

Front Page missing. Maybe November 1996

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TELSTRA - 1995 ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman of Telstra, David Hoare, reported that the results for the year to 30th June 1995 were strong.

Revenues rose to \$14,081.4 million from \$13,362.5 million in the previous year, and produced earnings before abnormals and tax of \$2972.9 million compared with \$2,941.9 million in the 12 months to 30 June 1994.

The Board recommended a substantial increase in the total yearly dividend to the Government from \$738 million to \$944 million. Together with interest and taxes the Federal Government will receive \$2,472 million from Telstra's operations during 1994-95.

The result was achieved in a period in which the telecommunications market continued to expand and in which competitive pressures continued unrelentingly to increase, with product and service prices under sustained downward pressure. Thus, the year was one in which there were continued efforts to improve productivity, reduce unit costs and further enhance customer service standards.

It was also a year in which Telstra made meaningful strides in new and improved services, network modernisation, major capital expenditure, outlays in commitments in new network facilities and value added service operations, as well as significant international business initiatives in the region.

The Government completed its review of post 1997 telecommunications policy. It is now clear that Telstra will operate in one of the worlds most open competitive telecommunications regimes, embracing carriage, reselling, service and information providers.

The progress of the Corporation over recent years in the light of the challenges has been outstanding. It has been achieved through the contribution of our people at every level in the Corporation. Dedication and professionalism have been exceptional, and performance improvements impressive, particularly in areas of new technology and greater customer focus.

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From the above figures the selling off of Telstra sounds like selling the goose that laid the golden egg. The profits of the international side would be interesting to know. Also from articles in Transit it would be to the publics advantage to know the number of overseas dollars earned by the offshore activities.

VALE

OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES GO TO THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE FOLLOWING COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY

JOHN BEDFORD

John commenced as a temporary technician at Lonsdale Street in 1959. During his career he worked at Rockbank and Fiskville and retired from Melbourne in 1986 on invalidity grounds. He suffered poor health in recent years and died of cancer on 20 March 1996.

MARGARET DOBSON

Margaret died on 27 January. For many years she was the private secretary to Bob Long the Assistant General Manager, OTC and subsequently to Cyril Vahtrick who followed him into the position, before she was promoted to a position in the Methods Section.

DEREK JOLLY

Derek worked in S.O.R. for several years before joining the Training Group as an Instructor. He suffered poor health for quite some time and died suddenly on 13 February 1996.

BETH KENNEDY

A requiem mass was held for Beth Kennedy loving wife of Jim Kennedy (retired OTC Melbourne) who died suddenly on 15 April 1996. The funeral service was attended by about 200 family and friends. Many OT Veterans were in attendance.

STAN LUXTON

Stan passed away suddenly on 19 November 1995 after suffering a massive cerebral haemorrhage.

He spent many years in S.O.R. and the Operator Training School training the I.T.O's and S.I.T.O'S.

JOHN MAURER

John died on 13 April 1995. His whole career with OTC was spent in S.O.R

KEN MILLBAND

Ken died on 23 January in Western Australia following a long battle with cancer. He worked as a technical officer covering operational and maintenance duties at Paddington for many years.

NORM ODGERS

Norm had a long and varied career in the Coast Radio Service including time spent at Port Moresby. He had been ill for a long time and died on 28 May aged 90.

WENTWORTH QUIRK

Lyle Gowanloch informs us that Wentworth (Wenty) Quirk, formerly with Pacific Cable Board, died in Sydney recently from melanoma.

WAL UWINS

Wal passed away on the 12 November last year. He joined the Pacific Cable Board in 1924 and retired from the service in 1965. He did a term of service as the Manager's Clerk at Fanning Island and on takeover by OTC in 1950 was employed in the Accounts Department.

BETTY WALLENS

Betty was Secretary to the Traffic Accountant, Melbourne for many years working with Jim Robinson, George McDonald and John Mcgrory. She also worked for a few years as Cashier. Betty died in October 1995.



In November 1995 we received an impassioned plea from DEREK MOORE, an ex-CRS&MARITIME member, who was a recipient of the O.T.V.A. NEWSLETTER, but pointed out to us that he could not communicate with us because of lack of communication as to who was what and where.

This point was not lost on PAM HELPS as she had agreed with me that it was a stirring suggestion and was done in the May edition of the NEWSLETTER. but unfortunately was not published in the November edition.

Firstly, let me advise our readers and contributors that we are operating in most uncertain conditions at the moment. We were fortunate on other occasions that TELSTRA had the facilities, not only to prepare NEWSLETTER, but to make the require copies needed. These facilities are now very restricted and Pamela prepared our last edition under most difficult circumstances.

I have reproduced the list of Secretaries of the O.T.V.A. which, hopefully, will be reprinted in the May, 1996, copy. Of course State Secretaries will change from time but at the moment the information provided should fill the bill.

So I say to you all keep this list even if you do not keep the back issues.

Remove it from this edition and put it under a magnetised section of the home refrigerator, or some place which is readily accessible. DO NOT STICK IT ON THE BEDROOM DRESSING—TABLE MIRROR. Some women are funny about that.

Anyway, Derek, I am glad that you appreciate the NEWSLETTER.

OUT OF THE PAST

Whilst sitting around one day contemplating whether I would slash my wrists or just go and have another beer, I received a note from LES BROWN, an ex—fast bowler on the team which represented the Melbourne Office at Wagga, many years ago, and a man I am pleased to call friend, whether he likes it or not. Someone with a religious bent told me that the Good Book says, “love Thine enemy — it drive him crazy”, or words to that effect. Anyway this is what he said:

“Greetings my friend. As always thoroughly enjoyed the latest edition of NEWSLETTER?. If it wasn't for this I would not have known of Kath Stone's passing, so I gave Harry a buzz and we had a long chat, much to Telecom's delight.

We replayed many cricket matches at Wagga and chatted over old friends, both present and those who left us. And now, in this latest edition, I find out that he has been playing up in Hong Kong. Sad, isn't it! One is not safe anywhere any more. Ill give him another call this evening.

I see that Gow has been “holidaying” in hospital again, so it looks like another call is warranted.

I read, with great interest, the article by GORDON CUPIT, “Victory in the Pacific”. He has put it all together so well I shudder to think what it will be like in 20/30 years time. Won't be our worries, though. I never had the pleasure of meeting Gordon, but I feel that I have known him for years from all I have read about what he was involved in with OTC. Sounds a good bloke to me.

I thought Harry hit it all on the head with his remarks about “It was Christmas Day in the Workhouse.” How very true!

Sorry about the typing. I tried successfully to take off a fair slice off the top of one of my fingers while cutting back in the garden, so the crook finger on the right hand throws one off balance a bit. Never mind.

Hooroo for now. God Bless, and I hope you are keeping in good health.”

Hey Les, a bunch of us met Harry when he visited Sydney. More about that Later
Ando.

TRACKING DOWN OLD FRIENDS

Geoff Whitmore

During last year I made the effort to locate an old Beam friend 'Frank Palmer'. Frank joined AWA around 1941 with me and served throughout the war years on the operating staff MOR. Around 1945 he was transferred with Geoff Day to SOR and from there for a short time Norfolk Island. Eventually Frank ended up at Port Vila New Hebrides as a radio officer with the British/French administration. He is now a consulting engineer for "SOCOMETRE" Vanuatu. Frank has been responsible for the installation of the radio stations eg. "Espirito Santo" and Solomon Islands also Port Vila. When eventually contacted on "Ham" radio we informed Frank of the Melbourne Vets reunion. Next sked Frank informed me he was coming down and had booked his ticket. He would have liked to see the Sydney friends, but was unable to break his journey, but we have remained in contact ever since. Our group Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 0630G/14130.5 Kc/s consists of Deane Laws VK4ALN, Mick Wood VK2VX, Ray Baty VK2BT and myself VK3DJW. Since returning to Vanuatu Frank has been awarded the "National Medal of Merit" along with the Australian High Commissioner for Vanuatu and the French Consul. Frank had a marvellous time at the reunion and hopes to see the Vets in Brisbane in the near future. My best regards to all.

FOOTNOTE: Frank Palmer's ham radio contact is YJ8AA

CAN ANYONE HELP?

Dr Peter Cahill, 7 Wynyard Street, Indooroopilly, 4068 - Ph (07) 3371 4794- is conducting a research into the Rabaul and Kokopo area of the gazelle peninsula in New Guinea for the period between the wars..1921-1942.

We will be giving him a copy of Ted Bishton's story as he has seen one edition of the Newsletter and is very interested. He is keen to contact any of our members who served in these areas during that period or anyone who has any stories of that region even if they did not serve there.

He has already published a story on the Chinese in Rabaul] and he will be visiting Sydney in the week beginning 14 July. He would welcome the opportunity to meet with any of our members during that week.

WILLIS ISLAND REUNION

Mr Peter Fletcher of the Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland Regional Office is keen to contact officers who served on Willis Island. The 8th November will be the 75th anniversary of the first observation on Willis and it is planned to hold a reunion either in Townsville or Brisbane for staff who ever served there. The service board at Willis Island shows a number of AWA/OTC staff who were stationed there prior to 1966. It is intended to publish some commemorative booklets so if anyone has any anecdotes regarding life on Willis or if you require further information regarding the reunion please contact Peter Fletcher on Ph: (07) 3864 8793 or Fax: (07) 3221 4895. (See over for letter from P. Fletcher)

Dear Former Willis Islander

As many of you are now aware on 8 November this year it will be 75 years since Willis Island sent its first observation

There seems to be some level of support for a reunion of all those officers past and present who served on the Island and the 8 November being a Friday this year would seem to be the obvious date. So we know what sort of function to plan, we need to have a firm indication of the level of support. I need to ask you some questions.

1. Would you wish to attend such a reunion if you were able?
2. If "Yes" would you like it in Townsville or Brisbane?
3. Would you like a) a fully served sit down meal and speeches (\$50 to \$60)
b) a semi formal cocktail party (\$25 to \$30)
c) beer and sangars at the local pub (about \$15)?
4. Would you prefer afternoon or evening?

Your response by the end of July would be appreciated.

Lastly thanks to all those who have committed to paper their recollection of the early years. If you have an interesting anecdote to tell and have not already written to me I would still be interested in your story for the booklet we hope to produce.

For your information we are trying to have some sort of media feature prepared. Hopefully a TV documentary but it may be a newspaper feature article. In addition it is planned to have a commemorative plaque on the Island unveiled by some dignitary.

I will keep you informed of developments.

Yours faithfully

P R Fletcher
for Regional Director Queensland

ANOTHER T.V. STAR.

G.C.

Brian Travis was the star of a half hour show on Channel 2 in a segment of 'Open Learning'. The subject was Communications Network Management featuring the INOC area at Paddington.

Well over my head but sounded important, and involved.

ANNUAL RE UNION.

G.C.

The Annual Re-union in December was another outstanding success with 180 in attendance. Eamonn Fitzpatrick presented the Association with a beautifully presented Pressure Gauge used on the Paddington/Dalley Street line. He mounted it on a carved wooden base.

VETERAN'S "HAM" HOOKUP.

G.C.

Veteran Amateur Radio lads are on the air at the following times.

Group A. 0915 and 1630 hrs daily on 7060 Khz.

Group B. 1015 daily on 14130 Khz.

DARWIN BOMBINGS - WORLD WAR II.

A recent edition of Transit covered the bombing of Darwin which indicated that the station was hit on two occasions. Phil Chapman tells us that the station received hits on four occasions. He should know he was there in the middle of it. Here is his account.

There were 60 Air Raids on Darwin from February 1942 through to November 1943. The heaviest raids were in 1942. The day of the first two raids by 242 aircraft, 19th February 1942, the station was machine-gunned by a zero fighter, causing minor damage to the aerial system. Successive raids on the 15th and 16th of June each carried out by a force of 27 heavy bombers with fighter escorts caused considerable damage to the town and to the radio station. On both these occasions the Japanese used 'daisy cutters' (anti-personnel bombs) and incendiary bombs ringing the station with some 50 bomb craters, plus some 10 unexploded bombs with 400 metres. On the 15th, the station roof was holed in dozens of places, all windows blown out - even the verandah posts gouged and splintered. Most of the radio receivers had valves blown out and loudspeakers with burst cones, and fires raging throughout the grounds.

The 16th was even worse with the station oil-store gutted, the station truck (carrying our evacuation equipment) destroyed together with OICs Lou Curnock's car. The ceilings of the station building were also ripped apart. All staff, with help from the Navy were fighting fires and cleaning up for hours on both days.

Darwin contd.

Similarly, the staff, mostly in different slit trenches, all had narrow escapes being mere metres from bombs on both days. It was a hopeless task to repair the building which survived due to the 33 cm thick concrete walls. However, all services were maintained and all transmitters and receivers restored to working order by the 17th. OIC Curnock in his report stated, inter-alia, 'It appears that we have become a definite objective of the Japanese and must face the possibility of losing all of the equipment on the station at any time. These words came almost true as on the 27th August, a lone bomber attacked VID and dropped three heavy 500 lb (227 kilogram) bombs. The first landed alongside the main aerial mast badly bending it at the top, the third landed outside the station front gate but the second dropped fair and square on the main station building, wiping out half of the structure and destroying every vestige of roofing. One main wall cracked and bulged out, the other three main walls were badly cracked. The engine room, next to the operating room, was obliterated leaving a crater one metre deep and 2 metres across where the Fordson engine used to be. Damage to the equipment was too extensive to list, but, suffice to say, with the able overall supervision of Jack Doggett, Engineer flown up from Sydney Head Office - some of the equipment was moved to the other end of the building and the station once again operational. In the days it took to effect this 'make-shift' changeover, all essential services were maintained with the cooperation of the Navy Secondary Signals Distribution Office and their main transmitting and receiving station at Coonawarra some 15 Kms south of Darwin. The Make-shift arrangements not only saw the end of the war, but continued to be operational until a new Darwinradio was built at Fannie Bay in the late 1950's.

A more detailed description of the attacks and damage caused is fully covered in Lawrence Durrant's excellent book 'The Seawatchers'.

LAPEROUSE MUSEUM

The National Parks and Wildlife operate a very good museum in the original cable building at Laperouse and is worthy of a visit if in the area. Seeing the station was the first cable landfall in the state, it is a pity that this fact was not highlighted, it could be a good place to show off some of our early cable gear.

WORDS

OP

Over the years certain words have become popular and for a period of time we saw them appearing regularly in minutes and correspondence. Examples have been - 'generating papers', 'inter-alia', 'at this point in time', 'state of the art', and 'enhanced'. A new one appeared in the Nov/Dec Transit.

"I would like to thank the Intelligent Networks (IN) Services team at Paddington, especially Cliff Varcoe, Scott Neylon and Les Muffet, who consistently 'massaged' the SCANTS platform to meet our requirements" said Dale.

TARAWA

'Blue' Easterling

Tarawa is the capital of the Republic of Kiribati which veterans will remember as the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony. Full independence was obtained in 1979. It is spread over 33 atolls in three major groups. Gilberts (17), Phoenix (8) and the Line Islands (8). However, the land area is only 886 square kilometres, and the population around 70,000. It covers a huge area of the Pacific, five million square kilometres - east to west 3870 km and north to south 2050 km.

In 1984/5 an automatic telephone exchange and satellite station were established on Tarawa in the Gilbert group and in 1988 OTC entered into a management agreement with the Government of Kiribati to manage the national carrier Telecom Kiribati Ltd. (TKL). 1990 saw a joint venture agreement between OTC and the government of Kiribati when TSKL was formed and became the national carrier. In 1992 satellite and automatic telephone services extended to Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean in the Line Island group, also known as Eastern Kiribati.

On Sunday October 8 1995 Tarawa had a planned outage. When power was switched back on the satellite dish rotated uncontrollably and smashed into a nearby building, damaging the reflector and squashing the waveguide.

Next morning Tarawa's Telecom authority asked Mr. David Olley, General Manger of the Bank of Kiribati, and an active radio amateur to get a message through to Peter Dalton at Telstra Sydney. Peter was the Business Manager for Kiribati business at the time. David tuned around the 20 metre band, found an Australian group chatting and broke in. He was lucky, almost all of the group being retired OTC staffers.

This group has been running for yonks; Norm Odgers, Ron Cocker, Tom Swarbrick and Sian Leahy in W.A., Harry Stone in SA. (when not creating mayhem in HongKong or Kangaroo Island), myself and Deane Laws on the Gold Coast, Geoff Warner and John Lawler in Sydney. John is a retired ABC TV Technician. Both John and I took the message, the east coasters being closest. As I was used to traffic handling, John opted to act as backup and be ready to step in if conditions required.

The message described the damage, no spares and asking for immediate assistance to restore fax and phone communications internationally. When Peter and I made contact it turned out that he was an amateur operator also, therefore minimal explanations needed. He said that Sydney had been puzzled when Tarawa did not come back on circuit. Having worked out at Tarawa on secondment he knew the scenario and the people.

David is a former Westpac man, and I was with its forerunner, the 'Wales' before I obtained my ticket and joined OTC so we were on common ground. During some of the lulls we exchanged some of the more printable bank yarns.

Next day he transmitted another message; investigations into the internal mechanisms showed much more damage and another appeal for assistance. Peter suggested that Tarawa use the INMARSAT equipment at the Fisheries Division, but it was unserviceable.

David had his hands full; running the bank, keeping skeds with me and running the one-off commercial sked with Suva on a frequency just outside the 20 metre amateur band. Kiribati is dependent to some degree on the money remitted from its young men crewing foreign ships.

Meantime Peter was performing minor miracles; within 48 hours of receiving the first of Tarawa's messages he had organised a new satellite dish and associated equipment, two installation technicians, passports, visas, funding and the RAAF to transport the gear by Hercules aircraft. This good news was given to David on Thursday and that the aircraft would leave Richmond NSW on Saturday 14th and arrive Tarawa that afternoon. (All of Tarawa turned out to see the monster.)

The technicians brought a SATFONE with them but the amateur radio link was kept for a few more days just in case. They expected to restore service within four days, five at the most.

Telstra has proposed to TSKL to repair and refurbish the damaged antenna and to bring it back to its original specifications. It is also proposed to up-grade the satellite transmission equipment which feeds the telecommunications signals to the antenna to take advantage of the newer technology that is now available in this area which will enable TSKL to carry more traffic on the antenna at a much reduced INTELSAT operating cost. (The TSKL Board has yet to approve these proposals.)

Once the damaged antenna has been repaired and refurbished the emergency equipment which is currently carrying the Kiribati satellite traffic will be dismantled and returned to Telstra in Australia.

Monday October 9 was my 73rd birthday and it really made my day, faxing and phoning and once again being useful. In the C.R.S. there was always something of an unusual nature cropping up as we all know.

NOTE from 'Blue'

My pan was just some simple traffic handling, fortuitous that David Olley at Tarawa broke in on an ex OTC staff network whose members knew the ropes. The big deal was the way Australia responded so quickly and efficiently to help a small Pacific nation in trouble. The real credit goes to everyone at Head Office and Stores.

NOTE from 'Qpee'

For those who don't know Blue; he spent most of his time in the CRS with service in Papua-NG, Thursday Island and LaPerouse, with a small stint in the International Relations Division in Head Office. (Blue's coffee perculator and its bubbling contents could be smelt right through the office)...In the past Blue has been a prolific correspondent for the Newsletter. He has done some remarkable research for his articles. Unfortunately we have not received much from him of late and trust that his story on Tarawa is the start of a new era. 73 is getting on Blue, but aren't we all.

I have a letter from JUDITH HOLLAND (nee Hamiltom) who lives in Clontarf, Queensland. Here it is:—

“In your publication in 1988, you printed an article I had forwarded to the O.T.V.A. which, from memory, I had come across in the Eastern Province “HERALD” newspaper in September, 1987. The subject was the “WARATAH” the Australian ship which mysteriously disappeared off the wild coast of South Africa back in 1909.

In 1991, I learnt that a small submarine was being brought to South Africa for research work and, hopefully, an investigation into the actual whereabouts of the missing “Waratah”.

As I was moving from South Africa back to our home in Brisbane, I lost track of events, but have since received a letter from the person involved in the project. I am enclosing a copy of the letter for your interest, and for that of our members. I shall keep in touch with the Director of Educational and Scientific Services, Dr. Mike Bruton, who is now based in Cape Town.

I am sure there are many people still interested in this mystery and who would like to know what happened to the “Waratah” - hopefully more later, although I am sure that if valuable information came to hand, the media would be on to it long before I would have a chance to up-date our members.

The letter Judith received reads as follows:-

TWO OCEANS QUARIUM
Cape Town

Dear Prof and Mrs Holland,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March, 1995.

The “JAGO” submarine did extremely valuable work in 1991 when we were able to dive seven times deeper than any scientists had ever dived before off the South African coast. We found whole communities of marine animals that were previously unknown, and many new distribution records were recorded.

Unfortunately, due to lack of funds and time restraints, we were not able to use the “JAGO” to search for the wreck of the “Waratah”.

We are hoping that South Africa will soon have its own submersible so that we can resume research on deepsea marine life, and perhaps also on the “Waratah”.

Best wishes,
Yours sincerely,

Mike Bruton
Director,
Educational & Scientific Services
P.O. Box 50603
Waterfront 8002
Cape Town , South Africa.

We did an article on the ‘Waratah’ in the Newsletter in 1988 and will recap from that story. It was during the night of July 27, 1909 that a ship with 212 people aboard vanished in the cruel seas off the South African east coast as if she had never existed. No bodies came to the surface, no lifeboats, no flotsam and jetsam, no slicks. Nothing.

Loss of 'Waratah' (Contd).

What happened on that Stormy night is a mystery that has captured the imagination since. South African adventure writer Geoffrey Jenkins even based one of his novels, "A Scand of the Sea", on the story.

The Blue Anchor liner "Waratah" of 9339 tons, her 93 passengers her crew of 119 and cargo of about 6,500 tons of flour, frozen meat and lead concentrates, disappeared off the face of the earth.

She left Durban on July 26, 1909 after topping up her coal bunker making for Cape Town on the penultimate leg of her homeward voyage from Australia to England.

The next day, July 27, she overtook the cargo steamer 'Clan McIntyre' . The weather was fine and the two ships exchanged signals before the 'Clan McIntyre' watched the 'Waratah' which had an average speed of 14 knots, disappear Southward.

She was never seen again.

That night the weather deteriorated rapidly, the master of the 'Clan McIntyre' referring to it as the worst storm he had experienced in the 13 years he had plied the South African coast.

Because marine radio communication, was not yet in general use, the alarm was not raised until the 'Waratah' became 3 days overdue in Cape Town.

An extensive Naval and land based search failed to find any trace.

INDONESIA.

OTC/Telstra Engineer John Phillips, (we remember him for his fine efforts in organising and his fine input into the OTC Bi-centennial Exhibition "From Settlement to Satellites".) advises that he took a Telstra team to Indonesia to bid for one of the KSO Projects. This occurred in January last year. The bid was successful and he is now an adviser to the joint Venture Company (MITRA GLOBAL), which is running the Central Java local telephone network. He advises that it has twice the population of Australia and in only half the land mass of Tasmania. Sees lots of opportunity for the service.

John hopes to be back home this year. He has been a leading light in some of the major cable projects in which OTC has been involved. We will be looking forward to his return in the hope that he can give some help and advice to the Historical Society.

COLOMBO BOMBING.

Baldy Stone, who spends winters in Hongkong with his Son John (Cathay Pacific pilot), had a few sleepless nights recently. Harry knew that John was flying to Colombo and was staying the night of the bombing in the hilton which turned out to be next door to the bombed building. When Harry managed to get in touch with him, he found that he was unhurt but badly shaken up and partially deaf. Pilots can't be deaf, so Harry was seeing his winters in jeopardy. Fortunately John has got over this affliction, and Harry is now smiling once again.

ANNIVERSARY.

One of our more junior members Jack 'Wick' Creswick recently with his wife celebrated his 70th wedding anniversary. 'Wick' joined the Pacific Cable Company in 1915. The event was celebrated with friends and family on a boat which was organised by their son (John) and daughter.

SUCCESS STORY.

G.C.

A recent story in the Historical page of the Telegraph/Mirror tells of the war deeds of Qantas members. One incident relates that Qantas flyers were involved in a remarkable rescue of refugees in New Guinea in May 1942. Qantas Captain Orm Denny was given command of the operation.

He flew two aircraft to Mount Hagen, but it was immediately apparent the airstrip, about 1000m long was too soft for take-off in a loaded aircraft. Denny hit on a simple solution. About 2000 New Guineans had come to Mt Hagen to see the aircraft. Knowing how much the people liked a sing-sing. Denny organised one - and 2000 danced on the airstrip for a DAY AND A NIGHT making the surface as hard as it would ever be. In all 78 refugees were evacuated.

This story has appeared in a previous Newsletter, however it brings to mind the career of a Beam messenger in the 1931-32 era, one Bert Ritchie.

From messenger Bert passed through the ranks of Circulation Clerk and Service Clerk to junior Telegraphist. He was an ardent hockey player and was off duty on a few occasions due to hockey injuries. He was hauled up before Supt Mark Mortimer and advised that he should give the game away as AWA were not prepared to give him any more time off. Being a God fearing young man, Bert, did cease playing, bought a motor cycle and enrolled in a pilots course at Mascot. He obtained his wings and then followed this by a Navigator's course. He was successful in obtaining a 'B' Class certificate, one which was fairly rare in those days.

Bert then resigned from AWA, took up a flying career as Navigator and trained as a Commercial Pilot He eventually joined Qantas and flew their planes. During the war he was employed on a number of biscuit bombing missions in Papua-NewGuinea.

The next we heard of Bert was that he became the Senior Captain of Qantas and flew the first Constellation on its delivery flight across the Pacific. Later he was promoted to Executive positions and for the last few years of this time was General Manager of Qantas. Incidentally at about the same time his twin brother, also an ex Beam boy, was General Manager of Fijian Airways. Chris followed an Accountancy career in AWA on passing out of the messenger service.

FROM OUR MATES IN NEW ZEALAND.

I got a letter from R.P. (Ray) Connolly who lives at Mt. Maunganui, in N.Z. He has asked me to record Brian Wallace who is Secretary/Treasurer of the Veteran Cablemens Association N.Z. I will do that, Ray, and shove it on the list with the others.

In the meantime here is the article you sent along -

CABLE & WIRELESS LTD

TELCOM REUNION TOUR SEPT 1945

SINGAPORE & MALAYSIA

TELCOM were the C & W staff working with armed forces in 1945 for the re-occupation of South East Asian cable stations and for the reopening of civilian communications. Their status was that similar to War Correspondents. Young staff was recruited in 1943 and trained in Adelaide, under Harry Colliver and Fred Stretton, and in Auckland, under Jock Baird and Dickie Heeps. Both groups moved to Colombo in May 45, approx 23 from each school, the NZ contingent then being under command of Bill Craig. Subsequently they all roved forward, as small detachments, with occupation forces, to Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hongkong & Batavia. These Australasian operators were in company with similar TELCOM staff from UK., which provided the senior engineering staff. Their activities, including the Press Ship, were recorded elsewhere and in earlier issues of OTVA newsletter.

Earlier reunions have been held in Sydney 1985, Auckland 1988 and Bay of Islands NZ 1994. The reunion in Sep 95 was held in Singapore to co-incide with services commemorating the end of World War 2 and the signing of the surrender on 12 Sep 1945. The attendance included a number of widows and a number of local Singapore staff. The complete list of attendees was:—

SINGAPORE retired staff:

Mr/Mrs Taxi Donough, Mr/Mrs Yong Kok Too, Mr Kerry Oei, Mr Jacob Lim, Mr/Mrs Gaw Sin Soon, Mr/Mrs Ronnie Barth, Mr/Mrs Lim Yew Kai, Mr/Mrs Chung Chung Tat.

U.K. retired staff & widows.

Basil & Isabell Leighton,
Mrs Helen Marsden,
John & Mrs Rippengall.
Mrs Wendy Suart,
Keith & Pat Warren.

AUSTRALIAN retired staff & widows.

Jim & Pat Bairstow W.A.

Roger & Nina Bardwell W.A.

Herb Farrar W.A. Pat Sykes W.A.

Mrs Barbara Charles VIC

Geoff & Jean Cox VIC

Bruce & Margaret Gall VIC

Henry Coulson VIC

N.Z. retired staff.

Ray & Josephine Connolly.

Peter & Rita Cowlshaw.

Denis Erson. Mike Fulton.

Kelvin & Margaret Healy.

John & Gina Todd.

Brian & Joan Wallace.

Basil & Cathy Chambers (now resident in Canada)

A reunion luncheon and a formal dinner were held, at which tribute was paid to TELCOM staff who have passed on since 1945. The New Zealand names acknowledged were:-

J.R. (Jock) Baird. C & W, ex PCB.

C.H.(Dickie) Heeps, C & W, ex Eastern Extn.

W. (Bill) Craig. C & W, ex PCB.

R.T. (Red) Blake, died Cocos 1954.

F.R.(Russ) Moir. Hongkong staff died Auckland.

R.J. Dick) Bell, (Marine staff) died Auckland.

G.C. (Grant) Campbell. died Auckland.

The full reunion group also attended the Dawn service at KRANJI Commonwealth War Cemetery & memorial on 12 Sep. Later in the day they attended the Civilian ceremony in the city, where Pat Sykes (86) laid a wreath on behalf of the company, commemorating the 28 C & W staff who died during the capture and occupation of Singapore, or while attempting to escape. The day finished with an evening service at St. Andrews Cathedral.

Other activities in Singapore over the 5 days included a bus tour of “old haunts” and many opportunities to visit the remarkable new city. This was followed by a 6 day coach tour northward, stopping overnight at Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Cameron Highlands and Penang. A tribute is due to Denis Erson, Chairman, Veteran Cablemens Assn NZ, Auckland, who put the tour together with Singapore Airlines, incorporating both Australian & UK veterans. Many friendships were renewed, some after 50 years.

For N.Z. veterans, 4 Dec 1995, sees the A.G.M. and annual luncheon gathering for Veteran Cablemens Assn. at Waipuna Lodge, Pakuranga, Auckland, 11 am.

EARLY WARNING

OP

The work of our Committees is appreciated and the running of our functions is a credit. However, it is imperative that they have advance notice of the numbers attending. A few members are turning up without ringing and many leave it to the last day or so. In the case of NSW please let them know at least three days before the function to allow them and the caterers to be organised.

PUBLICATION OF THE NEWSLETTER

I would like to bring to members attention that the old days of having all the resources ‘in-house’ to produce the Newsletter are no longer with us. It looks that in the future we will have to send copy to outside printers. Therefore, it would be appreciated if members who have articles for the Newsletter could type them up in a manner that they could be sent Direct to the printers. If you are like me, you will use a few bottles of Tipp-ex!!

TELSTRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

QP.

We have mentioned in previous Newsletters that the contents of the OTC Museum have been transferred to the Telstra Historical Society NSW Branch. In all 600 OTC relics have been handed over with some being found in their Museum in the old Post Office located in Hercules Street, Ashfield. The remainder is being held at the Carlingford exchange.

The curator, Bert Spratt, has already set up some of our old gear in his display, but they have very little knowledge of our equipment and will be eagerly looking forward to some of our technical staff and Veterans helping them out. His offsider Brian Mullins has a GNT printer on the bench and wants to know whether it is AC or DC and what voltage. They can be contacted by phone on 716 8091 (Weds only). The museum is open only on Wednesday afternoons and solely run by volunteers. They are a very keen bunch but are hampered by lack of space and lack of finance.

Bert Spratt is definitely a "Steptoe" and will take anything of a historical nature. The small display area and theatrette is not too bad, but the store area at the back is beyond belief. A few of our boxes are in there, but there is no room for any more. The Veterans Honour Board is in a prominent place on the wall.

The Society has an active "oral History" programme and many some of you will know, such as Reg Boyle, Bert Israel, Ron Turnbull, Ted Frewin, Jim Hutchison, Ken Douglas, and Ron Beecham have already given their stories. Copies of the stories are held at Ashfield and State Library.

MESSENGER SERVICES.

QP.

The Eastern Extension Cable Co., The Pacific Cable Board., The Beam Wireless., and the PMG's Dept all operated messenger services. As far as International communications were concerned the three operating companies all delivered overseas telegrams and collected telegrams for onward transmission within the Central Business District and as far afield as Newtown, Pyrmont, Glebe, Kings Cross and Surry Hills. The PMG's Dept were responsible for delivery to the suburbs and country areas. They had no collection service but accepted telegrams at any of their post offices. They received a per word fee for this service.

I do not know when the Cable companies services commenced but the Beam messenger service started in 1927. They were all discontinued by OTC in 1948, when all deliveries were handed over to the PMG's Dept. There was no provision for collections. The phonogram service for lodgement continued which was later carried into Telex lodgements.

TAKING THE KNOCK

(from Ken Mullen)

Many picturesque terms and phrases were used by that notorious group of telegraphists - including myself - who worked in OTC's Sydney Operating Room back in the 50s and 60s. Of them all, I have a particular affection for "Taking the Knock". And while this expression has nothing whatever to do with telegraphic procedures, I imagine it will strike a chord with many of my contemporaries.

One "Took the Knock" by telephoning, or better still, getting someone else to telephone, the supervisor on duty at the SOR and advise that so, and, so would unfortunately not be able to report for duty at the rostered time, having succumbed to illness. If one employed a friend or relative to convey the message, it was advisable to suggest that the caller convey an adequate amount of concern, without going over the top and giving the impression that the absentee was about to give up the ghost.

But it must be admitted that on many occasions, perhaps the majority, the absentee probably never felt better in his life. So why the subterfuge? Well, under existing staff rules, one could take up to four days sick leave per year (not more than two days consecutively) without depleting one's accumulated entitlement of sick leave and without having to supply a Doctor's certificate.

And when one recalls the Dickensian working conditions then in force, it is not surprising that one felt the need to take advantage of one of the few perks available. Working through a horrendous range of shifts meant that one's biological clock was thrown out of gear every second or third day. We were also expected to work from 7 am to 2 pm one day, returning at 11 pm that night to work through until 7 a.m. the following morning. It was sheer hell and, looking back, it is nothing short of miraculous that so many watchkeepers survived to claim the pension.

Meal breaks were non-existent, even on an eight hour shift. Consequently, it became necessary to quietly exit the operating room from time to time in order to seek sustenance at a nearby hostelry. Welded into a tight community by these archaic conditions, the workers of the SOR became expert in "covering" for anyone temporarily absent. Should it be considered unwise to leave the building, there was always the downstairs locker room where one could maintain an adequate stock of pick-me-ups for use as required. If, as happened on one occasion, one was actually found INSIDE the locker by a particularly persistent supervisor, explanations such as "waiting for a bus" were not considered acceptable.

There can be little doubt that these harsh working conditions gave rise to the ritual of "Taking the Knock." Indeed, had it then been possible to research this custom on an academic level, I am sure the findings would have revealed that the judicious use of an occasional "knock" substantially improved the marital relations of many shift workers, as well as extending their lifespan.

Having duly "recovered" and returned to work, it was necessary to complete the paperwork required to authorise the short leave of absence. Among the information to be furnished were details of the (alleged) temporary illness and this, in turn, revealed.

THE KNUCKEY STORY (continuing)
The Overland Telegraph

One afternoon in July, 1974, I was talking to Mr. Hawley, the Stationmaster at Daly Waters, when we noticed a stranger riding along the Roper road. As he came along we walked out to meet him. He looked very worn and thin. He asked for the Stationmaster. I pointed him out, and he handed him a note which he wished to be telegraphed to Mr. Scott who was then the Government Resident at Darwin.

The note read:- "Am nearly starved. We have eaten all our horses except the one Elvey is riding. I have about 20 lbs of dried horseflesh left. Do not know exactly where I am. Elvey is going to ride west until he cuts the telegraph line. Can you help?"

Mr. Hawley immediately sent the message to Mr. Scott, and we took the poor fellow and gave him a feed. We then got his story.

It appeared that Nation and Elvey had joined a Mr. deLatour, who was bringing 100 head of cattle from Gibson Station on the Flinders River, Queensland, to Port Darwin. At a place called Settlement Creek, about 60 miles west of Normanton, they had a disagreement. Nation and Elvey decided to go alone. They had two saddle horses and two pack horses with sufficient provisions that they thought would enable them to reach the Roper River, where they expected to find a settlement. However, they had wandered into the coast ranges and got out of their bearings. After eating all the rations they had to kill and jerk their horses for food. They had killed all but one, and Nation, who was a man of about 60 years of age, could go no further. He decided to camp in the ranges and let Elvey go west for help. Elvey steered west and on his 18th day out luckily struck Mr. Aldridge coming up with the last loading. Mr. Aldridge gave him food and a fresh horse and sent him to Daly Waters station.

It was decided by the Government that I should make a search for Nation.

As we were getting ready to start, DeLatour, the man they had left at Settlement Creek, and a young man of about 18 years of age rode up with a lot of horses. These two had driven the cattle as far as the MacArthur River where they had to leave them. The blacks were troublesome, and they struck out west. In the meantime I had been trying to get from Elvey the route he had travelled. He told me that he had left his mate, Nation, in a very stony range for about 12 miles, he then went west for a day and a half, and was pulled up by a big river running north. From where he struck it he could see the sea. From this point he followed the river for about 20 miles and then crossed a bar.

Now, from what DeLatour had told me about the track and Elvey's description of the river he had crossed I at once concluded it was the Limmen Bight, named by Leichhardt.

Not having a map on me, I telegraphed Mr. Ringwood, who was the assistant astronomer, to send me the latitude and longitude of Leichhardt's crossing of the Limmen Bight. I received this and decided to make a bee-line from Daly Waters to that point. If I was right I would then pick up Elvey's tracks. DeLatour decided that he would go back with us and get his cattle. I took Woods, one of my best bushmen and Elvey with me.

We got on very well until the 4th day out, and then we struck the Hodgson River, which was a tributary of the Roper. We had great difficulty in crossing the river. It went through cliffs of basalt. Our next check was the Gregory Sandstone cliffs and sandstone ranges. They are not ranges, simply the abrupt ending of the Barclay Tablelands. Then all of a sudden we came across a precipice of about 70 feet high, red sandstone. We had travelled about 3 miles along the cliffs before we could get down to low country. We got to the base there and there we struck about a quarter of a mile of the most extraordinary land I have ever ridden through. Pillars of red sandstone ranging 30 feet to 50 feet high and packed so closely together that it was, in places, as much as we could do to get our horses through.

On top of most of these pillars was balanced a stone and they looked as if they would fall off with the slightest touch or sound. We got through very quickly, and I don't think we raised our voices until we were clear of them. We were really afraid that some of these stones would fall on us.

After continuing our course for two days, Woods, all of a sudden, jumped off his horse, called out, "Here is Elvey's track, and so it was, plainly discernible. I was

very glad, for I found out when making my work, we were only 20 miles from Limmen Bight. Finding this track proved my theory that Elvey has crossed Leichhardt's track was correct.

Elvey told me the direction of his track to where he had left Nation. I plotted the track as well as I could and steered for the place where I thought Nation was, and struck out for the Limmen Bight crossing.

There are four conical hills at that place which Leichhardt named the Four Archers. The Archer brothers were well known squatters in Queensland. In a large creek I found a tree on which was enscribed a large L (Leichhardt's tree). The next morning we started out on a bearing of 70o and camped beside a creek which I named the Rosy, after my sister, Rosina. The next day, keeping on the same bearing, we crossed another fine creek which I named the 'Aldridge', after Mr. J.H. Aldridge, and camped that night at another fine running creek which I named the Nation.

We were only about 1 mile west of a very high, rough looking range, and Elvey informed me that that was the range in which he had left Nation. Looking at the range through my field glasses I fancied I saw a gap, so the next morning I climbed a tall Indian pine close to the camp. Taking my field glasses and compass with me I could see the gap fairly well, and taking a bearing on it I climbed down, saddled up and started on our journey. In less than two miles we struck the gap, and after riding about a mile through the range we came across an open space of country. I had not ridden 100 yards before I came across Elvey's horse. As soon as Elvey saw it he said, "I know where I am, now - the old man isn't far off." He stuck spurs to his horse and started at full gallop along the foot of the range. Woods and I followed slowly, and about a mile further on we found Elvey leaning on his horse's neck, crying like a child. "Too late. Too late." was all he said. Alas, we were too late, for there, covered up in his blankets, was poor Nation, dead.

He had evidently felt his end coming and had made his camp up in a decent manner. In his hand was his diary, which he religiously kept. The last entry was made 11 days before our arrival, and the last words ran, "I am getting weak, and I think I shall die before the night. The cold has been mounting from my feet, and when it reaches my heart I know I shall die. Beneath the tree, at my head, there is a box containing 35 and a half sovereigns. I have managed to crawl down to the spring and fill two quarter pots with water. I do not wish to die thirsty. I die forgiving all my enemies, especially DeLatour, who brought me into this trouble."

Well, that message made us feel very queer, but work had to be done. His body could not be moved so we made an enclosure with long and short rails until his body was covered. I cut his name in one of the quarter pots, and also cut a cross in the tree at his head. Then we rode, sorrowfully, back to Daley Waters.

On the journey back we camped near the MacArthur River, where we had a brush with the blacks. One night whilst enjoying a smoke before retiring, DeLatour and I were discussing our plans for the next day. DeLatour had just retired when I heard a suspicious noise and called out, "Look out, Boys, they are on us. DeLatour fired his revolver in the direction of the sound, and Woods fired the Snider rifle. The flash of the gun and its loud report scared the blacks, and we could hear the clatter of their spears as they ran away.

A watch was kept until daylight, and we discovered that we had had a very close shave. They had come within 30 yards of us. Three of our horses were speared, one so badly that it had to be destroyed. If I had not been a smoker we would have all been killed.

Next day we continued our journey to Daly Waters and reached that place without further mishap.

CASUALTIES AND ATTACKS BY NATIVES.

In an undertaking so extensive as the erection of nearly 2000 miles of telegraph lines across the continent the greatest part of the distance through unknown country, it would have been strange indeed if there had been no casualties to report. There were, however, very few. Five deaths were recorded during the construction of the line. C.W. Kraegen, operator,

perished from thirst. C. Palmer, teamster, from Consumption. J. Harcus, lost in the bush whilst searching for horses. One man from fever, and one drowned.

Generally speaking the health of the men was good, and great praise is due to the late Dr. Renner for the manner in which he carried out his duties.

From the first, every effort was made to make friendly relations with the natives. There were, however, occasional outbreaks of hostilities of a more or less serious nature.

On the 24th February, 1874, at Barrow Creek, the staff consisting of Mr. Stapleton (Stationmaster), Mr. Flint (Assistant) and six station hands, including a native boy, were sitting outside the Station building smoking, when they were suddenly attacked by a large body of natives who first speared Mr. Stapleton. The men rushed for the entrance gates at the rear of the building, but were driven back by a shower of spears. Mr. Flint, was wounded, and John Frank mortally wounded, with the native boy being wounded in three places. The men then ran around the building and reached the gate.

Once within the walls of the building, which was planned to afford every security from attack, the men armed themselves and poured a volley through the loopholes of the station, speedily clearing the ground. The wounded linesman died a few minutes after the affray was over. Mr. Stapleton lingered until the next day, when he expired. Mr. Flint, after much suffering, recovered.

The next year, on the 16th June, 1875, the Stationmaster at Daly Waters, Mr. C. H. Johnston, with a party of two men and two blacks, left his Station to search for horses on the Roper River at which they arrived on the 29th.

Shortly after his arrival Mr. Johnston went down to the river to bathe. One of the men. (Daer) went for water, and Rickards, the other man, remained in the camp. Daer, turning towards the camp saw a native, without any warning, spear Rickards. Daer at once ran to warn Mr. Johnston, who was in the water, but found that he had already received two or three wounds. Whilst assisting Johnston, Daer himself received a spear wound on the bridge of his nose and with difficulty, using Mr. Johnston's revolver compelled the native who had attacked him to retire.

Mr. Johnston died from his wounds next morning. Daer, with Rickards who was severely wounded, returned to Daly Waters, a distance of 185 miles. Daer, who had the broken spear in his nose, and which had penetrated his mouth, had to attend to the team and his wounded companion.

During the long and tedious journey back to Daly Waters he suffered frightfully from his wound, and died on August 7th, shortly after his arrival at Daly Waters. Rickards eventually recovered.

And if you be done to death, what then?
If you did the best you could,
If you played your part in the world of man,
The critic will call it good.

Death comes with a crawl or with a pounce,
But whether he be slow or spry,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
But only, how did you die.

I do not think that there is anyone but will admit that these words can be truthfully applied to poor Daer, who suffered so much and yet saved his wounded companion.

Mr. J. H. Aldridge and Mr. C.B. Ware were cadets on the O.T. Line, and at a later date were proprietors of the Exchange Hotel in Hindley Street (about 50 yards from King William Street), and the Southern Cross Hotel, in William Street, respectively.

REPLACEMENT OF IRON POLES IN LIEU OF WOODEN POLES
(DESTROYED BY TERMITES) FROM N. NEWCASTLE TO PORT DARWIN
1774 – 1875

Extracts from diary of John R. Knuckey who was in charge of the operation.

September 24th 1874. I started from Daly Waters. Caught line party at Milner Lagoon. Camped there, 34 miles.

October 2nd. Men commenced putting up poles.

October 20th (Tuesday). Hunter came into camp today just as we were starting, with the news that Vicary had accidentally shot himself whilst rolling up his hammock. Rode back to their camp, saw Vickary lying on his back and a large pool of blood nearby. Examine the wound and saw that the ball had entered at the right side of **the** neck, passing upward and out through the top of his head. Death must have been instantaneous. Made a coffin for the poor chap out of some wagon sides and buried him on the line about 16 miles south of the Corduroy. Examined effects and found two letters and an order for 10 Pounds on the South Australian Government. Rode on to Hart's camp the same night.

Sunday, 29th November. Samson arrived with the rations from Daly Waters. Had a very rough trip owing to scarcity of water at Frews, there not being any there at the time of his arrival.

December 2nd. Rode along the line as far as the contractors had completed it. Going along satisfactorily. Amount of work completed for the month of November, 38 miles.

Sunday, 13th December. Got as far as South Newcastle today. Found five bullocks there. Elliott rode out from W.K. with telegrams from Daly Waters stating that Giles had to throw off his load in consequence of heavy rains at Mt. Corey.

14th December. Started back for Powell today and reached there about 3 o'clock. Expect teams about Tuesday. Left Hart and Jones to keep a thorough watch for bullocks as there are still 22 missing.

Monday January 11th. Went down to the creek in the evening and was pleasantly surprised to find water about a mile and half from crossing. Very fine hole indeed. Plenty of water for horses and bullocks.

Saturday January 16th. Shifted to Attack Creek. Very little water to be found. Hart arrived today having laid on 11 miles past Attack Creek. Could go no further because of lack of water. Had to throw off remainder of his loading. 6 miles of poles to be taken on when we got more rain. Saw track of bullock this morning. Must be some strange bullock running down below this.

Sunday 5th February. Rain. Work teams two miles from Ringwood. Got as far as that place today. Country in fearful state. Scarcely any travelling on it. Tuesday 9th February.

Travelled about 3 miles today. Came onto rain which will not improve the roads.

Tuesday 16th February. Continued raining all night and throughout the day. Creek flooded where we camped. Scarcely any travelling on it.

Wednesday 17th February. Fine today until evening when rain developed again.

Heavy thunder and lightning. Lloyd and Hunter of the line party came into camp.

They are on horseback, and their camp is on the Phillipson. They are out of meat.

The two of them went into T.K. last weekend to get some, but found they had only 9 tins so could not spare them any. Shall go myself to T.K. on Friday.

Friday 22nd February. Sent telegrams to Mr. Todd. Received answer about 9 o'clock.

Wednesday 24th February. Started for line party after dinner. Arrived there about 6 o'clock. Party very dissatisfied with the result of telegrams.

Wednesday 5th March. Teams travelled to attack Creek. Today Hart and self went down to the creek and found some bullocks supposed to be lost. Came across 2 horses, 2 chestnuts and 1 roan cob. Suppose they belong to Hazel. No Government brands

Friday 9th March 1875. Camped at Elsie Crossing, but did not cross it as it was very boggy. Looked for another track but couldn't find one. Try in the morning to cross just above here.

Saturday 10th March. Made an attempt to cross this morning. Got a little way in when horses became bogged and had to take them out. Took a coil of wire which was on the line and made a wire rope and succeeded in getting them through to good ground. Took half a day to cross. Travelled 4 miles to Bitter Springs when heavy rain came on and continued until bedtime. Managed to catch water for ourselves. Travelled 7 miles.

Sunday 13th March. Started today for Stirling Creek. Travelled as far as the crossing on the Roper but found it was flooded and could not cross it. Camped on the south side of it. Roads very boggy all day, in places feet deep and up to horses bellies. Travelled 7 miles.

Thursday 15th. Before starting this morning two of Johnston's men from K.N. arrived bringing 6 horses to help me on the way. They left K.N. and coming to the King couldn't cross it. Had to stop there all day waiting for it to subside. After leaving there and going around the old track by the Stirling found roads impassable. Had to turn back as far as Providence Creek today. Roads continuing heavy.

Thursday 22nd. Spoke to contract party going out to work on fence. They refuse to work on the grounds that in the last clause of their contract agreement it was stated that when the contract was finished they were to be taken on to a place, where, if they wanted to work they could do so, and as the contract party had not done so they decline to start line work here at K.N. or at fence working. Sent telegrams to the Superintendent stating these facts.

Saturday 22nd. Came on as far as Banyon Creek.

Saturday 29th May. Arrive at Port Darwin. Reported myself to Mr. Little. Teams came in during the day.

(to be continued)

COMMUNICATIONS IN ANTARCTICA (continued)

V. GIBSON

A few years later I made one more trip to Antarctica, my third and final one. The usual waiting began, especially for news of the medical examination as I was well beyond the age limit of acceptance. However all went well and I was advised to report for training early in October.

The usual process of training began, fire brigade headquarters, Royal Melbourne Hospital, O.T.C. for a couple of weeks as there were new procedures in force in message preparation, all had been computerised, the rest of the time filled in with work at Head Office.

Our ship as usual was the last to depart, we saw all the others off until only ours was left. We had word that our ship had been held up for some considerable time at Dumont D'Urville, the French base, by heavy pack ice. Instead of leaving on January 6th we left at the end of the month.

The trip down was relatively smooth, thanks to modern technology, we could avoid the fronts with all the wild weather to a certain extent. There was the usual excitement of sailing day amongst the men, anticipating what would be ahead of us during the next twelve months or more.

We only had medium pack ice to contend with as we approached the land, once we landed all haste was made to unload as quickly as possible due to our late arrival.

On the door of the radio room when I arrived was a notice, "Welcome Home Vince" as this was my third period at this base, Casey.

This year we only had three radio operators so the work load was heavier. This year we had T O R and worked directly into Head Office in Melbourne and the weather data was switched through to the Met. bureau also in Melbourne, all via O T C at Paddington.

We had some new Drake radio receivers, but not much else had changed. One of our radio transmitters was switched on continually consuming more electrical power than normal, as a consequence the electric oven in the kitchen was changed to gas.

A rebuilding program for the base had begun, the old line of buildings were showing signs of rust, due to the strong winds of summer blowing salty spray from the open waters of the bay.

The weeks passed by, the sea began to freeze over, the penguins began to leave for the edge of the pack ice and the days quickly shortened.

We had the usual run of films, twice a week as winter approached, they were mostly 1950 vintage or earlier, I had seen them all many times but they were a welcome respite once again.

The blizzards came once more, frequently as winter approached, with the deterioration of the buildings I wondered more than ever whether they would survive these winds.

With better radio equipment it was not now necessary for a radio operator to accompany any field trips inland, and with only three operators it was difficult to get away from the base even for a few days. Three of us however did plan a few days away after the winter, we intended to go to the Browning Peninsular for a few days, 20 miles as the crow flies but 50 miles around avoiding crevasses.

We left early one morning, climbing up the plateau with no difficulty, but on reaching an altitude of just over a thousand feet we encountered cloud, a fog of ice particles with a wind of 20 or 30 knots which cut visibility to zero. We had to stay stationary, we gave it until the next morning when conditions were still the same, so we came back again. It was at least a little break from the continual work.

We had the usual midwinter celebratory dinner, there was not a lot of auroral activity during the darker months, sunspot activity was mild, which was good for radio work.

Spring time came and with it preparations for the inland party to depart. This year they were exploring new territory, turning eastward after progressing about fifty miles inland and following a contour line of about three thousand feet elevation, completely new territory.

We had a radio sked with them every evening and kept a continual listening watch on their frequency for any emergencies. I arranged to play chess with one of the men and every evening we would exchange one move. I only discovered after a while that I was playing the whole six men in the party, they would all discuss the best move to make. I had taken down an electronic chess board, and I must confess I received a little help from this. It would be one of the earlier models and I would put the moves in and set it on the highest level, sometimes it took almost 24 hours to get a move. It was such a long protracted game that we had not finished it by the time they returned in early December. About mid November a group of about a dozen men were flown in via McMurdo, mainly men working on the rebuilding program. This was a highlight for us after long months of isolation. The plane also brought mail, parcels, fresh fruit and vegetables, I had never seen such large grapes as the Californian grapes that we received. With the influx of these men the base was at its capacity, re sleeping and eating, in fact it seemed crowded, but time was passing and we were at this stage looking forward to returning home.

This year the Head Office of the division was in the throes of moving to Hobart, the usual schedules were changed completely from earlier years and a boat was due at our base before Christmas.

When the boat arrived there was a further influx of men, making life very hectic in the radio room, but eventually it unloaded its stores and was ready to sail. I returned home on this ship leaving Casey just after New Years Day. It was the fourth day out before we cleared the heavy pack ice, it was rather early in the season for these boats of 2,000 tons and limited power to be in these waters.

We did not go directly home, firstly we called in at the Russian base at Mirny about five hundred miles westward. The ice was so thick when we reached Mirny we could not get near the land so our helicopters took the man ashore with his baggage. He was going with the Russians on a summer expedition to Vostock. We had been hoping to land and go ashore to meet the men at Mirny, but we had no contact at all.

We left the vicinity of Mirny heading west towards Davis our next port of call, the Captain deciding to take the inside passage along the coast. We ran into heavy ice just after leaving, the pack ice appeared to get thicker and thicker. As far as the eye could see there was ice with no break at all, the ship continually went backwards and forwards every couple of minutes trying to barge a way through this almost impenetrable barrier. We on board had a holiday, the days were beautiful, not a cloud in the sky and continual light. We made some progress perhaps a mile or two each day. I remember seeing an iceberg we had passed close to three days ago and it was only a few miles astern.

We had two helicopters on board and each day they went up to see if there was any passage out of the ice, but to no avail. We were actually moving westward about fifteen miles each day, that was the speed the pack ice was moving.

Eventually the ice became so thick that we could not move at all and became embedded in the ice. Fortunately the Russian base at Mirny was manned this year, (some years it was not manned), so we sent out a signal for help before we were damaged by the ice.

It was only a few hours before a large Russian ship arrived, slicing through the ice as if it were butter, we were amazed at the power it had. It turned close to our ship disturbing the ice and we followed in its wake back to an anchoring position off Mirny, just near Drygalski Island, a cone of ice rising hundreds of feet in the air. We were there a day or so, we were waiting for the Russian ship to unload its stores at Mirny, we were going to follow it out passed the pack ice.

We eventually left, following in the ships wake until we parted ways, us heading west to Davis and it going to a Black Sea port.

We had no more trouble with ice, only light pack entering Prydz Bay just out from Davis. The passage nearing Davis was spectacular with magnificent icebergs all around the ship.

Due to the long delays the unloading at Davis went on 24 hours a day, unloading stores and a few men and embarking the wintering party.

The Vestfold Hills just back of Davis were a feature of the landscape, but the main scientific work then at Davis was the study of the fresh water lakes just a little further inland.

We eventually sailed from Davis once again past all the magnificent icebergs towards the Amery Ice Shelf, further westward, where the helicopters made a fuel dump for a party later that summer.

After that was accomplished we at last turned towards home, we encountered no pack ice at all, moving smoothly until we reached the mountainous waves of the roaring forties, the

ship tossing about like a cork. Not much to do on the boat, played quoits, chess and cards, some reading but there were not many books on board.

After a couple of weeks or more we arrived in Bass Strait where we anchored for twelve hours or more adding to our impatience, we were ahead of time and had a deadline to meet the pilot and customs boat.

Once again it was great to be home again, and an end to my Antarctic adventures. I feel that I have been fortunate in having such an experience, travelling along the coast from Commonwealth Bay to the Amery Ice Shelf, and most of all travelling inland into the continent, experiencing the beauty of the ice, the colours of the evening, the winter mornings, the bitter cold of inland and lastly but not least the ferocious blizzards, and then the returning home.

THE END

