



OTVA Newsletter

September 2014
Volume 15 Page 8

Registered Address:
42 Keswick Street
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Spring Function

Spring is in the air and it is time for the OTVA Annual Spring get together!

Please come and join us at this years Spring Function—catch up with old friends, a great networking opportunity!

Please click the RSVP link below to send an email to the President. Look forward to seeing you there.

When: 12 noon Friday 26th September 2014

Where: The Red Room
The Bowlers Club
99 York Street Sydney

What: Buffet Lunch and Bar Service (pay on the day)

RSVP: president@otva.com

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Coming Events:

Committee Meetings:

- Wednesday 8th October 2014

Spring Function:

Friday 26th September 2014

Xmas Function:

Thursday 6th November 2014

Message from the President

Fellow Members of the OTVA

As 2014 draws to a close, I reflect upon another year of achievements and progress in our association. I thank all of the members of the OTVA Executive for their hard work and dedication throughout 2014.

Enduring Membership has been embraced by a large number of new and long-term members of the OTVA ensuring the existence of the OTVA for at least the next 5 years. This initiative has resulted in increased membership. There have been many new members and quite a number of ex-members re-joining the OTVA. The burgeoning membership is most encouraging and most welcome.



Peter Bull—President OTVA

The OTVA continues to promote itself, its member's achievements and the history of OTC through the and web sites.

The library of employment history of ex-OTC personnel has grown significantly. I find it most interesting to review the breadth of life and work experiences of people that I knew during my years with OTC as well as some of whom I only knew through 'the stories' of their exploits.

These documents are being stored for possible use to respond to future enquiries from family and to enable us to reflect upon the impact of our members on OTC and the history of communications in Australia.

The work to produce a DVD containing Transit and Contact magazines circulated by OTC since 1948 has been completed and copies of the DVD will be available upon request at the OTVA Christmas function. A copy of the DVD will also be available to those who cannot attend the function in Sydney in November. The digitisation of these magazines would not have been possible without the significant support by many of you and those members of the OTVA committee who gave of their time and effort. We have managed to amass 293 Transits out of a possible 335 and 42 Contacts out of a possible 56. Thank you to all of those persons who helped us to build this library.

I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Have a safe and happy festive season.

Warmest regards,

Peter Bull

Lighting up some History-Mystery Solved.

Peter Allan

In 1993 OTC Staff based in Vietnam were, sadly, very active getting rid of OTC Brand. Vietnam was the first place in the world where the Telstra brand would emerge. As such there was a bigger than usual marketing budget allocated. The objective was to kill off the very well known OTC Brand and replace it with Telstra in Vietnam. One promotional opportunity came in the form of sponsoring a Surfing Competition in Da Nang. Da Nang is coastal city in the centre of Vietnam where the famous “China Beach” of television fame is located.

The surfing competition was the brainchild of an American Sports Promoter who was very active in Vietnam at that time and a American Vietnam Veteran who served and surfed at Da Nang in the 1970's. The vet had remembered his time surfing during the war and what a break (pardon the pun) it gave from the troubles around him.

Somehow the promoter managed to get this one off event to be part of the professional surfing competition for that year. The Association of Surfing Professionals sanctioned it in their second tier competition. More than 40 professional surfers entered the competition including Australian surfing legend Cheyne Horan.

Accompanying the professional surfers was a contingent of foreign press reporting on this historical event. OTC provided the Communications Centre for the press in conjunction with our Vietnamese Partners VNPT. Outside the communications centre an Australian Card Payphone was setup for the public. There were no public payphones in Vietnam at that time and as such it was a bit of novelty. The Payphone played a memorable part in the event for a couple of reasons. The first was that special phone cards were made for specifically for the Da Nang Surfing Competition. Under 100 of them were distributed and rest were destroyed. The surviving cards became very collectable at the time and some sold for many times the face value.

The payphone was also central to an international espionage “scandal”. In 1993 the USA was yet to normalise relations with Vietnam. Every morning at around 2am a mysterious figure used the phone to call the USA and report on what was happening at the event. Of course this did not go un noticed and one morning the payphone had stopped working. The Telstra technician who installed the phone had a look at it and reported that the anti tampering mechanism had been activated. In Australia this happens when payphones are vandalised. In Vietnam it transpired that a “device” had been put across the line at the Da Nang Exchange and had tripped the alarm. After a few red faces and a bit of discussion the payphone was up and operating again and Langley went on receiving reports re the surfing conditions in Da Nang!

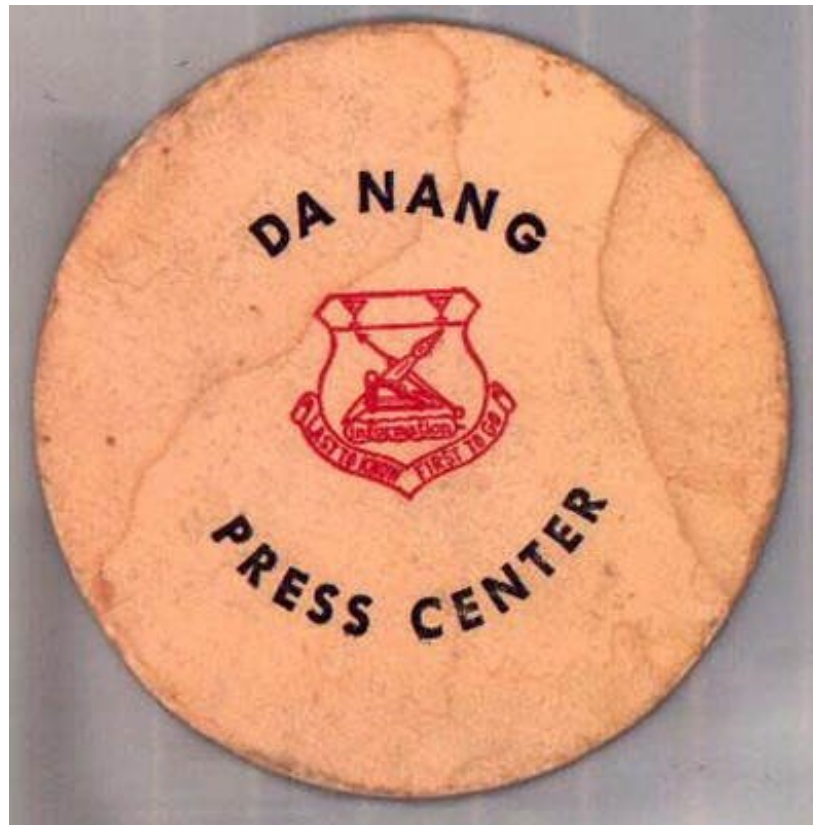
Nearing the end of the event the payphone technician came back from the local markets and gave me a cigarette lighter—it was in three pieces with many parts missing. He was told it was from the Vietnam War era. The store keepers in Vietnam were notorious for creating fake items from this era-so I put the pieces in my bag and forgot about the lighter. It subsequently made the trip home to Australia with me in 2000.

This year I've had a bit of time on my hands (thanks to being retrenched for the 4th time!) and I decided to try and restore the old lighter. I brought a brand new Zippo Lighter around the same size to replace the parts that were missing. It was then I discovered that the Da Nang lighter was not in fact a Zippo but a Japanese copy. None the less, I was able to do some modifications

and get it to a state where it actually worked.

I then set about trying to prove if it was from the Vietnam War era or just another fake. The clues were the engraving “Da Nang Press Center” on the lid and a badge with the slogan “Information—Last to Know First to Go”. A few short years back, tracking this down would have been an awesome task—but thanks to the Internet and Mr Google it was made a lot easier.

It appears that the Da Nang Press Center did exist. It was based in an old French Hotel in Da Nang and served as a base where the Combat Information Bureau of the US Marine Corps could lodge their stories from the battle fields. The logo and slogan (Cocktail Glasses on top of a typewriter) seemed to reflect that it may have been one of the better postings at the time!



In any case I was half way there—I had a Japanese copy of a Zippo with engraving and a badge from a place that did exist in the 1970's.

While searching the Internet I came across a picture of a beer coaster with the same logo. This was on an American War Veteran's website. From this I was able to track down a vet who was actually there at the time. I sent him a picture of my lighter.

His replied as follows:

Hello Peter,

First let me say thank you for writing. Your email stirred up a lot of memories. Over the years I've tried to contact some buddies from that time but have not been successful. There were really only a handful of us that served in CIB, a military name for Da Nang Press Center, operated by the Marine Corps. Enlisted guys like myself at CIB were mostly Marine journalists, photographers, and radio/TV people. If you wanted to pursue this further, a possible source would be the "U.S. Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association", USMCCA, that you could find online. If I had your lighter, I would try to auction it off with the proceeds going to that organization.

As for authentication, I'm not sure but tend to think it is genuine. Da Nang Press Center did not sell these items but had some protocol to procure them as gifts or whatever. After getting over the emotions of your email, I searched an old seabag where I keep some value-less treasures and at the bottom I found the lighter I vaguely remembered. It is a treasure that has no value. I'm attaching some pictures. The box of my lighter has "Japan" stamped on the bottom. It is not a full-size lighter but a slim-size lighter and it is not a Zippo. Your lighter ap-

pears to be full-size. Does it have "Zippo" engraved on the bottom? Are there any other identifying marks?

Thank you for writing and I would love to hear more. Did you visit the area around the Da Nang Press Center? What is it like now? Are there any museums nearby?

Accompanying Jim's email was a picture of what he had got out of his old Sea Bag—and there it was, a lighter that was the exactly the same as mine—given that his was in much better shape. Mystery solved—a genuine artefact from the Vietnam War Era.

Back to the surfing competition that spawned this search—I had visited Da Nang and the beaches many times before this time and never seen a wave bigger than 3 inches on the beach where the surfing competition to take place. A day before the pro surfers arrived it was as flat as a tack. Miraculously a typhoon off the Philippines whipped up 3 metre waves for the duration of the competition—the surfers remarked it was the best beach break they had had all season. Two days after they left it was back to its normal flat self. It seems that the surf gods were smiling on us!



The Restored Lighter –
mystery solved

Jim's Lighter from his
time in Vietnam

More Stories Needed!

The focus of the Newsletter this year will be on people and places. I'm sure there are thousands of stories out there, and some that we can print! Do we have members that were in PNG? It would be great to hear about it. How about Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos—there was some great work done there by OTC. Other international operations such as Kazakhstan, Georgia—there must be someone that was on that famous Antonov flight to transport the Satellite dish from Australia? What about our business offices in London, NZ and New York. Of course most of OTC's work was done onshore—The SOR, MOR, BOR, Coastal Radio, Stations, Paddo, Broadway etc....lets get those memories working and preserve it for posterity.

Articles can be lodged by email, letter or recorded over the 'phone. Your editor is a very proficient touch typist thanks to OTC and Mrs Eastern at the Sydney Business college—but that's another story!

The best story (as judged by the committee) in each issue receives a \$50 prize.

Life on the Islands 1955-1962—Des Kinnersley

Des Kinnersley has kindly shared his recollections of OTC life on the Suva and Fanning Island Cable Stations between 1955 and 1962. This issue features the second part of the story - Fanning Island.

The island was discovered in the 1870's by Captain Edmund Fanning of the Whaler 'Betsy' and subsequently became part of the British Gilbert & Ellis Island Protectorate.

It is now part of the Republic of Kiribati and has been renamed Tabueran.

The island was selected as a cable station in 1902 by the Pacific Cable Board as part of the "All Red Route" for the British Empire Round the World Cable System. The world maps at the time showed all British colonies, Dominions and other British possessions in red. The cable system was designed to only have landfalls at British possession, hence the name.

Apart from the Cable Station the only other occupant of the island was a copra plantation owned by Burns Philp.

The island was very isolated with no air strip and well off the main shipping lanes.

The only method of getting to the island at the time was by chartered ship which called at the island every five months to drop off incoming staff and supplies and take the outgoing staff to Vancouver.

The NZ operated Union Steamship Company had four ships which operated between Fiji and Vancouver carrying raw sugar. The ships were all Liberty ships built during WW2 and were given Maori names, Waitomo, Waihemu, Waikawa, and Wairuna. Two of the ships operated under NZ



The Cable Station on Fanning Island

articles and two under Canadian articles to avoid problems during industrial action.

The ships had to be paid a diversion fee to call at Fanning as it was well off their normal route.

The ships had three 2 berth cabins so they could a maximum of 6 people to Fanning and take the same number of outgoing staff to Vancouver.

I was transferred to Fanning Island in 1960 and my family boarded the Union Steamship cargo ship 'Waitomo' at Lautoka in Fiji. After a very pleasant 10 day voyage, we arrived off Fanning to see a very low lying island with what appeared to be hundreds of coconut trees and very little sand.

There was one unusual feature, on one part of the island we could see Norfolk Island pine trees which appeared very odd. These trees actually marked the area near the Cable Station and were planted when the station was first established in 1902.

The ships anchored off the island and the incoming staff and supplies were brought ashore by launch and lighter.

As there were no facilities on the island, the Cable Station had to be completely self-sufficient. This necessitated having our own power plant, grocery stores, canteen supplies, and all general purpose items. There was no 'Bunnings' a few minutes away and 5 months was a long time to wait for the next ship.

It was quite an eye-opener to see the amount of facilities which had to be maintained namely:

- Staff Cottages,
- Power Station,
- Carpentry Shop,
- Bakery,
- Single Staff Mess,
- Boat Shed,
- Swimming Pool,
- 2 concrete Tennis Courts,
- 2 Jetties,

Several other out buildings which had various uses as well as the fuel storage area where the fuel which was supplied in 44 gallon drums, sufficient to last for 6 months.

The main Office building which was a very long two storey building. The ground floor was used for the cable battery banks, Liquor Store, Grocery Store, and General Stores. The upper floor housed the main equipment rooms, workshop, Managers Office, ' Hermit Crab' (the Recreation area and bar), Library, Billiard Room, 6 Bed Hospital and the Doctor's Surgery.

The expatriate Staff consisted of :

- Manager and Manager's Clerk
- D/E (STO 2 equivalent)
- 1 Cable Officer on permanent day duties
- 2 Cable Officers on rotating shifts
- 2 Telegraphists who were capable of doing rotating shifts by themselves but as everyone

lived on site, help was readily available, if problems arose.

- 1 Technician

The Doctor provided by Cable & Wireless as was the Outside Engineer. His Duties involved maintaining the Power station, 2 Vehicles, Motor Launch, Large Freezer for keeping 5 months supply of meat frozen and the Large Cool Room for 5 months storage of fresh vegetables. The station was closed in 1964.



Des with Keith McCredden on Fanning Island

Denis Pickwell remembers Charlie Carthew

Some of the old MOR staff will have memories of Charlie Carthew who ran the Telegraphists school. Some tended to deride Charlie but he really had at heart the interests of his students and also was very loyal to OTC. When you talk about mentors, I class Charlie as one of those. Everyone in his school worked hard and all had a good word to say about him.

I was about half way through my Wireless Operator's Cert. with the Marconi School which operated adjacent to the Telegraphists School. As a result I often passed Charlie and had a bit of a yarn. That was my mistake. The next thing I know Charlie says "Look, while you are doing your Certificate why not join us at OTC". "I will help you with your Morse code and I'm sure I'll be able to get you in as a telegraphist as well". I didn't bite the first few times but Charlie persisted and eventually I applied to join OTC and they started me filing "flimsies".

Sure enough Charlie kept on pushing OTC and they let me join his school and in due course I went back to the Operating Room as a Telegraphist. Charlie continued taking an interest in my progress and when a position as Senior Technician came up at Fiskville I was offered the job (I think I was the only one locally available at the time who had the necessary technical qualifications). I was a bit hesitant to take it up as I had some idea of going to sea as a Wireless Op. but Charlie encouraged me and that was where I went - Best move I could have made.

Had a great time at Fiskville, terrific staff, all "spit and polish" - but we took great pride in our work and the older men always encouraged (sometimes with fairly strong language) the younger ones.

Three Expat Tales from Ted Bastow

During my stint at Port Moresby Radio, my wife was working at the Government Printers Office at Konedobu. One of her fellow workers was a lady, whom we shall call Mrs C. Mrs C was rather heavy handed with the local staff.

On one occasion my wife overheard Mrs C. on the phone to one of the local staff, it went like this:

The phone was answered by Lalani.

Mrs C. "Where's Inogo"

Lalani "He's gone to Colac"

Mrs C. "What ? Gone to Colac, what's he doing there ?"

Lalani. "He's gone to fish, Mrs C."

Mrs C. "Gone to fish ? What's he doing fishing in Colac?"

Then the penny dropped and Mrs C. hurriedly hung up the phone.

You see, in Papua New Guinea the letters P, B T and C are interchangeable.



Bob H. was on watch at Port Moresby Radio on the small ships sched.

Small ship "Port Moresby Radio this is mumble, mumble, mumble".

Bob H. "Ship calling Port Moresby Radio, please say again"

Small ship "Port Moresby Radio this is mumble, mumble, mumble"

Bob H. "Ship calling Port Moresby Radio, what is your name?"

Small ship "My name is Lahui"

Long pause then the penny dropped.

Bob H. "No, not your bloody name, your ship's name"..



I was doing a job at Colombo for the CCCA, a section of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Bureau and had been told that one section of the hospital there was known as the Honda ward, for obvious reasons.

I passed this information on to my wife, Marilyn, who was with me on this task.

One day one of our Sri Lankan friends, Lalith, was driving Marilyn to some place and as they passed the hospital Marilyn remarked "Ahh, that's the Honda ward".

In a surprised response Lalith cried "Ohh, how you know this ? You know *everything*".

Back to Bondi Re Union—40th Anniversary at the Xmas Function

Way back in 1974 a group of OTC Trainee Technical Officers rented a house at 15 Consett Ave, Bondi Beach.

In November this year, we will be returning to Bondi Beach for a 40th Reunion commencing with the OTVA Annual Christmas Lunch at the Bowlers Club in the city on Thursday 6th November and the party will continue all weekend. For more information, please contact Colin Kelly at colin.ned.kelly@gmail.com or 0412 703 522.

Financial Member?—One Easy Transfer and that's it Forever!

Secure your “Enduring” Membership of the OTVA for the one off payment of \$50.

The OTVA is dedicated to organising reunions to maintain valuable friendships forged while working in the telecommunications industry. The regular meetings provide a great networking opportunity for those still in the workforce. Our 250 plus members have a common desire to preserve the history of international telecommunications in Australia.

To ensure that the OTVA can continue to preserve your part in Australia's history—become a financial member it is easier than ever!

Enduring Membership—One-Off \$50 Transfer!

Enduring Membership is open to any person wishing to join the OTVA. You will secure a full membership for the rest of your days or as long as the OTVA exists as an association without having to pay any future membership fees.

Two Easy Steps:

1. Transfer Funds from your bank account to:

ACCOUNT NAME: **OTVA**

BSB NO: **802155** (Bankstown Credit Union)

ACCOUNT NUMBER: **2081816**

Remitter: '**SUBS: your name**'.

2. Email the Treasurer and President

If possible, take a screenshot of your transfer confirmation and send it to:

treasurer@otva.com cc president@otva.com

If you cant take a screenshot—please email the treasurer (cc President) anyway to let them know that your have paid your subscription.

Annual Membership remains at \$10—please use the steps above to transfer your annual membership fees.

If you do not have access to funds transfer you can mail a cheque to OTVA PO Box 702 Riverwood NSW 2210.