

# Newsletter

Vol.3 Pt.2 Page 32

April 1984

## MEETINGS AND REUNIONS

<u>NEW SOUTH WALES</u>	AGM, FRIDAY, 11 MAY 1984 TIME 6 PM	CONFERENCE CENTRE, 4TH FLOOR, OTC HOUSE, MARTIN PLACE, SYDNEY.
<u>QUEENSLAND</u>	AGM, WEDNESDAY, 2 MAY 1984 TIME 12 NOON	BRISBANE OFFICE.
<u>WEST AUSTRALIA</u>	10TH ANNUAL REUNION, TUESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 1984, TIME 5 PM	COOLABAH TAVERN, MORLEY.
<u>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</u>	NEXT MEETING, THURSDAY, 24 MAY 1984 TIME 2.30 PM.	ROYAL HOTEL, KENT TOWN.
<u>VICTORIA</u>	FRIDAY, 11 MAY 1984. TIME 5.30 PM	AMENITIES SECTION, BASEMENT, OTC HOUSE, 382 LONSDALE STREET, MELBOURNE.

INTERSTATE MEMBERS AND VISITORS WILL BE WELCOMED  
AT THESE FUNCTIONS, BUT PRIOR ADVICE OF INTENTION  
TO ATTEND WOULD BE APPRECIATED BY THE ORGANISERS,  
NOT ONLY FOR CATERING PURPOSES BUT TO GET  
CONFIRMATION OF TIMES AND VENUES.

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## A WORD OF THANKS

It was on this page that we recorded the disturbing news that our National President, CHARLES CARTHEW, had suffered a stroke in September 1983. His recovery was not effected until after the November issue of "NEWSLETTER" had gone to press. It is only fitting, therefore, that we record his thanks to all those Veterans and others who sent along cards, letters and telegrams wishing him a speedy recovery, and which Charles feels had some degree in having the desired effect. We are pleased to report that he has recovered to an extent that allows him to take an interest in OTVA affairs again.



OTVA NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH

The 27th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the above Branch was held on 20 May 1983 at the Conference Centre, 4th Floor, OTC House, Martin Place, Sydney.

The meeting was duly opened by the President, Philip Geeves, at 6.05 pm. 54 Veterans were present and apologies were received from another 68 members unable to attend.

President Philip welcomed official guests and all members to the meeting, with a special welcome to BRIAN CALLAGHAN making his debut as a new member of the Association.

Best wishes were received from the Presidents of the Victorian, South Australian, Queensland and West Australian branches.

One minute's silence was observed to mark the passing of members during the year:

HARRY BURDETT  
BERT HARTLEY  
HARRY HICKS  
FRED MULLIGAN

Election of officers

After confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting, and the presentation and adoption of the Balance Sheet and Accounts, President Philip declared all positions vacant and called for nominations for a Returning Officer. The meeting resolved that Mr. George Maltby be duly elected as Returning Officer.

Result of the Ballot

President: Mr. Philip Geeves  
Secretary: Mr. Alan Arndt  
Treasurer: Mr. Joe Collister  
Committee: Messrs. J. Anderson, R. Baty, L. Brown, B. Collett,  
G. Day, A. Griffiths, T. Thatcher, G. Thompson,  
K. Vincent and J. Whittaker

27TH ANNUAL REUNION

The date for this function was set for Friday, 25 November 1983, with a tentative venue being the Conference Centre, OTC House.

General Business

A vote of thanks was given to Lou Brown for his past services as Secretary of the NSW branch of the Association.


Other matters discussed concerned the new logo and the lapel badge. The logo posed no problems but there was strong opposition to any change in the lapel badge, and the fixing of the annual subscription which was subsequently raised from \$2 to \$4. This was carried unanimously.

The President expressed his appreciation and thanks of the Association to the Commission for its continued generous support.

There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed at 6.50 p.m., after which those veterans present took the opportunity to renew acquaintances with one another.

## PHILIP GEEVES MEMORIAL TRUST

**AUST.  
HISTORY**



**AUST.  
HISTORY**

Readers of Philip Geeves regular column in The Sydney Morning Herald and listeners to his broadcasts on 2BL will be delighted to know that a PHILIP GEEVES MEMORIAL TRUST FUND has been formed for the purpose of collecting donations towards a History Research Training Scholarship to be awarded in this great Australian's honour.

All people who shared the joys of his knowledge are invited to take part in this award scheme.

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### DONATIONS

To: Mrs. Mary St. John Henry,  
Hon. Secretary/Treasurer,  
PHILIP GEEVES MEMORIAL TRUST,  
G.P.O. BOX 1345, SYDNEY, 2001

Please find enclosed cheque for \$.....  
representing my donation.

NAME.....

ADDRESS .....

.....

Donations large or small will be welcome.  
All donations will be officially acknowledged.

### PHILIP GEEVES MEMORIAL TRUST

The above cutting from the Sydney Morning Herald is produced above for the benefit and information of members of the New South Wales branch of the Association. There are a lot of us who respected and admired Philip for his many talents and it was thought that perhaps individuals among the Veterans may be interested in making some personal donation.

It stands to reason that the NSW branch is unable to act until such time as the members, at a regular meeting, signify their intentions.

A precis for Philip's accomplishments and his obituary appear in the November 1983 copy of the "NEWSLETTER".

OTVA NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH

27TH ANNUAL VETERANS' REUNION

This Veterans' Annual Reunion was held in the OTC(A) Staff Cafeteria, on Friday, 25 November 1983, where we had 139 members, guests and visitors in attendance, and a most enjoyable evening was had by all. Apologies were received from some 47 members.

Included among the gathering were two visitors from our Victorian Branch (Alan Vagg and Jim Robinson), and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Le Quesne, of the Quarter Century Club of Teleglobe Canada.

After reading seasons greetings from all the Branch Presidents, the Secretary introduced our acting President, Ron McDonald, to officially open the proceedings by welcoming members and special guests.

One minute's silence was then observed for those members who have passed on since our last meeting. President Ron acknowledged the donations made by Leona Geeves, for communications equipment which will be displayed in our OTC Museum with suitable mention of her husband Philip, clearly marked on each piece.

The only member who is listed as sick at the moment was Claude Dalley, who went into hospital on 24 November 1983 for an exploratory operation.

Harold Le Quesne presented us with a beautiful book on Canada, that we will treasure always.

President Ron closed the official proceedings by appealing to everyone to enjoy themselves by eating, drinking and reminiscing on the good times of old.

ALAN ARNDT,  
Hon. Secretary.

VALE. CYRIL URQUHART

Advice has been received from TOM HUGHES that Cyril Urquhart died in October 1983. Although not a member of the Veterans, he did contribute about a half-dozen articles to the "NEWSLETTER" between 1979 and 1983.

We also feel that the following extract may be of interest to the many members who knew Cyril over the years.

During his 42 years in Telecommunications, Cyril spent about ten years working at CRS Stations in Western Australia. He was stationed at Bita Paka (Rabaul) at the beginning of World War 1 after a landing party took the station over from the Germans. He served at Brisbane, Kieta and Thursday Island between the two world wars, and maintained communications out of Madang (New Guinea) during the Japanese attack in 1942. Later on he was stationed at Manus Island when the Japanese attacked, keeping communications open between Manus and Port Moresby.

Cyril finished his working life at the La Perouse CRS Station in 1959. Our deepest sympathy goes to his family and relatives.

### SICK PARADE

One of our well-known Sydney identities, DES (JIM) WOODS, is reported as having recovered from a recent operation. Des hasn't been retired all that long but rumour has it that he strained himself building retaining walls. At the moment he appears to have gone into "smoke", probably to his caravan located at Blue Lagoon, Bateau Bay, on the central NSW coast, which will probably do him a lot of good, providing he doesn't go around lifting caravans. He's a bit of a rip-tear-and-bust artist, you know.

### IMPENDING RETIREMENT

Mr. JOHN T. NORRIS has announced his planned retirement on 20 March 1984. John commenced duty in the Melbourne Operating Room in 1946 and remained there until his transfer to the newly-opened Brisbane office in June 1970. John and Mildred are moving to their "hide-away house" at Runaway Bay on the Queensland Gold Coast where they expect to take up their mutual interests in golf, bowls, racing and relaxing. (There is no mention of gardening, you will notice).

I have fond memories of John from the Wagga Weekend Days where he figured as a prominent member of the Melbourne team and was often the cause of many a chewed finger-nail from the Sydney supporters. As a batsman he was a pain in the rumble seat of the Sydney supporters, but, despite that, a sportsman and a gentleman at all times.

I am sure that we all wish John and Mildred a long and happy retirement.

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

In the May 1983 issue of "TRANSIT" there appeared a group photograph of World War 2 Telecom Colombo Operators with veterans RANDY PAYNE and KEN BANKS named.

Standing (L to R) KEN CLARK, KEN COLLETT, JOHN COLES, GRANT CAMPBELL, BRUCE GALL, ROBIN MacDIARMID, HERB FARRAR, BRIAN WALLACE, TED GUNNING, MIKE FULTON, JOHN WALKER, BILL BERRY, JOHN TODD, DICK FRAY, BRIAN MORRELL, GEOFF COX, PETER COWLISHAW

Sitting (L to R) ROGER BARDWELL, DARBY THOMPSON, RANDY PAYNE, BILL CRAIG, DENIS ERSO, KEN BANKS.

The Editor of "TRANSIT" regretfully advised that he just did not have room to list all of the people at the time this photograph was published.

### A PART OF COASTAL RADIO HISTORY.

By W. N. (Jock) Cowie.

During the 1937/38 period, I was attached to the Staff of VPD, Suva. Whilst my main duties were operating out at VPD I did have to mix it with part-time announcing duties at ZJV - the local broadcasting station, as well as servicing new broadcast receivers, which, in those days, were not tropacalised and quite often had to be serviced before they could be sold to the local agent.

I clearly recall one occasion when Mr. Stevens, the then NSW Premier, who was passing through on the "NIAGARA" intimating that he wanted to make an urgent telephone call to Sydney. His request was directed to Mr. FRANK EXON

who came to me whilst I was having lunch and suggested I go out to the Station immediately and retune the short-wave broadcast transmitter to a certain frequency - I can't remember which - and having done that, carry out tests with Sydney for levels. He took Mr. Stevens to his residence in the compound and when all was well, I patched the line through to Frank's house. Mr. Stevens completed his call and when it was completed Mr. Ernest Fisk came on and said "Thank you", because he realised such a call must have caused inconvenience to some of us. That must have been one of the earliest radio telephone calls from Suva to Sydney.

On another occasion - a day or so before Christmas - when we were flat out with traffic - between us - we forgot to take the daily news bulletin from Ballan. It was not until Frank Exon came to collect the copy for Government House that the oversight was discovered. Needless to say there was a "scatter". A service message was sent to Ballan for a re-run on 40 w.p.m. I took it on a typewriter with someone monitoring the signal. Outside ourselves no one was any the wiser.

On the broadcasting side: on one occasion Richard Crooks, the famous tenor, passed through and dropped off a brand new record of his with the proviso that it was not to be played until he had left the area. In due course I made the announcement that "Richard Tenor would now sing a Crook song". Within minutes I had calls telling me it was "the most interesting announcement I had ever made".

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#### RETURN THANKS

From Victoria, British Columbia, comes a little note from BOB SCOTT, together with another article which I will publish as time and space permits. He writes, "I have many happy memories of my visit to your Annual Re-union this time last year (1982).

Please convey my best wishes to all."

HAROLD LE QUESNE, who with his good wife, Katherine, attended the Sydney "get-together" in November, and upon his return sent the following card.

"Dear Alan,

I wish to express our thanks to you and your President and members for inviting Katherine and me to your Annual Banquet. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves meeting friends from Pacific Cable Board days (Lyall Gowanlock, Jack Creswick, Charlie Raecke, Russ Welbourne, and others).

Joe Collister, Gordon Cupit, Trevor Thatcher and others were very kind to us. To you and all, our very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, 1984.

Katherine and Harold Le Quesne  
Vancouver, Canada, 1983.

THE PHANTOM FINGER.

By John Lee.

Brax Horrocks' recollections (OTVA Newsletter, November 1983) of operating a hand perforator in Darwin in 1924/25 stirred some memories.

In 1920 hand perforators were widely used in the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company's Sydney office in O'Connell Street. Devoid of electro-magnets, relays and silicon chips, the hand perf was an accurate but painfully slow method of producing perforated tape for transmitters.

Brax's Darwin speed of 115 letters per minute would be about the maximum a good hand perforator man could maintain hour by hour though some of the dexterous chaps boasted that for test purposes they could manage 135 letters per minute for 5 minutes.

I felt kindly disposed towards hand perforators because I never lost an annual increment during the years they were in use. Around 1923 the Creed Keyboard Perforator was introduced at O'Connell Street. With four rows of keys instead of the three keys (or buttons) of the hand perforator, here was a totally different ball game.

I soon made the alarming discovery that though my touch typing was reasonably accurate on a typewriter, an extraordinary aberration cropped up on the keyboard perforator - I had a wayward third finger on my left hand! Despite intense concentration this flaming finger would frequently transpose S for W and vice versa.

It could have landed me in serious trouble with Head Office. There was the time when I was plucking away at the keyboard (one of the cynics said, "Like a fowl picking up wheat"), when I was handed this telegram to which the customer had added his name for transmission as a signature. Nothing unusual about that except that his signature was WHITEHOUSE. If you will cast your mind back to my tendency to substitute S for W you will see that Mr. Whitehouse would not have been amused with my rendering of his name. Fortunately, at the time we had surplus staff and a grizzled old veteran was checking my tape using a transmitter and morse sounder. To my discomfort he bellowed to the whole office, "Hey Fellas, come and look at the mess John has made of this signature". Mess indeed!

Later, around 1930, an incident occurred which rocked me to the foundation garments. There were no leased circuits then, and all the overseas twaddle in the newspapers was conveyed by press telegrams. There I was, happily typing a press telegram on the keyboard perforator and feeding the perforated tape into the transmitter to Wellington N.Z. Quite an interesting press telegram - it reported that pirates had been active on the China Coast around Bias Bay and Britain was sending a gunboat while the Chinese were sending a SHORE expedition.

Evidently the phantom finger flipped again for I shortly received a query from the Kiwi operator in Wellington, "Your press telegram 142nd word WHORE, query WHOSE.

Thank Heavens for alert Kiwi telegraphists! Think of the furore this error would have caused if it had escaped undetected to those conservative New Zealand newspapers. Visions of being carpetted and told that my mind wasn't on my work flashed before me. Sneaking a shifty glance at the Supervisor who



was quite unaware that rude five-letter words were being bandied about the office, I quickly passed a correction to Wellington advising that the word in question was SHORE, not WHOSE and definitely not WHORE.

I have kept this boo-boo under wraps for more than 50 years.

There must be other veterans who have strayed from the straight and narrow. It would be interesting to hear recollections of their failings or misdemeanours. I am sure our editor would accept a nom de plume from anyone overcome by modesty.

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#### Editor's Note re the Above

I hereby give the unqualified guarantee that the identity of any perpetrator of mis-deeds, boo-boos or similar indiscretions will not be revealed if it is his or her wish. Nom-de-plumes will be accepted to preserve and protect the guilty.

#### PUBLIC APOLOGY

The Editor of the "NEWSLETTER" wishes to apologise to Mr. ROY TULLY for consistently spelling TULLY with an E between the L and Y. Roy TULLY has contributed articles to the NEWSLETTER, and quite good ones; so much so that I do not wish to lose him as a future contributor.

Mr. TULLY, normally a mild-mannered man, pointed out my grievous error at the Sydney Christmas Veterans' "bash". I hasten to assure everyone that Roy Tully brought no pressure on me to make this public apology, other than a chance remark that if I spelled TULLY once more with an E he would come around to my place and kick my back-side into a jelly. This was done in a tone which curdled my Pavlova.

The reason I have mentioned TULLY so often through this segment is my own idea, although, looking back on it, he may have hinted that perhaps if I mentioned his name in the correct format in the very next publication it could make the correct spelling more memorable.

But let's get one thing straight ..... I am not a man to be coerced.  
(Five times at least wasn't it, Roy).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are times when I despair of having the material to get the "NEWSLETTER" out but, in the nick of time, along comes copy from our members and I am up to my ears in articles and information. This is not a complaint. I want as much as I can get so that I don't have to fall back on "repeats" from old publications. Some of the articles are lengthy but too interesting to condense, so it more or less remains to my judgement as to whether to reproduce them in full or in a serialised form.

If you don't see your contribution in the current issue please do not despair; they have not been discarded, only held until space becomes available.

I wish to thank the following for their contributions:-

ELLIS SMELLIE (at 92 years of age perhaps our oldest Veteran operator).  
Ellis has sent me a copy of his life in communications which I  
intend to serialise).

PHIL CHAPMAN (The CRS During World War 2)

BOB SCOTT (from Canada)

JOHN LEE

BRAX HORROCKS

BILL CRAIG, F. STUDMAN (New Zealand)

Thanks to you and all the others who have contributed.

To "BLUE" EASTERLING - I've made a precis of TABAR in this issue.

#### OTVA VICTORIAN BRANCH

##### 27TH ANNUAL REUNION

The 27th Annual Reunion of OTVA Victorian Branch was held at OTC House, 382 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, at 5.30 p.m. on Friday, 11 November 1983.

Before opening the meeting, President JACK McGRORY mentioned that our popular Secretary, CHARLES CARTHEW, was progressing slowly at home and looking forward to receiving visits from his mates.

Among those present were:-

Mr. W. T. SCHMIDT, General Manager

Mr. R. T. SOMERVILLE, Chairman of the Commission

Mr. J. H. CURTIS, a Commissioner since 1974.

The Reunion was most successful. 35 members signed the Attendance Sheet and 19 apologies were recorded.

All those present voted it a pleasant and congenial evening.

E. G. RUSSELL  
Acting Secretary  
4 Pareora Avenue,  
East Brunswick. 3057.  
Phone (03) 380-5249.

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##### IN APPRECIATION

This item from Charles Carthew came along just too late for our last November issue but its message is still pertinent.

Charles writes:

"Many thanks to OTC, AWA and C&W colleagues and friends for the cards, personal calls, and correspondence received when in hospital after a mild stroke early in September.

It was so good to be remembered and to learn and be assured that the early Beam Wireless spirit of "family and good fellowship" is still there, and I pray God that it remains long into the future.

Fraternal Greetings,  
(Signed) Charles.

P.S. On Doctor's advice I have given up the OTVA Vic. Secretaryship, but I will be glad to hear from you at any time.

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A NOTE FROM GUYE RUSSELL

GUYE RUSSELL has taken over the reins from our old mate, CHARLES CARTHEW, and reports that he will be attending to the Victorian side of the OTVA until the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING in May.

On behalf of the Victorian Vets he sends his greetings to the Sydney counterparts and best wishes for 1984.

For those who may wish to contact him in the meantime, his address and phone number appear above.

OTVA QUEENSLAND BRANCH

The following comes from our man in Brisbane, ALAN (SPIKE) JONES.

We had our Annual Reunion at Brisbane Radio on Friday, 18 November 1983. 17 of our small band turned up and by all appearances had an enjoyable visit to VIB.

We had our first sight of the Seaphone in operation, and the old hands were quite impressed by its operation and potential, but were all glad that they didn't have it in their days.

As usual, stories of the old days were retold and enjoyed. I think that that is what the Veterans is all about. Some say that you shouldn't live in the past; but then - we have some great memories of old and past friends and experiences that lay dormant until they are brought up at these get-togethers and brought back to mind.

We were joined by two Sydney-siders, WILF O'DONNELL, (relieving our Manager, JIM BANKS), and BERNIE WHITE, here on a few days holiday. We thank them both for joining us on the day and hope they had, in turn, enjoyed their day with us.

We were especially pleased to see FRANK BOND from Rockhampton. Frank is down for a short holiday and is staying with KEV HISCOCK. (Yes - Kev is still alive and fighting fit at VIB). It is not very often we see any of the lads from Townsville and Rockie. We look forward to seeing any of them when down this way.

Those attending were:

Jim Banks, Frank Bond, Eric Clamp, Laz Eliou, Sid Gill (sporting a new beard), Bob Hooper, Kev Hiscock, Alan Jones, Jock Kellie, Denis Moorhouse, John Marshall, Norm Odgers, Wilf O'Donnell, Alan Reece, Vince Sim, Bob Webster and Bernie White.

Apologies were received from the General Manager advising that none of the Managerial Officers could be in attendance as the farewell presentation to Cyril Vahtrick was held on the same day. Although Cyril picked the wrong day to retire we still wish him all the best for the future. Who knows, we may see him retire to the Sunshine State.

Other apologies received were from Wilf Atkin, Gordon Collyer, Alf Goebby, Lou Heggie, Dean Laws, John Ponsonby, "Blue" Easterling, Armour McCollum and Harry Moss.

We were sorry to hear that John (Ponto) Ponsonby is not at all well and is confined to home. We missed him greatly. I cannot recall "Ponto" missing one of our meetings; he always looks forward to them.

Dean Laws was delayed in Singapore and could not make it. He is still sailing the seas as a wireless op., and he and a crew went to Italy to pick up a new vessel for their company - a coal burner of all things - they had a bit of trouble and were delayed getting home in time.

Although our numbers are small, we had a good meeting followed by a pleasant repast and an odd glass or two. We very much thank Bob Hooper and his staff for their hospitality. Bob's wife, Margaret, took care of the hunger pangs, organising and serving a very nice lunch. Our thanks, Margaret.

The reunion ended about 3 pm when all weaved their way safely home. All of them, I hope, are looking forward to our Annual General Meeting at our Brisbane office on a date to be fixed in May 1984.

NORM ODGERS will be moving out to Western Australia early in the new year. Keep an eye out for him, W.A.

May I take the opportunity to extend to all Veterans in the other States the best wishes for the New Year from your Queensland colleague.

"Spike" Jones,  
President, Qld. Vets.

#### SOUTHPORT CABLE STATION

The following has been received from "Blue" Easterling from Burleigh Waters, Qld.

"Blue" writes:

"I have been to the old cable station at Southport and was allowed to visit and photograph the Manager's house, now the private home of a professional man who does not allow strangers to go through. This was done for "TRANSIT" but can only use historical stuff now and then when he needs a filler. With only eight pages at his disposal that won't be often.

The operating room and the staff quarters that Mr. Scott wrote about (Page 21, November 1983 issue) were cut into five and seven pieces respectively (which was five and which was seven I don't know), for the short trip from the Bauer Street site to the Southport School. They were re-erected end to end and the gap roofed over and a connecting floor laid. The job was so neatly done that a visitor would not know it. It stands out in photographs taken at a distance and once one knows about it, the new floorboards make it obvious.

It has been a magnificent job of restoration. The school caretaker showed flair as a signwriter and has been able to copy the gold lettering style on the floors - all beautiful Nerand cedar. The staff quarters are now individual tuition rooms. The operating room is now the Band Room, and the Manager's office is the Principal's. Other nearby rooms are used by staff and one has been turned into a music shop.

Outside, the space between the buildings has been made into a brick forecourt for assembly. The bricks were salvaged from the old chimney/s and still bear the Brisbane makers imprint. All told it is a credit to the volunteers and any old Cable men would be happy to see how respected and well cared for it is. The kids treat it with great care; usually they are rather rough on school buildings and equipment.

The Operating room was the Chapel when the De La Salle Brothers had it and there were confessional boxes around the walls. There is a bad burn mark near the door - reason unknown. At the other end there was a solid concrete plinth sticking up through the floor. They had a hunt for matching floorboards and have made a great job in covering it, but everyone in the school is intrigued as to what the plinth was for, so solid and so embedded in the earth. Any of the old-timers know?

The Manager's house was transported quite a distance to the owner's country estate and set up on a hill about a quarter mile from the main homestead. He had a bitumen road put in to give access. It has been equally well restored with a few alterations to modernise it, such as tiled bathroom, stainless steel sink, and cupboards in the kitchen, otherwise it is much as it was. No doubt about it these Cable Managers lived in style. Being the private owner's home it is not open for inspection.

The Operating Room having become a chapel reminds me of a yarn I heard on the 40 metre band a few years back. A couple of old Broadcast techns were chatting about the old ZSM/CH transmitting station up Dundas way that had recently been consecrated as a Catholic church. Appears that when ZCH first started, a Telefunken transmitter that had been held in Customs bond, was used. It ran for some time and then new bits and pieces were needed in the way of spares, but Telefunken flatly refused to supply them as they had never been paid for the transmitter. The importer had defaulted.

A new transmitter was needed and eventually transmitters for the two stations were installed in a neat brick building. They were identical, but the ZSM one had been blessed by the Cardinal. It never gave any trouble. The ZCH Protestant one was never out of trouble and nearly sent them up the wall. The old-timer was wondering how much prayer would be needed to neutralise and exorcise the endless profanities embedded in the bricks due to that "blankety-blank" ZCH transmitter ...

It couldn't have happened to the Southport Cable station. Cable men were many things ... but always British gentlemen ..."

### FANNING ISLAND

By Bob Scott, Vancouver, B.C. Canada

Fanning Island is a small coral atoll in mid-Pacific almost on the equator. Shaped roughly like a footprint, (the native name is Tabueran - Isle of the Heavenly Footprint) it is roughly ten miles long by six wide. The land surrounding the lagoon averages only about a quarter of a mile wide and, as the highest point is only eleven feet, the island is invisible a few miles from shore. The lagoon is criss-crossed by coral reefs with a navigable entrance on the lee side. Just inside the entrance is English Harbour, the headquarters of the Copra Plantation where the manager's bungalow and quarters for the two bachelor members of the staff were situated. Scattered throughout the island were several camps or small villages for the native employees and their families. The natives were enlisted in the Gilbert Islands to the south and brought to Fanning Island on the copra schooner DORIS CRANE as indentured labour for a term of three years.

Whaler's Anchorage, also on the lee side of the island, was where ships of the Union Steamship Company anchored off the reef and discharged their cargo and passengers into lighters which were then rowed ashore by natives through the surf to a landing on the beach. This was where all passengers for the Cable Station disembarked.

When a ship was expected, a native was sent atop the one-hundred foot flagpole to keep watch for it. When it was sighted he would call out "Sailho!" The cry was taken up by all who heard and echoed around the island. Everyone gathered at the landing place on the beach to welcome any new members of the staff, or just to watch the activity on this red-letter day.

On one occasion after the ship had been sighted, the boy atop the mast reported that the ship, which was away off on the horizon, had sailed past the island, then turned back and steamed toward the island anchorage.

I went out on the surfboat with the Doctor and Superintendent. As we approached the ship the captain called out through a megaphone, "Why the blankety-blank don't you anchor this blasted little island of yours?"

The Superintendent aptly replied, "Well, it's got a cable forward and a cable aft; isn't that enough for you?"

The cable staff consisted of about six married men and twenty bachelors. The station was so isolated, being 1,200 miles from the nearest civilization, Honolulu, that no-one was required to serve more than two years before being eligible for transfer elsewhere. Ships of the Union Steamship Company called only once every three months northbound, bringing mail, food, general cargo and passengers for the station.

The staff worked around the clock in six hour shifts, five men to a shift. The Fanning-Bamfield cable, 3,458 nautical miles long, extended northwards and the Fanning-Suva cable, 2,045 nautical miles southwards. The long lengths of both cables made signals difficult to read.

As was to be expected in the tropics, insects - especially mosquitos - were a nuisance. Outside the operating room door was a bucket of kerosene. As each man entered he dipped his feet and hands in the kerosene and rubbed it over his arms and face to ward off the insects. Small translucent lizards scampered over the walls and ceiling of the operating room; every now and then one would lose its grip on the ceiling and drop with a thud.

Since it was almost on the equator the days and nights were of equal duration, the sun rising and setting in the same places each day. The annual mean temperature was 83.5 degrees, modified by almost continual trade winds which shifted between southeast and northeast for varying periods.

A trail, surfaced with broken sea shells, encircled the lagoon connecting the various camps. It was customary for the cable staff bachelors to go barefoot, dressed only in shorts and singlet. Soon after his arrival a bachelor was invited by others to go for a walk along this trail - in bare feet. Unlike the others' his feet were tender and it was not long before he was limping painfully. After a few months barefoot the soles of his feet became calloused like a native's and he was able to walk over anything. However when it came time to leave Fanning, it took weeks to become accustomed to wearing leather shoes again.

Off duty hours were spent in a variety of ways: exploring the island, sailing in outrigger canoes, fishing - either in the lagoon or outside on the reef - swimming, tennis, shooting migratory ducks in season, photography - which entailed doing our own developing and printing. Indoors there was a fair amount of social life, with billiards, library, gramophone, player piano and a dance-hall. Of course one entertained and was entertained for the purpose of quenching one's thirst. Occasionally one might imbibe a little too freely and be unable to do his night duty. All he had to do was wake up another man and ask him to do his duty for him. He was never refused, even though it meant his relief having to work two shifts in one day. Such was the esprit de corps in those days.

The first year usually passed all too quickly, while the second dragged on interminably. Time was ticked off on the calendar day by day, week by week, and month by month, until at last the day arrived for departure.

I was transferred back to Sydney. As there were no southbound steamers calling at Fanning, I had to sail on the MV Hauraki northbound to San Francisco, wait there a few days and then sail southbound on the RMS Niagara for the journey back to Sydney, travelling 12,000 miles instead of the 4,000 miles as the crow flew. A first-class passage was always provided on transfer, with a moderate allowance for wine and tips.

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VALE.

FRANK BRIDGES DUNSTALL died 28 November 1983.

1st World War Service with Royal Engineers 1917-1919.

Joined Merchant Marine Service as a Radio Operator 1924-1927.

Became a member of AWA Beam Wireless Service in 1927 and on retirement in 1963 completed 36 years of combined service in AWA/OTC.

A fine operator and good workmate sadly missed.

AND SPEAKING OF FANNING ISLAND -

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXTRACT FROM 1918 EDITION OF LUX

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SYDNEY CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOL, DARLINGHURST

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#### A WAR TIME EXPERIENCE AT FANNING ISLAND

Fanning Island, where we lived, is an atoll, one thousand miles south of Honolulu, and three degrees north of the equator. It has one of the Pacific cable stations, where we used to live, also a copra factory, employing about a dozen whites and 120 natives. The climate is hot, of course, but the heat is pleasantly tempered by the trade winds. On one side is a deep water opening into the lagoon, which has room for lots of big ships. The current rushes through the opening at seven knots an hour. There is plenty of very beautifully coloured fish, some of which are good to eat. Thousands of "Boobies" and "Terns" build their nests in the trees, and Frigate-birds soar high up all day. When the Boobies return from fishing in the evening, the Frigate-bird will dive from a great height on top of one of them, and worry it till it gives up the fish it was carrying home. Millions of land crabs, hermit crabs, and coconut crabs are also found there. The coconut crab is large and powerful. It climbs the tree, pulls a nut down; then comes down and makes holes through the husk at the three soft spots at one end of the shell, and scoops out the nut. About thirty gentlemen work at the cable station. There are five families, who have nice houses, and the other men live in the "quarters". The cable ship Iris took us there just after the war started. Seven days after we got there very early in the morning, to our horror, a German warship came and landed lots of sailors with rifles and a machine gun. They made lots of the cable men prisoners, then smashed up all the instruments and batteries they could find. They did not come into our houses or do anything to harm us, but of course we were very frightened. They blew up the electric light and freezing machinery, so that night we had to use candles, and we had no fresh meat for months afterwards. They also blew up the cables, and chopped down the flagstaff. Everyone thought we were all killed, and they were sending more men here, but the electricians dived to the bottom of the sea, and joined the cables again. Then they mended some of the instruments, and after fourteen days they were able to tell our friends that we were all safe, and so this exciting adventure ended quite happily.

G.L.

#### Editorial Note

The above article was contributed by George Maltby. Both George and the Editor of "LUX" magazine are intrigued as to the identity of the author or authoress, the only clue being the initial of the contributor which appear at the end - G.L.

Would there be any of the old-timers who may be able to hazard a guess?



OTVA WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

THE 9TH ANNUAL REUNION

By Hon Sec BRIAN MORRELL

The 9th Annual Reunion was held at the Coolabah Tavern, Morely, on Tuesday eveing, 29 November 1983 from 5 pm onward. There were nearly 30 Veterans, visitors, and representatives of OTCA present, including Mr. Randy Payne, representing the General Manager, Mr. W. T. Schmidt.

Some new faces among the gathering were a sprinkling of ex-CRS staff. Ted Hemp, retired and now living at Mandurah, about 100 kms south of Perth; and Norm Johnstone, John Frazier, Jim Devlin, Bill Wattleworth and Barry O'Keeffe.

Roger Bardwell, one of the TELCOM boys came along and made it 6 ex-TELCOM staff present - others, Jim Bairstow, Heb Farrar, Randy Payne, Ron Cocker, and Brian Morrell. A seventh member couldn't make it owing to ill health, John Coles, by name, but he will be there this year for sure.

Harry Rumble renewed old acquaintances with Roger Bardwell who spent some of his early days in Broome. Harry was at Broome Radio in the early thirties.

The Annual General Meeting didn't take very long and under the guidance of President Derek Walker, it was over in 10 minutes flat. The Election of Officers took about 30 seconds, and strange as it may seem, there were no changes from the previous year.

Messages of greeting came from the General Manager, Mr. W. T. Schmidt, Charles Carthew, our National Secretary of OTVA and Foundation Secretary of OTVA Victoria, Alan Arndt, Secretary NSW Branch, Bert Dudley, OTVA South Australia, John Eales, our "distant" member from Esperance Radio, George McDonald, Gosford NSW.

Des Else, ex-Cable Station, Cottesloe, is now with ABC/TV.

Les Owen is holidaying in Victoria following his retirement from AWA Ltd.

Fred McNulty is on "ships" and had hoped to be at the reunion if everything went according to plan.

The 10th Reunion will be held on Tuesday, 27 November 1984, from 1700 at the Coolabah Tavern, Morley - so make a note of it now. After all it is the TENTH Reunion and that's some form of a milestone, so much so that the GM, Mr. W. T. Schmidt, has promised to make every effort to attend this year, subject to commitments.

Fraternal greetings to Veterans everywhere from Veterans in W.A.

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SICKNESS REPORT

JOHN HENRY COULSON, Rokewood Victoria, ex-OTC Melbourne and ex-TELCOM Unit, has been in and out of hospital over the past 12 months. John has been farming since he parted company with the wonderful world of communications.

## BROOME'S EARLY TELEGRAPH LINK

By John Moynihan.

This is an extract from a letter to the Editor of the local paper "The West Australian", a copy of which has been forwarded to us from John through Brian Morrell.

Your article on the Broome courthouse (5 December) said that the building erected in 1890 served as a cable house for 21 years until superseded by a Darwin installation.

Under an agreement with the W.A. Government of the day, a cable from Java was landed at Broome in February 1889. A telegraph line snaking north from Roebourne to Derby via Condon, La Grange, and Broome, was finally opened on 9 April 1889, and "THE WEST AUSTRALIAN" noted with some pride that this line coupled with the cable to give W.A. independent international communication.

From the time of its opening, this cable carried all of W.A.'s overseas traffic until 1901.

When the line through Darwin and Java failed, other colonies routed their overseas traffic via Broome. The Eastern Extension Cable Company (which owned the cable) landed a cable from Africa via Cocos Islands at Cottesloe late in 1901 and this was extended to Adelaide early in 1902. From then on the telegraph business through Broome declined.

Under the original agreement with the W.A. government, the Eastern Extension Cable Company was allowed to bring in Indian servants to help run the cable house at Broome. However, after Federation, the Commonwealth Immigration authorities initially restricted and then finally reversed this aspect of the original agreement.

Starting in 1912, the cable company made further efforts to bring in Indian servants to reduce the cost of upkeep of its Broome establishment which had lost most of its business to the Cocos Islands cable.

The Commonwealth stood firm and as a result the overseas cable service via Broome was terminated on 31 March 1914. The cable company also announced its intention to take up the 25 year-old Broome-Java cable and reuse it elsewhere.

It seems reasonable to assume that Cable Beach, at Broome, was so named because the cable came ashore there.

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## A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN MOYNIHAN is a member of the Post Office Historical Society in Perth, of which BRIAN MORRELL is also a member, and John is considered very knowledgeable in the matter of the ROTTNEST ISLAND CABLE, a Telecom Cable linking Cottesloe with Rottnest Island. He is also highly regarded as to his knowledge of all communications matters through W.A. He is an Engineer in the NORTH WEST SECTION of Telecom, and I feel sure that if the OTC historian wanted any information, John would be only too happy to oblige.

If a museum ever gets to, or reaches the stage of being established, I feel sure that many Veterans would have in their possession many things that could help to make it authentic, apart from the many articles published in the

"NEWSLETTER". Telecom in South Australia has a very good museum in the old Eastern Extension Telegraph building in King William Street, close to the GPO, and there are many old Cable artifacts listed there, also.

Brian Morrell was one of the trainees in Adelaide during 1944, along with Randy Payne, Ken Banks, and Ted Gunning to name a few. We had a fair representation of the old TELCOM BOYS at our last reunion.

#### OTVA SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

##### South Australian Christmas meeting of the OTVA

The Adelaide Branch of the OTVA held their Christmas meeting at the home of Brax Horrocks on 24 November 1983. Again we were lucky as it was a pleasant day and we were able to be outside under his patio.

Those present were Geoff Cox, Cliff Birks, Claude Whitford, Harold Oates, Ron Ward, Bert Dudley, Fred Reeve, Max Lang, Les Reynolds, Keith Parker, Hugh Taylor, Ken Springbett, Norm Mackay, Bill Hyde, Ken Collett, Alan Arndt and Brax Horrocks.

Apologies for absence were received from Rocky Gordon, Charles Smith, Eric Symes and George Rowe. We had a letter from Randy Payne saying it was not possible for him to come from Sydney to be with us, but he sent a cheque so that we could all have a Christmas drink with him - thank you Randy, much appreciated.

The President, Brax Horrocks, extended a warm welcome to Alan Arndt (Secretary of OTVA Sydney) who had come all the way from NSW to be with us. It was good meeting Alan and we hope that he will be able to join us again next year.

Brax also mentioned how good it was to have present our two oldest members, Cliff Birks ((93), and Harold Oates (91). Both keep quite remarkably well.

Members were sorry to know that Charles Carthew had had a stroke so was of course unable to be with us this time. Alan Arndt was able to inform us that Charles is improving which is good to learn.

Fraternal greetings were received from the Melbourne and Sydney Branches and from Pat Sykes of W.A., Bruce Sutherland of N.Z., Eric Meredith and Fred Doolette of Sydney.

Our next meeting will be held at the Royal Hotel, Kent Town, at 2.30 pm on the 4th Thursday in May 1984.

BRAX HORROCKS.

THE POSTMASTER.

By "RECORDER".

Of course, the main idea of applying for a transfer to Fanning Island was the thought of saving money. The extra "locality" allowance for tropical service coupled with simple inexpensive living was very attractive, particularly to those of the staff who contemplated marriage when they had saved a few hundred pounds. Clothing was also unsophisticated and plain and as there were no stores to patronise, there was little expense apart from the normal monthly mess bills. Perhaps one exception was the canteen, but as liquor was relatively cheap, that was merely incidental, unless one indulged too freely. Most of the staff were rather moderate and there was little scope for excessive drinking. Maybe one or two were "regular" but the majority were extremely careful.

There was a post office on the Cable Station and it was manned by one of the staff. In the years 1919/21 the postmaster was genial Jimmy Coote. The office was a branch of the NZ Post Office and consequently all the stamps and other stationery were similar to any post office in New Zealand. The postmaster was also in charge of the savings bank. Jim worked his regular duty as supervisor in the cable station, but on mail days, which occurred for one whole day every three months, he was freed from his cable duties and concentrated on postal affairs. As the supply vessel "Tangaroa" was "in port" for only one day the inward mail had to be received and delivered and the outward mail had to be prepared and despatched, all within a few hours. There were many willing volunteers ready to assist in sorting, stamping and clearing the mail.

The Tangaroa always anchored in the open sea, half a mile from the shore, so passengers and goods had to be loaded on to heavy lighters, which were manned by Gilbertese boatmen wielding two or three pairs of oars. The helmsman manned the steer-oar and his control of the rowers was absolutely essential and was punctuated by yells and shouts heard over the roar of the surf pounding on the coral reef. His guidance and his timing when the maximum effort was required, were vital to the success of negotiating the narrow passage through the hard sharp coral formations on each side, taking full advantage of the waves to drive the boat well up on the white sandy beach. After discharging the cargo, the preparation and adjustments for the return trip to the ship - the manning and control of the oars and the rush to seek a safe distance from the shore, ere the next ponderous wave struck, all contributed to the adventure and excitement of the three-monthly replenishment of stores and mail. Mail-day was always one exciting hectic day of orderly confusion and no-one really recovered his equilibrium until the ship hauled up the anchors and disappeared over the horizon on the way back to Honolulu. It was virtually impossible to answer any correspondence on mail-day (the day it was received) because everyone was working at extreme pressure - everyone was tense, excited and busily engaged in some urgent project, which had to be completed ere the ship sailed.

In those days, salaries were paid in golden sovereigns. There was a limited supply of these and they were always kept in reserve in the Superintendent's safe. As soon as the monthly salaries were paid, a queue formed at the post office and the sovereigns were deposited in the savings bank - at about 3% interest. When the complete staff had banked their money, the Superintendent would give the postmaster a cheque for the whole amount and the sovereigns would be transferred back to the Superintendent's safe in readiness for the next pay-day. This system worked perfectly for many years and it was the normal method of currency circulation until 1920. In August of that year,

sterling was devalued from \$4.87 to the £1 to \$4.00 to the £1. At Fanning, information regarding the devaluation was, of course, unofficial being gleaned from the many press messages passing through the cable station.

Now, as all the staff on the island were there simply to save money for the future, the fact that all their savings would be drastically depleted was altogether too much. So, when the next pay-day arrived, no-one paid any sovereigns into the savings bank. In a couple of months, the supply of sovereigns was exhausted, being wholly distributed amongst the staff and as there were no deposits in the bank, no gold was available to pay future salaries.

Some bright individual conceived the idea that, now that the supply of gold had run out (sovereigns would always be worth their full amount because of the gold therein), the next best thing would be to purchase money-orders from the post office at \$4.87 and deposit them in a Honolulu bank. Thus, until amending instructions were received from Wellington, one would be able to make a purchase at the old rate of exchange.

It would appear that the New Zealand postal authorities had overlooked the fact that the Fanning Island post office was part of the NZ system, for they omitted to telegraph instructions to the postmaster. Apparently, it was customary for the authorities to circularise all post offices by mail and Fanning was included in this mailing list. By each mail there would be literally dozens of "circular" advices covering scores of internal domestic happenings in New Zealand, such as opening new offices, late shopping nights, counter attendances, bicycle allowances, postmen's uniforms, holiday observances and so on. The WPB was always rather full after a mail-day.

Nevertheless, in case Wellington decided to cable instructions promptly, there was an immediate panic run on the postmaster's office to buy money-orders. In normal times, there would be very few orders written and the office had only three pads of forms on hand. There was a limit of £20 to the value of each order for the USA. Consequently, if one wished to remit more than £20, one had to purchase several separate orders. So Jim Coote was kept very busy writing out a series of orders for each customer. However, as the savings bank had already been depleted of ready cash for staff salaries, there was insufficient to allow indiscriminate withdrawal from the deposits. No doubt each money-order purchased for cash, would allow another withdrawal from the savings bank. Jim never explained in detail how he was able to cope with the demand, but he cheerfully attended to all clients and indeed rationed those whom he thought were too greedy. In a short time, all the pads were used up and those who had been slow to take advantage of the situation were disappointed. Recent arrivals who had not had time to save much money and others who had already telegraphed regular remittances to other stations, considered themselves most unfortunate.

The next phase was to get someone on transfer to take the orders to the Honolulu banks. It so happened that Henry Parkinson was due for transfer by the next supply vessel and he willingly agreed to carry the orders to the banks and deposit them in the respective accounts. But this was not all; Henry was also given charge of a large parcel of gold sovereigns. When the vessel made her next trip to the island, Henry, weighed down with gold and documents, was tendered a royal farewell by grateful investors, helped on board the lighter and whisked through the reef passage and the rolling surf to ship at anchor in forty or fifty fathoms outside the shelving reef.

By this same vessel, Jimmy Coote received his instructions to change the exchange rate and the money-order boom was over. Or rather, it was over as soon as the supply of money-order forms was exhausted. By this time, the undercopies would have reached the clearing office in Wellington and there must have been some consternation in that department when it was learned that the Fanning Island residents had purchased orders at the old rate, while all other offices were using the amended rate.

With no money available to pay staff salaries, the Superintendent was obliged to cable the Manager in the Pacific at Sydney for instructions. Within a few months there arrived a large parcel of Australian banknotes. Of course there was no incentive to hoard these notes, as both New Zealand and Australian banknotes were not popular in Honolulu. The Australian notes were used for several years, following the same order of circulation - office - savings bank - office, as was used when sovereigns were available.

As a sequel to the golden era, in the following year, Roy Hosking and I, on transfer to Halifax N.S., were delayed owing to a train wreck in a small town in Minnesota called Elbow Lake. Not having any U.S. dollars, I walked along the railway track to the village and asked to see the manager of the local bank. Producing a handful of bright new sovereigns, I asked him to change them into dollars, saying that they were worth \$4.87 but I would take \$4.80. After carefully inspecting the coins on both sides, he passed them back to me, saying, "What are they, South American coins?". When I explained what they were, he offered only \$4.00. Whereupon I decided to go hungry rather than sell them for that amount. So we awaited the arrival of a relief train which took us to Chicago, where the banks were well aware of the true value of the British sovereign.

It was rather a sad day when sovereigns disappeared from circulation. They seemed to represent something more than just twenty shillings worth of currency. To me they symbolised the glory and solidarity of the old British Empire, when the pound and the gold standard were the measuring stick for all other currencies. The initial devaluation of sterling, was of course, the price the Empire had to pay for the long 1914/18 war, when Britain spared no expense or effort to defeat the enemy and British investments overseas were depleted to an alarming degree.

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#### THE TABAR ISLAND STORY - A RUN-DOWN

By. W. (Blue) Easterling.

Tabar is a group of islands about 80 miles east of Kavieng. Kavieng is located on New Ireland, north of New Guinea. The signals received were from a Coastwatcher, C. L. Page.

Page was about 30 years of age at the time and had been in New Guinea for some ten years. He came from Sydney. Working his way around the Territory, he had been to Tabar looking for gold and returned there in the early days of the War to manage Pigibut plantation on Simberi, one of the Tabar group. He took over the coast-watching duties of the owner.

Three islands make up the Tabar group. On Big Tabar there was a Catholic Mission with Father Murphy in charge, a Mr. Topal ran two company owned plantations, and managed two more on Tatau. A third was owned and run by Jack Talmage, a World War 1 veteran. On Simeri Mr. Page ran Pigibut and Marakor plantation was managed by "Sailor" Herterich.

Herterich was a German who had been in New Guinea since the German days. Being married to a native woman he escaped deportation after World War 1 and had been drifting around the Territory since, taking jobs here and there.

After Pearl Harbour the Japanese turned their attention southward and their reconnaissance and attack aircraft found Tabar a useful navigational point. Page had his hands full reporting them. Herterich (according to Cdr. Feldt) took a pro-Japanese line with the natives; that they would come and should be treated as friends. Page countered this as best he could, but his position was weakening.

Rabaul and Kavieng fell on 23 January 1942. Early the previous morning, Ted Bishton at Rabaul took a message from Page giving warning of another raid which came at 8 am. Page asked what he should do about getting away but all that he could be told was that he would have to work out things for himself as the Naval Intelligence Officer, Lt. Cdr. McKenzie had already left Rabaul. Ken Stone went with McKenzie as his Radio operator, but that's another story.

In the afternoon the AWA staff left with the exception of the Manager, Mr. Holland, who had decided to remain, and the office boy, Ian Gascoigne, who was staying with his father. That, too, is another story.

Meanwhile, back at Tabar, Page moved his teleradio to a hut hidden in the jungle, just as a precaution. On the 28th, a Japanese warship landed a party but failed to find it. He continued to transmit Intelligence information that he had obtained from the natives about the situation in Kavieng. The Navy reasoned that as he was going to stay, the best thing was for him to keep off the air and let the Japanese think that he had gone. Previous instructions to him to bury the radio and make for New Ireland, or wherever he felt best, had been ignored.

As he still kept transmitting he was ordered to close down until he received orders to recommence. In March he was commissioned as Sub. Lieutenant RANVR. Early in the month he came on air advising that renegade natives from Kavieng had looted Pigibut and were threatening to report his location to the Japanese. He was then advised to make for Buka which was still clear of Japanese; his reply being a further list of Europeans captured, and information that Namatanai airstrip was mined.

By the end of March it became obvious that his escape was impossible without outside help. The natives had started turning to the Japanese and Page had little support with his food supplies rapidly dwindling. It was late in May before an airdrop could be made. A cap and badge of rank, food, and a rifle and ammunition were to be dropped but the rifle package jammed in the aircraft bomb-bay. His radio commenced to play up and he could only transmit Morse code by touching two wires together. His knowledge of Morse was not the best and his signals were barely readable. Ken Frank of AWA Moresby was consulted, and figured, on the evidence, that the trouble was caused by a broken lead-in, and a replacement part was airdropped to Page. This put him back on air on R/T. He had been in contact with Lincoln Bell, another Coastwatcher on New Britain and they would chat in the Kavieng dialect. Bell's family had a plantation in New Ireland and Bell was hoping to go there and rescue his father.



By the end of May, Page was forced to hide in caves with only his long-time Tabar "wife", Ansin Bilu, (called "Blue" in Mrs. Murray's book) to help him. He radioed that the Japanese were setting up a native police force, and it would not be long before they would find him.

The U.S. Navy sent an old submarine to pick him up. Page kept the rendezvous for three nights but the submarine had broken down and had limped back to port. There were no others available. Page then advised that a ship with natives and dogs was coming to hunt him and the RAAF sent an aircraft to bomb it. The ship was not there, so an old wreck was bombed. It would at least let the natives know that Page still had outside help. The crew saw a dinghy near the island with three natives and a possible white man in it, but couldn't be sure that it was Page.

There was no reply from Page when next called by radio. The RAAF sent a Catalina to Tabar which was rather risky with Japanese fighters being based at Kavieng. The Captain timed his arrival for late afternoon and flew around Simberi at low level, but there was no sign of Page.

Page and Talmage had been captured on or about 16 June.

Cdr. Feldt's account is that the Japanese landed on Simberi and occupied Pigibut. Page and Talmage were in a small hut in the jungle which was found by a hostile native. The Japanese were told, and led by natives, captured the two asleep in the hut.

Mrs. Murray's version is that while "Sailor" Herterich was hardly a likeable character, he was not as bad as painted. She says that it was his wife who betrayed Page and Talmage to the Japanese after she had had a quarrel with Herterich. She was able to convince the Japanese commandant that Herterich was lying when he denied all knowledge of their whereabouts, with the result that he was taken prisoner with Page and Talmage for having given them aid. All three were taken to Kavieng and on or about 11 September were beheaded at Nago Island along with Father Martin and Father Murphy, and the Coastwatchers from the southern part of New Ireland, Lieut. Kyle and Sub-Lt. Benham RANVR.

After the Japanese surrender, a party of Naval personnel toured the area to try and unravel the story of Page and the others. A native woman, her appearance showing evidence of lashings and ill-treatment by the Japanese, approached one of the officers and handed him a ragged piece of paper. It was from Page. The contents identified the bearer as Ansin Bilu, and gave the information that she had had all her personal belongings and what little money she had saved taken by the Japanese. Page told how she had stuck by him right up until the time she herself was arrested and gaoled, and asked that she be taken care of the best way possible. It was apparently typical of the man that he asked nothing for himself.

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#### EPILOGUE.

The above has been a precis of the story forwarded to me by Bill Easterling. There is other information relating to individuals which would be of interest to those officers who served in the war-time island Radio Service and which I will reproduce when space permits. The story is of special interest to me, but I think it merits space in our "NEWSLETTER" because it shows the dedication of those who served in such areas toward maintaining communications above and beyond service requirements, even at the cost of their own lives.



NEWS FROM THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD.

By Bill Craig.

The Annual Reunion will be held on Friday, 2 December - again at lunchtime.

Most of the Veterans seem to have been keeping reasonably good health, though Harry Fox and Ron Carter both had spells in Middlemore Hospital - leaving Ron with an artificial limb below the knee. Oliver Crossley reports a big improvement in his eyesight after specialist attention.

Unfortunately the widows have not fared so well and I regret to advise the passing of Mrs. Win (Colin) Smyth, Mrs. Dulcie (Bob) Heron and Mrs. Via (Bert) Ellison. We extend our sympathies to all the relatives.

In April there was a reunion of TELCOMs in Sydney and a very enjoyable time was spent renewing old friendships. Two dozen TELCOMs and their wives made a party of about fifty. Organisation details were in the capable hands of Denis Erson and Randy Payne.

During the year a group of members inspected the Cable Vessel "Mercury" prior to the laying of the Auckland-Norfolk section. Improvements in cable and other communications systems since we retired have been amazing and it is staggering to note that the new Pacific Cable "ANZCAN" has a capacity of 1200 circuits. We hope to inspect the Auckland terminal when the new system is in operation.

Recent visitors from Vancouver were Mr. and Mrs. Harold Le Quesne retired from Bamfield station. They are touring New Zealand enroute to his home town in Australia.

We extend a hearty welcome to a more youthful Veteran from C&W Ltd. - Mr. Mike O'Sullivan - now in business in Onehunga.

VETERAN CABLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

AUCKLAND.

The Annual General Meeting and Reunion of the Auckland Veteran Cablemen's Association was held on Friday, 2 December 1983, at the Rose Garden Lounge in the Parnell Rose Gardens commencing at 11.15 am.

Present: Bill Craig, Fred Studman, Huia Evetts, Oliver Crossley, Les Gladding, Harry Fox, "Jake" Jacobs, Don Baker, Alan Miller, Les Davison, Tom Condon, Neil McNeil, Ken Healy, John Walker, Richard Michaels, Colin Nielsen, Jack Potter, David Thompson, Denis Erson, Mike O'Sullivan, John Todd and Allan McCullough.

Apologies and Greetings: Tom Atkins, Horace McCoy, Neil Wylie, Axel Mortensen, Bruce Sutherland (Nelson), Bob Martin (Taupo), Loftus Russell, Len Sedman and Ray Connolly.

Chairman's Report:

The gathering stood in silence as a mark of respect for the following deceased since our last meeting:

Roy Hosking (PCB)  
also Vere Ellison, Dulcie Heron and Winifred Smyth (PCB Widows)  
and Jack Carswell (P.O.)

The Chairman welcomed new member Mike O'Sullivan who served with Cable and Wireless in Nairobi and the Persian Gulf. Mention was made regarding a visit by Harold Le Quesne (Vice-President, Vancouver, B.C. Veterans) and his wife who were entertained by a small group of veterans in Auckland prior to their continuing on a tour of N.Z. and Australia. During the year a party of veterans had the opportunity of visiting the Cable ship "Mercury" prior to the ship laying the new Auckland to Norfolk Island cable. Earlier in the year a party of ex-TELECOM staff visited their counterparts in Australia.

Minutes: The minutes and Treasurer's report of the previous Annual General meeting were presented and confirmed.

Election of Officers for 1984: The following were unanimously re-elected:

Chairman: Bill Craig  
Hon. Sec/Treas: Fred Studman  
Hon. Auditor: Tom Condon

Correspondence:

Letters of sympathy were sent and replies received concerning the above deceased. Grateful thanks were received from our twenty widows for our Xmas cards and good wishes last Christmas. Newsletters from Australia and Canada were received, also the "Zodiac" and "Mercury" publications from Cable and Wireless, London.

General business:

We will continue to send Xmas cards and good wishes to all our widows as they are obviously much appreciated. Mention was made concerning a spell in hospital of Harry Fox and Ron Carter. Happily both are well again and Ron Carter is getting used to his artificial foot following an amputation.

There being no further business the meeting closed and those in attendance partook of refreshments, following which, members sat down to a delightful smorgasbord luncheon.

In perfect weather, it was a happy gathering in beautiful surroundings.

F. C. Studman,  
Hon. Secretary,  
829 Riddell Road,  
St. Heliers,  
Auckland 5

THE CRS DURING WORLD WAR 2 (WW2)

BY PHIL CHAPMAN.

Prompted by Alan Vagg's Coastwatching article in the April '83 issue, herewith a contribution concerning the CRS (for simplicity this term also embraces the then Island Radio Service) participation during WW2, based on the knowledge gained from perusing head-office records during my 14 years as chief of the CRS, my time as a CRS and Marine Radio-officer during WW2, and as a member of the Coastwatching Organisation until 1962, and my contacts with CRS staff old and new over my 48 years service.

To recapitulate.

The original CRS network belonged to the R.A.N. Following the takeover by AWA in 1922 it was written into a so-called "WAR ACT" that all CRS stations (mainland and Papua/New Guinea) would revert to naval operational control in the event of hostilities. Between the wars, RAN and Allied naval ships, apart from the facilities of a few short-range naval Post War radio stations at major ports, used the CRS for maritime communications. Upon the outbreak of WW2 in September 1939, the RAN assumed operational control of CRS communications and, additional to the traditional responsibility for Allied Merchant Shipping, the CRS network together with the major Canberra Naval Radio Station complex, VHP (Harman/Belconnen), which, fortuitously commissioned in December 1983, provided radio communications for RAN and Allied ships in the Australian Area and approaches. For obvious reasons Naval and Merchant ships did not break radio silence (transmit) except in action/emergency situations. In the shore-to-ship direction, messages to individual ships or fleets/convoys were promulgated by a system of broadcasting, i.e. the ships copied the broadcast but did not break radio silence to acknowledge receipt.

For naval ships the "I" broadcast method was employed. Although the majority of CRS stations were equipped with the frequencies to participate in the "I" method, adequate coverage for the whole area was provided by a triangle of the major participants of Canberra/VHP, Perthradio VIP6, and Darwinradio VID6. (When working "Navy", CRS stations added the number 6 to their regular callsign). As an example of the "I" method, Darwinradio would receive a message from the Darwin Navy office for a ship (or ships) in the Indian Ocean or West Australian waters. Darwinradio/VID6 would transmit the message, simultaneously on longwave and H/F addressed to Perthradio/VIP6, where the latter would be copied. At the conclusion, the latter station would then retransmit the message, exactly as copied, back to VID6. Thus, Naval ships within range of these two high-powered transmitting stations had a 'double' broadcast to copy from a selection of Longwave or H/F.

To receive messages from ship-to-shore Canberra/VHM and Perthradio/VIP6 (owing to the latter's coverage of the Indian Ocean approaches) kept watch on a multitude of H/F frequencies, termed VIX/O i.e. Naval ships desiring to contact any Australian radio station merely called VIX/O and any shore station hearing the call would respond. The other CRS stations, depending on their strategic location, monitored one or two VIX/O frequencies. As an example, Darwinradio maintained surveillance of two frequencies simultaneously by using a 'split' headphone watch.

In February 1941 the second major naval station was commissioned (Darwin Naval Radio Station, Coonawarra/VHM) and together with Canberra and Perthradio /VIP6, provided the major Naval broadcasts. The CRS stations, however, continued sending Naval 'Area' broadcasts and guarding designated VIX/O frequencies until the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, as the war grew with Japan's entry, the Naval Commitments at Perthradio and Port Moresbyradio, in particular, were significantly increased including direct radio links between Canberra/VHP and Port Moresbyradio.

Overall, the CRS stations had a military guard and the major stations had direct lines, even Naval despatch riders in emergencies, to the local Naval Intelligence, Coding and Operating Centres. In Navy working a variation of the International Morse known as "Tiddly" morse was used, which consisted of additional accented letters to confuse enemy attempts to decypher. The CRS operators, scorning to 'pencil' (write) down messages, had special typewriters evolved with extra characters to embrace 'Tiddly' morse. Further the Port Moresby war-time staff were the first, to my knowledge, to transcribe morse reception directly on to teletype machines.

Messages for the various Allied fleets were transmitted under different callsigns - a radio call to GBXZ meant "Calling any British warship". 'NERK' meant "Calling any USA warship". Similarly, Naval broadcasts to British and Commonwealth Merchant shipping were prefixed GBMS broadcasts. This was a British Admiralty scheme in operation well before WW2 for worldwide alerting to the then British Empire Shipping of possible hostilities. Those of us at sea prior to WW2 were advised through GBMS, a week before war broke out on 3/9/39, that hostilities were inevitable. (Actually I copied that dramatic GBMS broadcast from Adelaidradio/VIA whilst R/O on "SS Bungaree" steaming across the Australian Bight. "Bungaree" was later commissioned as minelayer "HMAS Bungaree".

Returning to wartime prefixes. A combination of four morse letters AAAA indicated attack by aircraft, SSSS - attack by submarine, RRRR - attack by naval ship, QQQQ - attack by disguised merchant raider. Also a series of 'contact' codes ranging from "Q" international, the old naval "X" series and the later Allied "Z" codes. Obviously to make all this work, confidential Naval Codes and Instructions were kept at Naval Shore Establishments, CRS stations and aboard Allied Naval and Merchant ships.

#### THE COAST WATCHING ORGANISATION.

It is not intended to elaborate on the actual beginning, nor confuse the issue concerning the A.I.B. (Allied Intelligence Bureau). Suffice to say that prior to WW2 the RAN, aware that many plantation, district officers, missionary and small island outposts used radio equipment, (originally the old pedal-radio) to contact AWA base (coast) stations in Papua/New Guinea and remote areas of Northern Australia, commenced issuing geographically selected outposts with then modern teleradio unit - an AWA 3BZ Transreceiver - equipped with an "X" (special) frequency provided to report any suspicious aircraft or shipping, and the installation of a crystal-locked receiver on the "X" frequency at selected CRS stations. Thus the Coast Watching Service was born with participating CRS stations guarding the "X" frequency on a continuous basis. The refitment of outposts with 3BZs and the enrolment of approximately 800 volunteer Coast Watchers and the issue of the confidential code (Playfair) was hurriedly completed by 1940. So, additional to providing wartime Naval and Merchant maritime communications, all the Papua/NG stations and the northern coast stations, particularly at Darwin with relay support by Thursday Island, Townsville and Broome were projected into a role that proved to be of vital importance to Australia's survival following Japan's entry into the war in December 1941.

All radio traffic in and out of Papua/NG was handled through the main stations of Port Moresby and Rabaul (also coast stations) with an additional eight stations at the smaller settlements communicating with the two major stations. All these centres did a splendid job in receiving alerts of Japanese aircraft from the various coastwatchers until Rabaul and the other settlements were captured by the advancing Japanese through January 1942 and, two months later, March '42, only Port Moresby remained in operation. Of the Rabaul staff, Manager "Dutch" Holland remained behind and was lost on a Japanese prison ship. Ken Stone went bush as the operator with a coast-watching party to be finally evacuated a couple of months later, on the other side of the Island by the patrol boat "LAURABADA". Bill Luke, Ted Bishton, Alan Hooper, Harry Groom, Bill Watson, Bill Brown and Ron Eldridge made a last minute escape by schooner to Port Moresby. (Space does not permit the stories of the escapes by staff from the other NG stations; however, some have been reported in previous NEWSLETTERS).

Port Moresby and Darwin bore the brunt of the Japanese air attacks and the Moresby station was moved to survive. Darwinradio was damaged during two raids in June '42 and sustained major damage from a direct hit in the August. Despite the attacks the staff carried on efficiently at both centres and handled countless calls on the coastwatching "X" frequency. Operating in the 6MHz band this frequency had a daylight range of approximately 400 miles which due to 'skip' was considerably enhanced early mornings and evenings. Not all calls were aircraft alerts; there were reports of suspicious vessels, submarines, survivors from sunken ships, downed airmen including Japanese pilots, and at times grim news of the deaths of participants. Herewith a typical intercept by Arthur Oliver at Darwinradio 30/4/42 from Dutch station Saumlaki, in Timorlaut:-

"43 refugees including 8 women, 11 children, 11 A.I.F., 3 officers, food short, single bomber attacked motor boat yesterday, please arrange evacuation."

A RAN CORVETTE was sent from Darwin and picked up all except the radio operator who was left to carry on. He finally went off the air two months later - fate unknown.

Parallel with the Allied advances in Papua/NG later in 1943, CRS staff operated coastwatching base stations at Lae, Finschhafen, Milne Bay, Misima, Hollandia, Madang, Biak, Bougainville and Torokina (i.e. Jack Allan, Charlie Beckett, Jeff Buckland, F. Dockray, A. Dunstone, Time Neale, Bill Watson, Les Young and W. Annand. Pat D'Arcy and Norm Laws of the "Beam" staff, attached to General Macarthur's communication staff, went on to the Philippines).

The full story of the CRS staff involvement in Coast Watching is beyond the scope of this article and the resources of myself. Whilst copies of some of the signals handled by Darwinradio still exist, there are no other copies of the significantly higher number through Port Moresby/VIG to quote from and to pay tribute to the Papua/NG staff wartime exploits needs inputs from veterans like Norm Odgers, Tim O'Neale and Syd Glenn. However, the following paraphrased quotes may give some broad indication of the contribution by the CRS staff involved.

In his book "The Coast Watchers" by Omdr Eric Feldt "on the AWA highly proficient operators and the teleradio systems the Coast Watching Organisation was based ... the Coast Watchers played a vital part in these operations, a part so important that without them the whole course of the war in the Pacific would have been drastically changed".

The History of the RAN 1942-1945 has this to say. "But within her powers Australia did what was possible to prepare defences. Most important was the establishment of the Coast Watching Organisation (now in 1942 about to come into its own)".

Many appreciative words were spoken by senior officers of the South Pacific Command in commenting on the Coastwatching assistance during the Guadalcanal campaign. Most treasured were those of USA Fleet Admiral Halsey who said that the intelligence signalled from Bougainville by the famous Coast Watchers, Paul Mason and Jack Reid, had saved Guadalcanal, and Guadalcanal had saved the South Pacific. With this in mind, how many veterans realise that our own Norm Odgers and his support staff received these vital messages from Mason and Reid?

(TO BE FINALISED IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF "NEWSLETTER").

### ELLIS SMELLIE - THIS IS YOUR LIFE.

Before we plunge into the main story it would be appropriate to say a few words about the author.

Ellis Smellie resides at the Lady Nell Seeing Eye Dog School Hostel, 384 Wattletree Road, East Malvern, Victoria, 3125. I am told that he is in his 92nd year. He has sent me one of the longest, and to my mind, most interesting account of his years in communications; longest, naturally, because he was 46 years in the communications game.

It is my intention to serialise his contribution.

And now ... on with the story.

The Day Ellis left Bridgewater for Wycheproof was the same day as he put on his first long trousers. In one pocket was a golden sovereign given to him by his mother. He had no other money. It was a day of a terrific dust storm. Being now a railway man he kidded the guard to allow him to travel in the Guard's Van. He helped at the stations until told not to do it. He was in the way.

At Korong-vale, in place of buying food he ran around the town. The dust storm at times, so intense, he could not see the ground from the high window in the van.

When the train arrived at Wycheproof he forgot what the guard had said and was ready to help there. He approached a very large Porter mistaking him for the Station Master and asked for orders. The Porter stared down at the skinny little kid and roared out "What's your name?" "Ellis" he was told. "What's your christian name?" "That's my christian name, Ellis". "What's your surname?" he persisted. "Smellie" was the answer. "What?" he yelled as he staggered back. "Smellie" and Ellis spelled it out as was a morse code operator's habit. "Smellie" roared the Porter, as he walked off down towards the Guard's Van, "What a bloody name to go to bed with". Over and over, he said it again between fits of laughter. At the Guard's Van he pointed to Ellis. "see that skinny kid there, his name is Smellie". And they all roared out laughing.

Because of the name being well known in Bridgewater for many years this was the first time Ellis had it brought home to him that it was a name to be laughed at. His next action was to approach the Station Master for orders to help get the train away as it was now about four hours late because of the dust storm. The Station Master was a Frenchman, Mr. Gillard, polite and courteous. He told Ellis to put his luggage on a seat and sit there. This Ellis did. Twice he had been knocked back. Some time after the train had left Mr. Gillard told Ellis to go to a Mrs. Mitchell's guest-house. The way was along a fence. Half way there Ellis lost his way in the dust storm which had thickened, and returned to Mr. Gillard. He was then directed around through the town and reached the guest-house around mid-night. His remark that he had not eaten since breakfast was not heard and he was shown a room. The plate of meat he was given at breakfast had maggots crawling in it and was uneaten, so Ellis arrived at the railway station still hungry. Mr. Gillard almost ignored him as he sat on a stool silent and determined to stay that way.

Then the telegraph register (which printed the morse-code on tape) called W.O.O. which was the call for Wycheproof.

During the three months Ellis had taken McKenna's advice to join the railway, McKenna had taught him all the railway work. Many times Ellis had heard Mr. Gillard at W.O.O. take a bunch of messages and an hour later call up for words he was unable to read on tape. During the three years Ellis had been a casual telegraph messenger at the Contract office Bridgewater, he had become an expert morse receiver. So he knew it would take Mr. Gillard a long time to do what he could do now. So Ellis grabbed some forms, a half inch stub of pencil and took down the traffic. After awhile, Mr. Gillard's big black beard came over his shoulder to see what he was doing. This unnerved Ellis as the sender, Frank Herrick, was one of the fastest senders and started off about twenty five words a minute and if not stopped, he would finish up sending out forty words a minute, and the writing only legible to himself. When told all O.K. Mr. Gillard gave the O.K. on the line. Then he stood up and roared. "You are a sound reader, a sound reader. This thing has driven me mad," and he patted Ellis on the back with a powerful right. It was a good hour before Mr. Gillard became normal. He kept yelling "a sound reader, a sound reader", and Ellis dodged the blows. Then he quietly said, "my son works at the post office. He puts it over me because he is a sound reader. He and a friend will be here tonight for speed tests using the register. You come here and meet them". When they arrived they, both big lads of seventeen, ignored Ellis. After they had finished, Gillard said to his son, "Give Ellis a go", "What! Does he know the code?" When Ellis doubled their speed, he was no longer ignored. Mr. Gillard's son became Ellis' staunch ally during his stay at Wycheproof. Ellis was there for the busy wheat season. There were times when twenty wagons would be waiting their turn to unload. The farmers would drift over towards the railway station and talk to Mr. Gillard, who was too polite to terminate a conversation. So he talked all day and was at the station till 3.00 am or he got up at 5.00 am to do his office work. Now that Ellis had proved himself capable, he soon started doing all the office work as well as the morse code and Mr. Gillard had free time.

With young Gillard's help, Ellis had a happy time in Wycheproof.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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