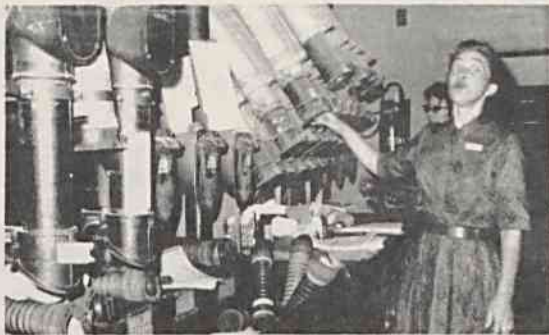


WHOOSH-PLUNK!

by Betty Kernodle

Did you ever have these sudden noises startle you as you walk along the corridors? You probably glared resentfully at the source of your shock--a large metal box recessed in the wall, a small red light shining over it, and a rack of bulky cylinders below. Unless you were attracted by the unexpected noise, you probably passed that place in the hall without so much as a glance. Actually, the box, the light, and the cylinders represent one "station" on an important, hard-working circulatory system in the Medical Center. Even those employees who are thoroughly familiar with the stations and use them frequently have very little idea of the monstrous size and intricacy of the installation.



Betty describes the tubes going "whoosh".

Officially named the Lamson Automatic Airtube System, it transports intramurally almost anything which by size and nature will fit into a cylinder (endearingly called a pigeon) and withstand the jolt of a landing at the destination. Incidentally, suitable cylinder contents do not include mice, firecrackers, and vituperative messages maligning the recipient. Some wise-acres don't know where to draw the line! The system routinely carries interoffice communications, patient identification plates and admission notices, laboratory and radiology reports, prescriptions, medications, and most of all, medical records.



Mr. Bill Blair, Hosp. Admin. Intern.

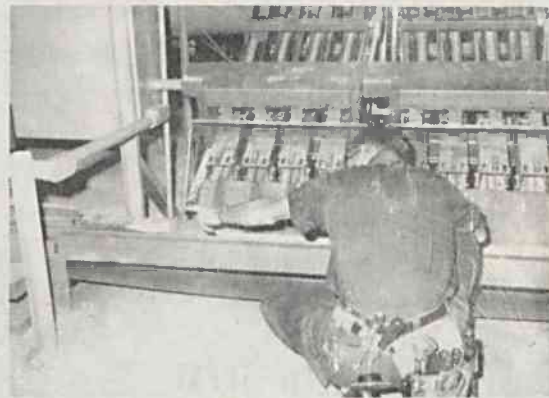
So now maybe you are curious about this step-saving invention and think you will just step out of your office to that station you remember seeing down the hall to give it a try. Hold it! One innocent little mistake in dispatching a pigeon can disable for hours a line of nine stations. One innocent big mistake can disable the whole system for the rest of the day.

The network is made up of six separate lines, A,B,C, D, E, and F. Each line has up to nine stations on it, and at present there are forty-three stations in all. A cylinder must be accurately "addressed" to reach the proper station, understandably. "Addressing" is accomplished by setting two dial bands, one for the line and one for the station on the line. Addresses are listed on a directory at each station. If you fail to set the dials, the pigeon will return to your station like a boomerang.

So now maybe you think you are ready to give it a try. Hold it! You have addressed the cylinder accurately, but have you fastened it securely? One of the sorriest sights to see is a wad of shredded paper emerging at the outlet, the remnants of important documents which escaped a poorly fastened cylinder. Besides being hardly any good anymore, these loose papers have no doubt obstructed at least one whole line of stations and very likely have caused an emergency halt to the entire network. Address the cylinder carefully, fasten it securely, and you are ready to dispatch it--almost. It won't go anywhere unless you insert the felt head first and send in the direction of the arrow.

Perhaps you have wondered how the pigeons know what station you dialed. The system's brain is located in the sub-subbasement of the Main Entrance Building. The brain is a huge interchange where each pigeon must come to be redirected to its destination. Somehow, by means of channels, electronic brushes, conveyer belts, motors, fans, and a great deal of noise (it's really frightening) this interchange reads addresses and guides the pigeons.

Now hear this. With all its wonderful ability to deliver records and messages to the far ends of the Medical Center, the airtube system cannot reach out and return a pigeon to its home station. People have to do that. The system fails completely when people fail to monitor the stations. Each pigeon is identified with a home address, and pigeons should be at



Claude E. Phipps, Maintenance

home when not in use. A station clogged with cylinders is causing frustration and despair at any number of other stations, and may in fact be causing several traffic jams. Anyone passing a station can monitor it in just a minute or two. Red light burning? A pigeon is there with a message. Retrieve the message and flip off the red light. More than four cylinders in the rack? Send those wandering pigeons back home.

The Lamson Automatic Airtube System is really a great little gadget. Let it work for you. Operating instructions are at each station.