been drinking from rivers contaminated by dead sheep.

At the school, many of

At the school, many of the old time linemen relate tales of the exciting times they had in the North, camping by themselves for weeks at a time, the only equipment—wire, the only stores—a gun for hunting.

Those whom they are now teaching will only know half of the life they led there in the old days. Then a job was seldom completed without meeting up with the dead body of some unfortunate, who had been following the line, fighting against thirst and hunger, looking for some sign of civilisation, and when you swam a river several times a day to get to some of the damaged lines.

## Cyclone

One of the instructors of the school used to be stationed in Onslow. He was 20 miles out one day with his horse and cart when a terrific cyclone rushed upon them. River's banks overflowed, roofs of houses in Onslow were torn off, cattle and sheep were drowned.

He managed to climb to the top of a small hill and tied his belt round a tree. He was safe, but he watched his horse carried off.

In the morning, after 8 inches had fallen during that night, he waded back to his home.

It was under the water, and all their livestock had perished. But personal problems, bad as they were, had nothing to compare with the damage done to the lines.

It took weeks of hard work and hard camping to put them up again.

## No Wonder

Only known case of electrocution was to a horse. The charge went straight through the man. Passing under some hang-

ing lines one lineman in the North accidentally touched the wire with his hand. His horse dropped from under him. It shook like a leaf and blood ran out of its eyes and nose. And no wonder, a charge had gone through it. Darky, the horse, lived but it never heard again.

Only 2 men have been killed on the job in WA. Both were before the school began, and both because of dry rot affecting the poles.

This was a good record to begin with, and with the increase of linemen in the State the record has not been spoiled. This is because the qualifications are too high to allow linemen to endanger life through ignorance.

Every lineman has to pass through the Training School, and after that they can't go wrong.