

Overseas Telecommunications Veterans Newsletter



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2012 has been a very good year from the perspective of our collective achievements and I look forward to being a part of a team that will deliver more in 2013 with the support of the very competent & effective members of your OTVA.

The digitisation of the Transit and Contact magazines from 1946 to 1996 is a very big job but we are well progressed and should have a DVD available at no cost to members early in 2013.

Your committee is also identifying and working with Government & Industry to organise a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Compac Cable by HRH Queen Elizabeth on 3rd December 1963. The format of this celebration is yet to be determined but early indications are positive. Your committee welcomes the participation of you, our members, to utilise your specialist skills & expertise honed through many years of working for OTC to assist in this venture.

I lament the passing of so many of our fraternity during 2012 but am consoled by the legacy that they leave behind. I wish their families and friends a happier 2013.

I wish my fellow members of the OTVA a very happy & safe Christmas and a prosperous New Year.



NSW CHRISTMAS REUNION

9TH NOVEMBER

2012



To be held in York Rooms 1 and 2, at the NSW Bowlers' Club, Level 2, 99 York Street, Sydney. Doors will be open from 11 am with meals to be served from about 12.15pm.

As OTVA will subsidise the overall costs of the function, the charge to members will be \$35 per person. Please ensure your membership is current to avail yourself of this subsidised event. As in previous years, beverages can be purchased from the bar on Level 2.

A guest speaker is being arranged.

RSVP BY Friday 2 November to
president@otva.com
Call/SMS Peter on 0411 260 542.



OUT ON A WING

OLD-TIME RADIO OPERATORS HAD IT ROUGH

By STAN C. GRAY. La Perouse Coastal Radio Station.

In the early 1930s I was a radio operator in the Fleet Air Arm, operating from the carrier 'Eagle' in the China Seas. One of our jobs was to go after pirates-of whom there were quite a few about at that time. I well remember transmitting "spotting" messages back to the carrier after we had located the lair of some pirates who, in classical fashion, had boarded, as passengers, the Butterfield and Swire ship 'Shuntien' (of some 3000-4000 tons) and then, in the middle of the night, had taken over the ship, robbed all the passengers, and abducted some European and Japanese hostages. Excitement was great as, after many fruitless sorties, the pirates' hideout was eventually located on a desolate, uncharted coast. We radioed for fighter support, and the Hawker Nimrods soon arrived to bomb and machine-gun the pirates into submission - incidentally almost killing the hostages into the bargain.

I was flying in open-cockpit Fairey 3F aircraft at this stage. Odd duties often meant the carriage of unwieldy equipment which was secured (not always scientifically) to the outside of the aircraft. One of these pieces of extraneous apparatus, carried from time to time, was a "stannic pot". This was a fairly large cylindrical canister, containing chemical, which could be released from the cockpit by tugging on a long piece of wire which ran outside the fuselage to the cylinder. By flying in different directions over this released cloud of chemical, the speed and direction of the wind could be calculated-all essential before starting out on a mission across the sea. H.T. for the aircraft radio transmitter was obtained from a wind-driven generator, located on a rotatable arm, which allowed the small propeller and generator to be wound into the slipstream or, if necessary, withdrawn back into the cockpit for easy servicing.



Fairey 3F Aircraft

Exercising one day between Hong Kong and Chefoo we ran into bad weather, became lost for a while, and the pilot was soon singing out for radio bearings. These were obtained successfully at first, but all of a sudden things went wrong; contact with the ship was lost and quick investigation showed that there was no H.T. to the transmitter.

Upon looking over the side of the fuselage I was horrified to see that the wire which released the chemical had come adrift from the cockpit and was stretched taut between the "stannic pot" canister and the propeller of the wind-driven generator, around which it was wrapped several times. This locked the generator in its "in flight" position, making it incapable of being wound into the cockpit where the fault could be cleared.

The weather was deteriorating fast. Heavy rain reduced visibility to almost nil, and the pilot began to show obvious uneasiness: our petrol reserve also worried him. I was soon urged in no uncertain terms to get the radio working.

There was only one thing for it, so, with the pilot pulling back on the throttle, I secured my parachute harness by its safety wire to the floor of the aeroplane as a precautionary measure and climbed apprehensively outside the aircraft. The intention was to gingerly edge my way forward and down about four feet to a point where, with pliers, I could cut the offending wire and release the generator.

Although our speed, with the throttle eased back, was not much more than about 80 knots, my goggles were almost immediately whipped away from my face and disappeared somewhere over the tail-and the leather helmet soon went the same way. Before many minutes my face felt like a hot pincushion, stung and hurt by the driving rain. With whitened knuckles I hung on to the edge of that cockpit like grim death and pulled myself forward inch by inch.

At last, with the wire severed and generator free, I tumbled thankfully back into the cockpit, but only to receive an even greater shock! The safety wire-in which I had implicit trust whilst out in the slipstream-had somehow become detached from the tail of the parachute harness and I realized that the trip over the side had been made without any reliable support. Although any danger was now past, I broke into a violent cold sweat, trembling all over, and remained that way for a considerable time.

Some 24 years later, whilst operating in Comets, when both the radio aerials on one occasion came off and wrapped themselves round the aircraft tail, my mind went back to the time when I had chanced my luck outside the fuselage. Even had it been possible. I wouldn't have ventured outside that Comet for all the tea in China.

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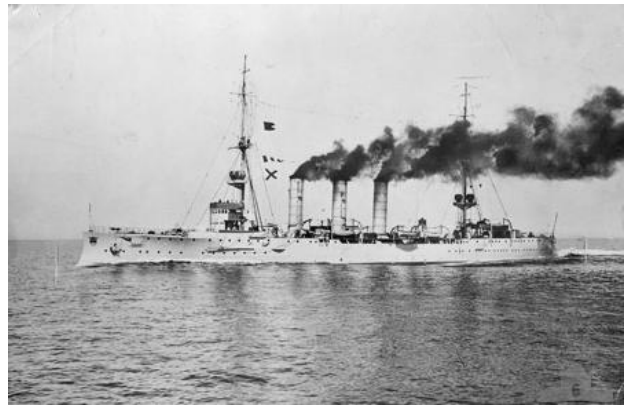
THE DAY THE WAR CAME TO COCOS ISLAND CABLE STATION

This event is also significant for Australian wartime history in that the first Australian and New Zealand troop ship convoy was only 55 miles east of Cocos at the time of the Emden landing. These ships carried over 20,000 service men in 28 merchant ships accompanied by only 3 naval escorts. If the Emden had located the convoy, and was able to steal upon it at night, many "Anzac's" lives would have been lost at sea prior to the Gallipoli campaign. The SMS Emden was a three funnel light cruiser, which carried out a very successful German campaign early in the war, operating in and around the Indian sub continent region sinking thousands of tons of British Empire merchant shipping. On various occasions the Emden used canvas sheeting to falsify a fourth funnel so as to disguise the vessel. Ed.

[The following account of the German landing on Direction Island is extracted from a report by Superintendent Farrant, of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, who was in charge of the cable station at the time.]

"At 5.50 a.m. on the 9th [November 1914] I was informed that a warship with four funnels was steaming for the entrance between Horsborough and Direction Islands. Quickly investigating, and finding that the fourth funnel was palpably canvas, I found Mr. La Nauze and instructed him to Proceed immediately to the wireless hut, and to put out a general call that there was a strange warship in our vicinity, asking for assistance and signing our naval code. At the same time I proceeded to the office and sent services, as previously instructed, to London, Adelaide, Perth, and Singapore.

"The Emden (for such she turned out to be) came in at a great speed nearly as far as our outer buoy, where she wheeled and disclosed an armoured launch and two heavily manned boats under her counter. They were immediately slipped, and speeded straight for the jetty. Through a glass we managed to distinguish four machine-guns, two in the launch and one on the bow of each boat. The information was conveyed to the



SMS Emden

and I personally told Singapore that it was the Emden. So quick had been their movements evidently with the hope of rushing our wireless, that the slip of the last-mentioned services was passing through the 'Autos' when they entered the office.

"In the meantime Mr. La Nauze was putting out the call. I returned to the wireless hut, where he informed me that the Emden and her collier the Buresk were endeavouring to interrupt him. I instructed him to continue the call, as the fact of forcing the two ships to use their strong Telefunken notes could only be regarded as a matter for suspicion if picked up by a warship. I stood at the corner of the hut to assume responsibility for the use of the wireless, until an officer and some half-dozen blue-jackets ordered us to desist and leave. Armed guards ran to all buildings, and the office was taken possession of in force and the staff ordered out.

"Lieutenant von Mücke, in charge of the landing party, was exceedingly agreeable. He informed me that he had landed 3 officers and 40 men, and his instructions were to destroy the cable and wireless station. Further than this, he said, they would not go, and all private property would be respected. He instructed me to collect the staff and take them to a place of safety as he was blowing up the wireless mast. Three charges had to be fired before it fell. The main mast was considerably damaged; the top-mast appears unhurt, and a short length is broken off the top-gallant-mast. Instruments, engines, dynamos, batteries, etc., were all battered to pieces with huge axes.... The Emden was for a short time circling over the cables, but, evidently worried by our wireless, she almost immediately stood out to the entrance to watch for anything coming up.

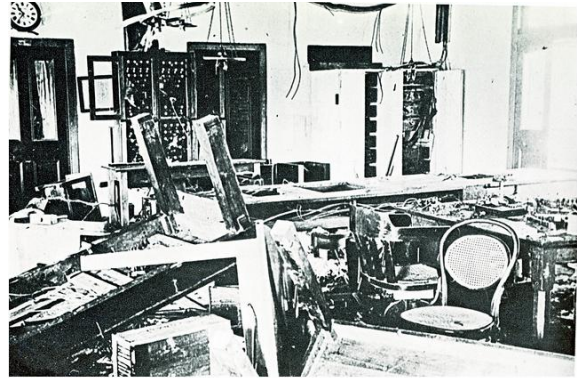
"The only question I was asked was the whereabouts of the cable ends; the answer 'in the sea' appeared to satisfy them, as I was not pressed. Whilst all the damage was being done ashore, the launch was searching the foreshore for our cables, and I noted

with delight that she first raised a small type (probably B), which would be our half-naut of spare laid out in the lagoon. The greater part of her time was taken up in coiling this cable inboard, and it did not appear to strike them that there was a considerable slack for a laid cable. Later they raised Perth, which they experienced very great difficulty in cutting and which was one of the causes of their not getting aboard the cruiser. The cut was made about 300 yards from the jetty. At about 8.45 a.m. the Emden steamed in again, and made frantic endeavours to recall her boats, using both her flags and sirens. The launch appeared to be unwilling to give up her cable, and some delay was experienced in getting her in and the men aboard. Lieutenant von Mücke shook hands with me on leaving, and apologised for having to blow up our small engineer's store-owing to there being a roll of electric light cable there - and hoped the flames would not spread. All the men were looked over for loot, and a few minutes later put out to rejoin their ship

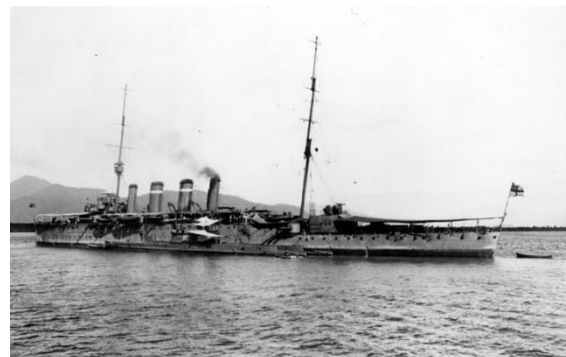
"After the departure of the boats, I requested the staff to have breakfast and then help in clearing up and finding out exactly how we stood. The time was about 9.30 a.m. We had scarcely reached our houses when a report was brought in that a large ship was approaching from the eastwards, and at the same time it was noticed that the Emden had raised her anchor and was standing out to sea. Getting on to the barrier, a cruiser was seen coming up at a great rate, stoking heavily and enveloped in a cloud of black smoke. It was only an occasional glimpse now and then which showed her to be a four-funnelled light cruiser, which we incorrectly assumed to be the Newcastle. Coming out of the entrance the Emden fired immediately, and we were afterwards informed that shells landed in both the Sydney's controls, breaking one of their range-finders. The reply was instantaneous, and a very picturesque battle started at a range of about 3,700 yards and within a mile or so of the barrier.

"The Emden worked her guns splendidly, and seemed to be firing continually. Her shells were plainly visible, cutting through the black smoke of the Sydney, and she appeared to be making good shooting. The Sydney, on the other hand, having to pick up her range by gunfire, was at first somewhat handicapped, her shells landing over or short of the other cruiser and

apparently somewhat astern. They had, no doubt, underestimated her speed, as she was travelling at a big rate. This, however, was speedily rectified, and getting out of range of the Emden's guns she hit her frequently. The latter soon lost a funnel and almost immediately a mast, followed by another funnel, and was seen to be burning



Cocos Cable Station Wrecked by the landing Party



HMAS SYDNEY

astern, with an escape of white steam from her side. The two ships then passed the horizon and were lost to sight. We afterwards learnt that to avoid sinking she ran for a reef at North Keeling, burning furiously... The landing party had, meanwhile, returned, and the German flag was hoisted. I was asked to get the men together, and it was explained to them that they were under German martial law and that any attempt to communicate with the enemy would bring about drastic punishment. All fire-arms had to be given up, and the staff put up under an armed guard. When Lieutenant Von Mücke came up he explained that, if the Emden did not return before evening, he would take the schooner Ayesha and leave the island. He required provisions, which he said would be returned or paid for later, and asked for any old clothes for his men. He allowed us full liberty, and allowed me to lock up my office, the stationery, etc. It was only now, when the officers were too busily engaged in provisioning the schooner to properly look after their men, that a good deal of petty pilfering went on, and more damage was done to the already destroyed office. At 6 p.m. they joined the Ayesha, towing their two boats and being towed by the launch. The German flag was broken at the peak, and after giving three cheers for the staff, and the compliment returned, they stood out to sea in the dark.

"We had made no provision for lighting, as they had not discovered our oil store, and I thought it desirable to see them away before opening it up. At 6.30 p.m. we groped for and dug up our buried mirror, collected cells from the various hiding places in the bush, and quickly got into communication with Batavia, who answered our second or third short call. We tried Rodrigues, but probably our battery was too small, and we failed to raise him. After reporting as much as was necessary-as we were tired out, and working with candles in the midst of a chaos of broken glass-I closed down for the night, telling Batavia to watch for us at daylight.

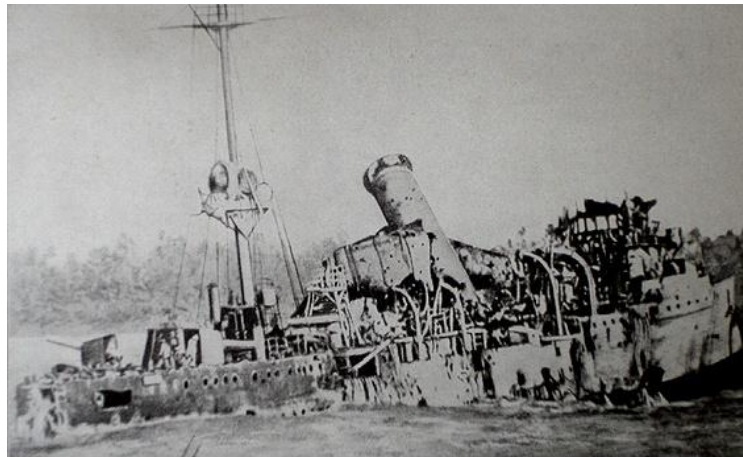
"At 6.30 a.m. on the 10th we dug up and brought in our spare instrument, tray cells, etc., and were early in a position to wire reports and exchange services with Singapore.

Discovering a milliammeter in a fairly good state of preservation, we were able to roughly test the other two cables, finding Rodrigues in good order and Perth cut. We communicated with the former station, and a boat with the handy men, under Mr. Griffin, searched successfully for the Perth ends. The cable was somewhat pulled about, and had to be straightened before making a temporary connection. The ends were lashed to a life-boat, and communication restored early in the afternoon. Our Chinese lighter was scuttled by the Germans, and I was very glad to receive from Captain Glossop the above-mentioned life-boat, which had previously belonged to the Emden's collier, the Buresk, and which Cocos Station should find extremely useful

"Dr. Ollerhead, by going on to the roof to inspect the Emden's fourth funnel, gave me the chance of putting out the wireless call without any waste of time; Mr. C.H.K. La Nauze maintained the call under very trying conditions; Mr. Preshaw worked long hours erecting instruments and re-wiring circuits. Mr. Griffin recovered the Perth ends, and straightening out the cable, enabled us to make a short connection. Mr. Beauchamp went out after dark to recover buried instruments, and Mr. Cherry constructed another instrument out of very unpromising material collected from the debris.

"I suppose we were putting out our calls for a quarter of an hour, first 'Strange ship at entrance,' and later 'Emden is here'¹" The first was picked up, but I have heard no mention of the second. Lieutenant von Mücke, a tall, pleasant, well-built man, allowed me to do almost everything I asked him, and I am pleased to say that at my request he sent no one to Home Island. They were all thoroughly sick of the work they had to do, and up to their arrival here had not lost a man. He told me that the Emden had a complement of 300 men, of whom forty were ashore; but later Dr. Ollerhead said that one of the survivors told him that she had 352 on board at the commencement of the fight. Whatever the number was, he considered the absence of the landing party a very severe handicap. He explained to me the Zhemchug incident, and how they tried to lure the Pistolet to close quarters. He further explained that it was the first time that he had been ashore for three months, except for seven minutes on 'another island'. It was not the Emden that passed here on the 1st September, but he suggested that it might have been the Königsberg. I asked him whether, in the event of our cruiser returning, he intended to fight on the island, and he shrugged his shoulders and said 'I must.' As the ship would have most certainly shelled him, I arranged with him that the staff and servants should go to another island out of the danger zone, and I told the carpenter to tell the Chinamen to make all preparations to leave. On account of the few boats, and the probable shortness of notice, I am afraid that not all could have got away; but I had no intention of going until every man and servant had gone. Direction Island would have afforded sufficient shelter, and was quite safe for a few, and I did not feel at all inclined to move. Another officer with the landing party was Lieutenant Schmidt, son of Admiral Schmidt of Kiel.

"The Emden flew no colours, and evidently hoped to find us asleep. As it was, they turned out quite a few men!"



SMS Emden, Beached after being destroyed by the SYDNEY

¹ *This was evidently jammed, as no ship records having picked it up.*

COMPAC 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The 50th Anniversary of the opening of traffic on the COMPAC Cable in 2013 and you are invited to join in.

A subcommittee has been established and if you wish to contribute, contact Peter Bull, president@otva.com.

To renew your membership, you can (i) either do an electronic funds transfer of \$10 to the OTVA Bank account (email president@otva.com to obtain the details), OR

(ii) mail a cheque for \$10 to

PO Box 702 Riverwood 2210

For EFT transactions ensure your name is included in the transaction.

The articles published in the last newsletter were reviewed by the committee.

All were considered interesting and the final decision was to present Henry with the \$50 for his article on Communication Without Wires.

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