



# Newsletter

Vol. 3 Pt. 2 Page 101

APRIL 1985

## MEETINGS AND REUNIONS

### NEW SOUTH WALES

AGM, FRIDAY, 10 MAY 1985  
TIME: 6 PM

CONFERENCE CENTRE, 4TH FLOOR,  
OTC HOUSE, MARTIN PLACE,  
SYDNEY.

### VICTORIA

AGM, FRIDAY, 10 MAY 1984  
TIME: NOON - 3.30 PM

OTC HOUSE,  
LONSDALE STREET,  
MELBOURNE.

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

MEETING & REUNION  
4TH THURSDAY IN MAY (23RD)  
TIME: 2.30 PM

ROYAL HOTEL,  
KENT TOWN.

### QUEENSLAND

MEETING 29 MAY  
TIME: NOON

MANAGER'S OFFICE,  
OTC BRISBANE.

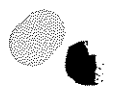
### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REUNION - TUESDAY,  
26 NOVEMBER 1985  
TIME: 5 PM

PERTH OFFICE,  
OTC,  
22 ST. GEORGE'S TERRACE.

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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OVERSEAS TELECOMMUNICATIONS VETERANS' ASSOCIATION (VICTORIA)

28TH ANNUAL REUNION

The 28th Annual Reunion of the OTVA (Victorian Branch) was held in the Boardroom of OTC House, 382 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne on Friday, 9 November 1984, at 5.30 p.m.

The President, Mr. George Magnus in declaring the meeting open, welcomed Mr. J.H. Curtis as the Commission's representative and took the opportunity of thanking Melbourne Manager, Jim Robinson, for making the Boardroom available for the Reunion.

George was happy to report that Charles Carthew continued to make very good progress, and that Doug Batten although still on the sick-list was well on the mend and back at home. Both would be pleased to hear from other Vets.

The Reunion was voted a great success - good fellowship prevailing in very congenial surroundings.

At the conclusion of this happy evening the attendance book recorded 38 members present and 16 apologies tabled.

E.G. RUSSELL  
Secretary

NEWS FROM THE VICTORIAN BRANCH OF THE OTVA

Veterans will be glad to hear that our colleague, CHARLES CARTHEW, has made a good recovery, so much so that he has nominated for, and been voted into, the position of General Secretary of OTVA Australia.

He writes,

"Correspondence from NZ, USA, UK and Canada still reaches me at regular intervals. Mr. LeQuene states that the recent passing of their only other Life Member, at the age of 97, now means that I have the honour of being their only Life Member. Our Canadian veteran colleagues exist East and West with Quebec being the senior centre of The Quarter Century Club. This 25 year length of service is suffering from a 'generation gap' similar, alas, to our experience, but 'Time Marches On' as relentless as ever, and we all must one day face the inevitable. I believe sentiment is the watch word to ensure we retain the spirit of 'good fellowship'.

Modern technology is a new force which intrudes on our territory, and is a vast contrast to the old days when the game was to do the utmost to keep the traffic flowing, maintain contact, and above all, to get the message through. Morse-men were a race apart and considered their profession as unique, with expertise not easily attained, but when mastered, was held firmly with a sense of pride.

Since 1972 it has been an honour and a privilege to represent Australian overseas telecommunications abroad as General Secretary of OTVA (Australia). Pen friends have resulted and also an interchange of NEWSLETTERS. When my health improved and I re-nominated for the position of General Secretary, OTVA, I was pleased when all five states replied endorsing my re-nomination.

I wish to express my grateful thanks and sincere appreciation for the co-operation and courtesy extended by State branches of OTVA (Australia) and the many 'phone calls, letters, and cards during my recent illness. It is this bond which keeps our association so buoyant, and long may it continue."

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#### CREDITS

The Editor of NEWSLETTER wishes to thank the following people for contributions of material received. Space will not permit the publishing of all material received in one edition, but all articles not used in the current publication are held for future use. My thanks go to:

"Ponto" Ponsonb  
R.B. Scott  
Brax Horrocks  
Tomi B. Condon  
Ellis Smellie  
Bill Sanders  
Pat Sykes  
Ted Bishton  
Joan Amery

All articles from Veterans are welcome.

#### THE VETERANS' BADGE.

Our Secretary has had an all-too-infrequent article from our compatriot from Queensland, WILF ATKIN, which I know will be of interest to veterans old and new.

Wilf writes:

"As the only surviving member of the Foundation Committee of the OTVA, I feel that very few members know the designer of the badge.

It was the late FRANK MARSDEN who was a draughtsman in the Engineering Department. After a long discussion it was decided that a 'morse key' must be one of the badge's essential features.

Frank offered to have a go at it, and when he produced his design at the following meeting it was adopted unanimously. An order was given to a recognised badge maker, the first order (I think) being for 200. They were all numbered on the back, and our first President, the late Jack Cameron had the honour of having Number 1.

As foundation honorary Secretary, I had Number 2. The late BILL STEVENSON, our Treasurer was issued with Number 3.

Frank Marsden was crippled with arthritis, but at this time was able to use his hands and though he had great difficulty in walking he was a bright soul with a great sense of humour and a great music lover."

ABOUT THE WRITER.

To give credit where it is due, WILF ATKIN also had a great sense of humour. In fact, it was a necessary attribute for survival in the early days of the Commission. Wilf was the first man to leap into the fray when the Cricket Club was formed, supplying material for the Smoko skits, sometimes rude but always hilarious. I hope that he will supplement our NEWSLETTER from time to time with some of his memoirs, of which, I know, he has a bountiful supply.

Editor.

ATTENTION JOCK COWIE - IN ANSWER TO YOUR QUERY.

The following has been received from TED BISHTON.

Replying to Jock Cowie's query in the November "NEWSLETTER", Page 86.

CON PAGE, the Coast Watcher on Tabar Island was the son of Con Page who was manager of Carpenter's Store at Kavieng, New Ireland.

There was no relationship between Con Page and Harold Page who was Government Secretary in Rabaul. Harold was never Administrator of the Territory. Con Page the Coast Watcher was beheaded by the Japanese. Harold, with all the civilians from Rabaul, and some troops, was on the "Montevideo Maru" which was sunk by an American submarine off Luzon Island in the Phillipines in 1942. No survivors.

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28TH ANNUAL VETERANS' REUNION

(N.S.W. BRANCH)

This year's annual reunion was held in the 4th Floor Conference Centre, OTC House, on Friday, 7 December, 1984, where we had a total of 140 members, guests and visitors in attendance. A most enjoyable evening was had by all, thanks to the very efficient job done by the OTC(A) Catering Staff.

The gathering included three visitors from our Western Australian Branch (Jim O'Toole, Alex Sandilands and Gerry Tacey).

After reading seasons greetings from all of our Branch Presidents, and National Secretary Charles Carthew, the Secretary introduced our N.S.W. Branch President, Ron McDonald, to officially open the proceedings by welcoming members and special guests present.

One minute's silence was then observed for those members who have passed on since our last meeting.

Mention was made by President Ron, of the following members who are on the sick list:-

Claude Dalley  
Reg Towner  
Marie Casey  
Jack Chant

The Secretary, on behalf of Laurie Durrant, who is having his book on Coastal Radio History published, asked any members who may have photographs of old CRS Stations (with suitable captions) to send them to him for inclusion in his book, which should be available early in 1986. After the photographs have been used for reproduction in this book, members who do not want them returned, can let him pass them on to be kept in our Archives collection.

President Ron closed the official proceedings by appealing to all present, to enjoy themselves, and drive home safely, to enable everyone present to have a Merry Christmas, and a very prosperous New Year.

ALAN ARNDT  
Hon. Secretary

#### THE PHILIP GEEVES MEMORIAL TRUST FUND.

Philip, our N.S.W. Veterans will agree, was a gregarious, entertaining wit, and it saddened us all when he died. I am pleased to report that the N.S.W. Branch of the OTVA made a donation of \$250 to his Memorial Trust Fund, but I think it only fitting to acknowledge personal donations made by individual members, and they are:

E.G. (Gray) McDonald  
E.L. (Lou) Brown  
H. McInnes  
R. Payne  
W. Luke  
N. Martin  
G. Cupid

It was a fine gesture toward the memory of a fine gentleman.

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#### VALE

GEORGE EDWARD McDONALD - Died 17 February 1985.

George commenced his working life with the E.E.C.C. in Perth, at the Cottesloe Cable Station. His service life with the P.C.B. and later OTC took him from Perth to Suva, Fanning Island, Sydney and Melbourne, but Perth (his home town) was always uppermost in his thoughts. Periodically he would make a pilgrimage back to see and talk of old times with his many friends in Perth.

When George retired from OTC in Melbourne, at his farewell a friend sang "I DID IT MY WAY". It can honestly be said that George did live his life his own way, which was direct, factual, and down-to-earth. George was George.

Throughout his working life he amassed many friends. George will be sadly missed by these friends and colleagues, as well as members of OTVA.

JOE HAWKINS - Died 9 April 1984.

Joe was an ex-member of A.W.A. with which he served fifty years. We don't have too much detailed information about Joe, but I do know that he was in charge of all training at the Marconi School of Wireless just after World War II. I have one particularly fond recollection of Joe which I will detail later.

HAROLD GRAY

On page 64 of the November "NEWSLETTER" you will see that a minute's silence was observed to mark the passing of a number of our Veterans, among which is a listing, HAROLD GRADY. This is incorrect. It should have read HAROLD GRAY, who also worked with A.W.A. as an instructor in the Marconi School of Wireless, under Joe Hawkins. Both Joe and Harold figured in the incident I will now relate.

"SETTLE DOWN, HIGH SPEED BEAM"

The above cry will bring back memories to all those blokes, twentyfour of them to be exact, who came out of the Navy and Air Force at the end of World War II to be trained in the High Speed Beam Wireless Course under the Commonwealth Servicemens' Rehabilitation Scheme.

With the return of thousands of men from the Services to Civvy Street, the Government was faced with the problem of an enormous force which had been trained to perform duties in a battle area which would not be appropriate in civilian life. The Government therefore set up training courses in skills and trades which would enable these men to take their place in society and made an appeal to those firms and companies who could assist in the scheme.

Full credit must go to the then heads of A.W.A. for guile. The Beam Wireless Service would expand in leaps and bounds, they imagined, and operators and telegraphists would be the prime need. Here was a chance to obtain twentyfour already trained operators, and train them for the added skills required for the Beam service, and be paid by the Government for training operators for their own Company. Brilliant!

The man in charge of Training, both for this course and the First Class Ticket course, was Joe Hawkins, a dapper, moustachio-ed gentleman, and he, in turn, entrusted the High Speed Beam course, (as it came to be called), to his Chief Instructor, one Harold Gray, a quiet, gentle gentleman who had done absolutely nothing to deserve this impost.

So far as the touch-typing was concerned, the pupils were keen in their interest, but when it came to the morse sending period at which most of them could already perform the required twentyfive w.p.m., their interest flagged, and these periods came to be used for other purposes, like doing an odd bit of shopping, popping along to the Housing Commission office to see how their application was going, or the taking of medication at the Queensland Hotel just around the corner. Harold Gray, God love him, had enough on his First Class Course plate keeping tab on those bodies, let alone keeping track on the will-o-the-wisps of High Speed Beam.

Then one fateful day, Joe Hawkins came on the scene. High Speed Beam had dwindled down to three men at this stage, and when Joe brought this to the attention of Harold, poor old Harold went white. Joe armed himself with a memo pad, obtained the names of the three loyal subjects (who would have been with the others, only they had no money), and took up a strategic position near the one and only exit/entrance.

One by one the Course appeared, some hearing irrefutable evidence of their crime, such as parcels marked David Jones, Farmers, etc., but invariably the answer to the question, "Where have you been?" brought a question in response, "Did you check the toilets?" When Joe answered in the affirmative, the culprit broke down and confessed all, throwing himself on the mercy of the court.

From then on the morse practice sending periods were well attended. The boys were awake-up, as they say in Shakespeare. However, flushed with his previous success, Joe catapulted into the room a few weeks later, pad in hand.

You wouldn't read about it! Only one bloke was missing, and all the poor sod did was to go to the chemist next door to pick up a script of anti-biotics he needed to stave off a massive dose of the wog, but because he was one of the previous offenders, Joe was convinced that he was a constant offender, a rebel, an anti-social - and after issuing warnings right, left and centre, went off frothing at the beak. To add insult to injury, it was the only two occasions that the culprit had ever been absent from the room, and both of them for the purpose of picking up genuine medication. All he could do was look at us and say wryly, "Wouldn't it?"

Most of the twentyfour have gone now, but those of us who are left know the identity of the victim. And the victim knows that we know - but because of his responsible position within OTC his identity must remain a secret.

After all, how could he exercise his control over staff to ensure that they don't "duck out" if they ever became aware of this story.

But I know he'll smile when the memory comes flooding back.

#### MORE ON SOUTHPORT

Contributed by Bill Sanders.

Many thanks for the Newsletter of 19 November 1984, and I feel that I may be able to add something about the concrete slabs at the old Southport Cable Station (page 72).



Firstly, there used to be four long wooden legs sunk into the earth below the floor of the instrument room and were flush with the wooden flooring; on this was mounted the Cox Magnifier for use on the Southport/Norfolk Island cable. This magnifier and Cox relay system were later replaced by the fork relay system.

Now re. the concrete slabs or plinths: well, firstly, I installed these for the installation of equipment associated with the method of working known as the regenerator system which was used by the Eastern Telegraph Company and which replaced the old Cox relay system, the year being 1930. The equipment consisted of 1 Synchronome Clock, 2 Clock-controlled Units and 2 Synterpolators, the last having its own built-in synchronising unit.

The above was only installed at Southport for use on the PC/NI circuit.

The PC/SY section was worked plain relay (fork) with associated equipment.

Southport was the first PCB station to be supplied with this equipment so we had not had experience with this gear; hence I was sent to Adelaide Station for a month to gain some knowledge of the Regenerator System, which time was sufficient to acquaint myself with the old equipment and to understand the synterpolators, synchronome clock and the clock-controlled units.

The above refers to Southport at the time, but further installations at other stations did occur and some already did have anti-vibration methods fitted. This definition refers to the concrete slabs at Southport.

Perhaps the Southport School may be interested to know what purpose the concrete plinths served.

As a small personal note - during my stay in 1930/34 I played tennis at the same Southport Club as two of the Southport school teachers, Jack Ratcliffe and Matt Walker.

Finally, I would like to say things have changed somewhat; I was a probationer at Southport 1921/1922 (Charlie Swinney and I travelled together Sy/Brb in the old Katoomba) and Deputy Engineer 1930/34.

#### RECOLLECTIONS 1920/60

By R.B. Scott

#### Sydney and Auckland

Having once had a taste of overseas travel I found it difficult to settle down to ordinary life in my home town of Sydney. I do not think the system had changed much except that Wheatstone Morse transmitters had been installed on the Sydney-Melbourne telegraphic circuit and a cable had been laid between Sydney and Southport to provide the main route for international traffic to Europe and America.

I remained in Sydney for about eighteen months and then a volunteer was called for Auckland, New Zealand. I applied for the vacancy and was accepted. After a few days' journey by steamer I arrived in Auckland on my twentyfirst birthday. Having already made arrangements for board and lodging, I proceeded directly to the place, a private home in Onehunga at the foot of One Tree Hill park, which was to become my favourite 'stamping ground'.

I enjoyed life in Auckland very much. My landlord was an old Maori war veteran in his nineties who told many tales of the early days in New Zealand. He was married to his second wife, a Maori of middleage who was an excellent cook.

The cable office was situated on the third floor of the Auckland postoffice close to the harbour and ferries. Contrary to the system at other stations, the staff here, instead of changing from receiving to sending positions every hour, stayed in the one position all day and swung by the day instead of by the hour.

The main route of Australian overseas communications at this time was via Sydney-Southport-Norfolk Island-Suva and on, the Sydney-Auckland cable being used for local traffic only and the Auckland-Suva cable for New Zealand international traffic.

On one occasion, after I had been in Auckland nearly two years, the main route was interrupted by a break in the cable near Norfolk Island. This meant that all Australian, as well as New Zealand international traffic had to pass through Auckland on its way to Suva and on. As Auckland station was not equipped with relays there was only one way to handle this vast amount of traffic - by Klein translation. In this system an operator acted as a human relay. The received tape was passed over a Kleinschmidt keyboard perforator and the operator, reading the signals, translated them onto perforated tape for re-transmission. With this system, errors could be made both in reading the cable signals and in translating them. In order to increase the capacity of the cable to cope with the extra traffic, the speed was increased beyond the normal point. Local management decided that only two of the operators on the staff could handle this situation - Roy Hosking and myself - so the days were divided into two twelve-hour shifts. I was put on the evening shift, noon to midnight, and Roy on the night shift, midnight to noon.

Under the pressure I had to take off my coat, roll up my sleeves, loosen my tie and even take off my wrist watch. This system continued for about two weeks until the cables ship could repair the cable. We did not receive any extra allowance for this work, or even an official acknowledgement, only the overtime involved. It was considered to be all in the line of duty. That month I received and transmitted over 100,000 words without errors, but before it ended I received a traumatic shock.

All errors were traced to the operator who made them. One day I had a batch of ten errors issued to me. They were all clashes - that is, made by hitting two keys on the keyboard perforator at the same time. I prided myself that I never did this because I could tell when I hit the wrong key. I protested that the errors must be mechanical failures but to no avail. I had no recourse but to accept them and they were logged against me. This so undermined my confidence that each night my sleep was disturbed by distorted nightmares and I soon became exhausted. The doctor recommended a few days rest.

Upon returning to the office I thought it better not to take up Klein translation again, but the kindly supervisor (Tam Smales) persuaded me that I could do it and that it was the only way to regain my confidence. So, reluctantly, I went back to the job.

A few days later I found the keyboard perforator clashing on certain letters - the same letters as before. This time I had caught it red-handed! It was the perforator that had made the errors - not I! The station engineers (K.C. Cox and W. Fowley) were called to witness the incident and agreed that it was the same machine that had caused the previous errors and agreed to accept all of them as mechanical.

My confidence was now restored, but the shock - and the nightmares - were to have a lasting effect. I still have them on occasions.

Not long after this I applied for and received a transfer back to Sydney. It was customary to transfer a man every two years or so, provided that it suited the exigencies of the service.

#### Sydney and Bamfield

During my absence from Sydney the cable system had been duplicated between Suva and Bamfield with the laying of a fast 'loaded' cable. A new three-storey concrete office building had been constructed at Bamfield and a new wing added to the Bachelors' Quarters to accommodate the extra staff that was anticipated.

The new fast service enabled the Pacific Cable Board to capture a lot of traffic from the Amalgamated Wireless Company, their competitors. However, shortly afterwards the A.W.A. introduced a new system of long distance radio - the Beam - which concentrated the signals like a searchlight instead of broadcasting them. They promptly recaptured the traffic they had lost.

I was now twentyfive years of age, unattached and seeking something, I knew not what. Life somehow did not seem to have fulfilled its promise. When a vacancy occurred in Bamfield, I applied for it and was accepted. I sailed on the old Niagara in early March, 1930. Travelling first-class on an ocean-going liner was my idea of good living. I always enjoyed it. Now-a-days, at this stage of life, I do not feel that I can spare the time to enjoy myself that way: I fly.

Upon arrival in Victoria, British Columbia, three weeks later I transferred to the old Princess Maquinna for the overnight coastal voyage to Bamfield. The weather was clear and sparkling - an entirely new experience for me, accustomed as I was to much warmer climates. I found it exhilarating.

When we docked in Bamfield there were a few old acquaintances there to meet the ship. I think they must have been more than mildly amused when I stepped ashore clad in the manner of a young man about town complete with bowler hat, silk scarf and gloves.

For me it was a case of love at first sight. I fell in love with Bamfield and have remained so ever since. Within an hour of disembarking I was hiking through the forest, and almost every day thereafter, averaging five miles a day on the West Coast Trail.

Bachelors were accommodated in the beautiful, photogenic Bachelors' Quarters building, built by the C.P.R. for the P.C.B. in 1902, and were waited on hand and foot by Chinese servants. It was like living in a Country Club. We had almost everything. Not all bachelors were happy with the isolated life on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, some referring to the gaunt, concrete structure that housed the operating room as 'Alcatraz'.

The working speed of the new cable was 750 l.p.m., divided into three channels of 250 l.p.m., one channel going to Sydney, another to Auckland and the third to Suva. The signals on this cable were 'copper plate' compared with the other slow original cable, every dot and dash being clearly defined.

As we had the longest cable in the world on one side and one of the longest landlines across Canada on the other, no system of automatic working had yet been devised. The gum and punch system was still in use with the operators acting as human relays. There was a physical telegraphic circuit only to Halifax, 4,000 miles away. It is a wonder that it worked as well as it did. Quite often we found ourselves sending into 'thin air' having lost contact with Halifax.

During periods of magnetic storms the C.P.R. (which maintained the landline) were unable to keep fuses in the circuit: the electrical impulses being generated by the storm would blow the fuses as fast as they were replaced. On the cable side the slow cable was sometimes likewise unworkable due to a continuous alternating current, like reversals, being generated in the cable by the magnetic storm. The new, loaded cable was unaffected.

The traffic pattern was curiously tidal with the outbound traffic from Europe and America flowing through Bamfield from 9 am to 9 pm, then, after a slack period, it would reverse and flow in the opposite direction from 9 pm to 9 am. The new simplex cable was switched, or changed over, for use in whichever direction the traffic was flowing, the old slow cable being used for communication in the opposite direction.

The weather pattern was quite different then; the winters were colder and the summers warmer. I have seen small coastal oil tankers come into Bamfield with their rigging completely coated with ice. One winter a bitter Northwest wind blew continually for six weeks! Bamfield Inlet froze over right up to the Cable Station. Trapped in the ice were thousands of pilchards and the seagulls descended on them squawking and screaming with delight. The lakes froze over the black ice which was excellent for skating; although it was somewhat disconcerting to be able to see the weeds growing below.

We earned a month's leave every year. This could be saved until we had long leave, or furlough, after five years. Then our passage was paid back to our domicile with travelling time not being included. We could travel any route we wished, the cost of our direct passage being handed to us in advance. Many Australians, myself included, chose to travel the long way around the world via Europe, spending two or three months travelling and the remainder in Australia. If we did this we also received a free train passage across Canada from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

So, in 1934, I made the classical tour of Europe, returning on a P & O liner through the Suez Canal to Sydney. At this time, despite the fact that it was a good paying proposition, the Pacific Cable Board system was sold to

Cable & Wireless Ltd., which owned or controlled most cable and radio systems in the British Commonwealth. The two systems were combined in the one building in Spring Street, Sydney. Gradually the P.C.B. men lost their identity (of which they were so proud) and were absorbed by their previous competitors. I applied for, and was granted, transfer back to Bamfield - provided I agreed to serve temporarily at Suva for six months. (To be continued.)

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### BITS AND PIECES

My spies report that CLAUDE DALLEY is progressing satisfactorily after an operation in which his leg was amputated in January. It goes without saying that we all wish him well, with the fervent hope that nothing further crops up.

From Victoria GUYE RUSSELL, Secretary of the OTVA Victorian Branch, has sent an up-date of the addresses, etc. of Veterans. Two members, G.M. CAMPBELL and E.A. WILLINGTON are listed on the Vale list, but he has no other details. Should any have any information relating to the deaths of these members the Editor would be glad to have it, and any snippets known by veterans who were personal friends or acquaintances of the gentlemen.

### VALE

A.A. McCALLUM died recently at the age of 81 years. He had retired from OTCA after serving with the Coastal Radio Service at POM, BNE and other stations. Our sympathy goes to his family and friends.

TOMI CONDON tells us about a descriptive phrase manufactured by "CHILLER BARDEN" or "YAMMA", as they used to call him at Fanning. Charlie's comment about someone who was a hit on the dumb or useless side was "About as useful as a hip pocket in a shirt". Though the Aussies haven't got a patent on these types of descriptive phrases they certainly must rank high with the best. I had a mate who once announced "I'm so B---- hungry that I could chew the backside out of a rag doll through the bottom of a cane chair."

Another saying heard by Tomi was, "He comes from a distinguished line of batchelors". I'm pretty sure that we all know someone like that.

### OLD ACQUAINTANCES

At the NSW Branch of the Vets Christmas bash held on 7 December last, I was particularly pleased to see that BILL DAY and his better half, PHEMIE have returned to the fold after covering most of Australia in their caravan. Both of them look all the better for the trip.

Present also was LES (Double Pay) DOUBLEDAY down from Rockhampton in the heart of Bjelkeland. Les reports that his wife, HILDA, is in poor health, and we wish her all the best for the future. Les has always contended that Bill is his half-brother, but we take that with a grain of salt, especially when you compare the names.

JOAN AMERY has sent along some old photographs showing the PCB Station at Fanning Island and the Station at Suva, with a picture of some of the staff, in the year 1910. The photograph of the Fanning Island Superintendent's house was also shot in 1910, and shows CHARLES LOUIS HENSLET standing on the verandah. Photos of this kind are very welcome, particularly those which give details on the back. They will be onpassed to JOHN WALKER for inclusion in our archives. Unfortunately our NEWSLETTER is not equipped to reproduce photographs with any clarity, but our thanks go to you, Joan, for sending them along. A search through old trunks and suit-cases may unearth similar finds.

#### VALE

FRANK BRIGGS - News has just come to hand that Frank passed away on Thursday, 14 March 1985, after suffering a massive coronary. The tragedy of it is that Frank was only 57 years of age. He was a diabetic for many years. He was first employed by AWA starting off as a message bundler but later becoming a telegraphist, and onward up to acting Shift Controller, I believe. Our sincere sympathy goes to his widow and family.

#### VETERAN CABLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

AUCKLAND.

The Annual General Meeting and Reunion of the above was held on Wednesday, 28 November 1984 at the Rose Garden Lounge, Parnell Rose Gardens, at 11.15 am.

The Chairman, Bill Craig, opened the meeting and members stood in silence briefly for those passed on since our last meeting:

Don Baker (AK)  
Jack Turnbull (MBN)

Stanley Gaskin (UK)  
Bill Whaley (BC)

Chas. Halsted (UK)  
also Mrs. Eva Wylie

#### On Sick List:

The Chairman reported the following:  
Alex Mortensen (in hospital)  
Loftus Russell (recently 5 weeks in hospital - now happily improving).

#### Those Present:

T. Condon, R. Connolly, P. Cowlshaw, W. Craig,  
O. Crossley, L. Davison, D. Erson, H. Evetts, H. Fox,  
L. Gladding, K. Healy, H. Jacobs, A. Miller, F. Studman,  
D. Thompson, J. Todd, J. Walker, B. Wallace.

#### Apologies & Greetings:

T. Atkins, R. Carter, M. Fulton (Nelson), N. Jones,  
H. McCoy, A. McCullough, N. McNeil, L. Russell, L. Sedman,  
B. Sutherland (Nelson).

The Chairman welcomed our guest Mr. Mike Milne (ret. ex N.Z.P.O. Engineer) and all members. He also reported on a recent function attended by some of our members, to celebrate the official opening by Her Majesty the Queen of the new ANZCAN cable linking N.Z. and Aust. to London, and witnessed the ceremony on T.V. as guests of N.Z.P.O.

General Business: It has been found necessary to increase our subscriptions to two dollars in view of rising costs of postage etc. It was agreed to continue sending Christmas cards to our 18 staff widows, a gesture much appreciated by the response received.

Minutes: The Minutes of our last A.G.M. and the financial statement was read and confirmed.

Correspondence: From absent members, widows and overseas colleagues together with Fraternal Greetings and Newsletters from Australia and Canada. Our regular receipt of "Mercury" and "Zodiac" publications are much appreciated.

The following officers for 1985 were unanimously re-elected:

Chairman:	W. Craig
Hon. Sec. Tres.:	F.C. Studman
Auditor:	T. Condon

Following the meeting those present enjoyed a delightful smorgasbord luncheon in the restaurant. Further exchange of news and experiences brought another happy occasion to a conclusion.

F.C. Studman,  
Hon. Sec. V.C.A.

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#### OTVA SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

The Adelaide - S.A. Branch of the OTVA held their Christmas meeting at the home of Brax Horrocks on the afternoon of 22 November. Although early summer, it was a fairly cold day so we needed constant applications of alcohol to keep us warm.

Those present were Cliff Birks, George Rowe, Norm MacKay, Keith Parker, Max Lang, Les Reynolds, Geoff Cox, Ken Springbett, Bill Hyde, Claude Whitford, Harold Oates, Brax Horrocks and Lou Brown from NSW.

Apologies were received from Eric Symes, Charles Smith, Fred Reeves, Ken Collett and Bert Dudley.

The President, Brax Horrocks, extended a warm welcome to Lou Brown who had come all the way from Sydney to be with us. Lou gave a most interesting talk on the Anzcan project and many other facets of modern communications, mostly quite incredible to us older members.

Fraternal greetings were received from Melbourne, Sydney and Perth branches and we had letters from Randy Payne, Bruce Sutherland and Pat Sykes, we were sorry that none of them could be with us but we drank their health in their absence.

Our next meeting will be at the Royal Hotel, Kent Town on the afternoon of the 4th Thursday in May 1985 - at 2.30 p.m.

NEWS FROM OUR CANADIAN CONFRERES

Last November, JOE COLLISTER received a letter from HAROLD H. Le QUESNE, head of the Quarter Century Club, Western Chapter, who writes -

"Greetings from Canada, this time last year Katherine and I were about to spend one great month in Sydney, surfing and visiting.

The enclosed photograph, painted by George Lamont of Teleglobe Canada, Montreal, and reproduced, is "BAMFIELD BEFORE 1962". I just thought that somewhere suitable in the Overseas Telecommunications Commission's Headquarters could be framed and find a place, in memory of well over 50 years that Sydney and Bamfield worked together.

It is quite a good painting: shows the concrete Cable Office - the wooden Bachelor's Quarters and the Chinese Servant's Quarters on the extreme right of the picture - a glimpse of the Married Quarters in the background - the Cable Tanks - Cable Hut - sheds where the power was generated. It also shows a fishing boat, the type of boat seen on the West Coast of Vancouver Island where thousands troll for salmon.

Trust this photograph arrives in good condition. At this time and being close to Christmas we take the opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas, and I would be pleased if you would convey the same thoughts to Trevor Thatcher, Gordon Cupit and their families, and of course, greetings to all those who remember a "handful" of Australians still enjoying life on Canadian soil."

Harold.

Well, the picture arrived in good condition and is in the possession of Trevor Thatcher who has been appointed custodian until such time as our Veterans Museum is established - which, we hope, will not be very long.

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A VETERAN CABLEMAN REMEMBERS  
NORFOLK AND FANNING ISLANDS

W.D. (BILL) FOWLIE INTERVIEWED BY R.B. SCOTT

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Q. "Tell about the office conditions in Norfolk, Bill."

A. "It was situated in a wooden building, bungalow type. There was the manager's house next door and farther down was the old Quarters building. At one time there had been a fairly large staff at Norfolk because all the messages used to be relayed there by hand. There were messages coming from Suva which were relayed on to Southport. There was another cable from Auckland to Norfolk Island and all these messages were relayed by hand. But by the time I got there in 1926 the office had been converted into a relay station. The whole of the apparatus had been invented, patented and manufactured in England from Mr. K.C. Cox, a very clever engineer.



The instruments received the signals from Fiji and Southport, depending on the direction, and relayed them after clearing up and bypassing all the imperfections caused by the characteristics of the cable and sent a new, perfect, signal on to the next section of the cable. One of the chief instruments was the Cox Magnifier which increased the amplitude of the received signals to such an extent that they could work the automatic apparatus. Before the Cox Magnifier was introduced the amplitude of the signals was so small that all it could do was to operate a coil which had a mirror attached to it. A light was reflected on to the mirror, and as the light went up and down on a scale, the operator just had to watch the fluctuations of this reflected light on the scale and write up the messages from that.

This method was superceded by the siphon recorder which gave a permanent record of the signals - something like a seismograph. This had been further improved by the Selenium Magnifier, which was also invented by Mr. Cox, which amplified the signals one hundred times and made them strong enough to work mechanical relays.

He also invented an interpolator which gave a perfect signal for onward transmission to the next section of the line. He also invented another instrument which looked after all but the most severe attacks of the Aurora. As you know, in the cable itself, besides the signalling currents, there were always currents induced by changes in the earth's Magnetic Field. These set up currents and the cable signals were superimposed on these 'earth currents' as we called them. During magnetic storms I have sometimes seen a cable practically unworkable, because these currents were so bad, for twentyfour hours - that was the Bamfield-Fanning Island cable.

But down in the South Pacific area, in my time, I only saw one occasion when earth currents in the cable became so bad that for an hour or two we could not work through them.

Mr. Cox also invented a re-perforator which not only received the signals but also turned them out in re-perforated tape which could be either stored or re-transmitted onward to the next station on the line. this perforated tape would work an automatic transmitter. It was a very wonderful system. I was very proud to be allowed to - I thought I was in charge, but it was really Bill Sanders who did all the work and showed me what to do.

By the way, the station at Norfolk was on the edge of a cliff which was almost perpendicular. At the base of the cliff was a bay with a patch of sand and that is where the cables landed. The bay is known as Anson Bay, named after one of the early explorers of the South Seas. There was a path up this precipitous cliff and it took us about fifteen minutes to walk from the Cable Hut, which was down on the beach. Once a month we had to go down and inspect the hut and the cable and then zig zag our way up the face of the cliff. The landline, which connected the cable hut with the office, was entrenched up the side of the cliff. All three cables came up in that way.

There was one operator on duty at a time and there were three duties of eight hours each. An assistant engineer covered day and evening duties, but we were subject to call if anything went wrong for the full twentyfour hours. The manager, Mr. Warner, was very efficient and kept a close watch on us.

It could have been a very happy station, but just about that time it was decided to renew the main batteries - We had a power plant and electric lights (D.C.). There was a gasoline driven dynamo, and a very elaborate switchboard in an engine house about a hundred yards away from the main station. It also contained two large hundred volt batteries - sixty cells each - and at this time it was decided to renew them.

We got this new battery in position. After each battery was filled with sulphuric acid it had to be given an initial charge and this was supposed to be run for twentyfour hours without interruption. After that you could have a rest and then continue charging until the cells had received their correct charge.

Well, it was decided that I was to take charge of the gasoline engine and the charging apparatus from eight o'clock in the evening until eight the next morning. It was a hot Sunday night, very humid. I went on duty and relieved the branch engineer, Mr. Bailey, and he went off on his horse to his home at the other end of the island and I was left alone. I had to take the specific gravity of each of the batteries with a hydrometer and also to note its temperature, every hour.

Well, this was a bit of a problem. After a while the cells were gassing and they began to gas furiously. The battery room, which should have been well ventilated, had no ventilation at all and the acid content of the battery room was pretty high.

Anyway I did my job. I went there and carefully read the hydrometer and recorded the specific gravity readings of each cell until it got near the time for my relief to come on at eight o'clock. I was doing a final clearing up.

The re-fueling of the gasoline engine was rather terrible. I don't know why something hadn't been done about it - I had only been there a few weeks - but I suppose I should have set to and done something about it. Anyway, what they had was in the ancient part of the building, it was just a wooden structure, they had a forty gallon drum and from this drum you filled a gallon can and then you stood on a chair and lifted this can up and you filled a tank with it, and this tank was some five feet up on the wall. A fuel pipe led down from there to the engine. The exhaust of the engine was in a big four inch diameter iron pipe which came down from the engine, uncovered, and ran into a trench to the outside of the building.

Well, I had filled the tank and then I decided to leave everything ready for Sandy when he came on at eight o'clock.

So I turned on the gasoline to refill the gallon can so that it would be all ready for him. Just as I was turning this tape on, some figures caught my eye - to do with the recording of the specific gravity of the batteries and, I was half asleep after having been on duty for twelve hours. Next thing, I looked around and saw that the can of gasoline had overflowed and gas was still running from the forty gallon drum. There was a steady stream of gas running across the floor to the iron exhaust pipe. Just as I looked, it caught fire and went up in flames!

I got out! My hair was singed, the engines and batteries and everything were totally destroyed. It was terrible! A real nightmare! Of course it was my fault but -

Q. "Those sort of conditions should never have existed."

A. "Of course! The fuel tanks should have been well away from the exhaust pipe with no possibility of an accident, let alone getting anywhere near a red hot exhaust pipe. But nothing would convince me that it was not all my own wretched fault and for three or four days I went through hell.

But there was something about the P.C.B. They were a hard concern to work for and their standards were high, but if you got into trouble they would stand by you. A message came from London hoping that I had escaped serious injury and that I would soon be restored to health. That was pretty nice!

I struggled on - I think I should tell you about the wonderful work that Sandy (Bill Sanders), my junior, did. He just took charge and helped me. I was pretty well shell-shocked.

Our electric lights were gone. Our power was gone, but somehow Sandy did wonders. Mr. Cox's magnifier was supposed to have an intense electric beam, so Sandy rigged up an apparatus so it would work with an oil lamp. He kept those cables going, perhaps not at the full potential, but working remarkably well through that difficult period.

I was left at Norfolk for a few months longer and after a while I began to come out of my shell-shock. I enjoyed the last part of my time there.

The height of the cliff where the office was located was 325 feet from the sandy beach down below. You could see - not exactly the spray - but the mist just driving up and over the top of the cliff and the air was saturated with wet salty spray or mist. The houses were the same, so that if you leaned up against the wall of your house, which was of clapboard construction, your shirt would be wet through. Working in the office was very difficult because all the instruments would be covered with moisture and before you could do some of the routine tests which were required, you would have to shut the door of the test room and light oil lamps in there and keep them on for twelve hours until the place was reasonably dry at the time you wanted to carry out the tests.

After my term in Norfolk I was transferred back to Auckland in 1927 or 1928 for six months or so and then I was transferred to Fanning Island.

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#### REFLECTIONS ON MEETING BILL HYDE AFTER A LAPSE OF YEARS

By Pat Sykes.

I have been retired for twenty years from Cable & Wireless Ltd., not quite the trumpet call of The Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company which I joined in 1925, no doubt influenced by the "and China" in the nameplate.

It was not until 1930 that I first met Bill Hyde, on 17 February to be exact, when Sclanders and O-in-C Singapore office, after showing me round the large and airy instrument room assigned me to assist Bill Hyde operating on the Penang Cable.

I had just arrived in Singapore, my first taste of the romantic Far East, having arrived three days before on transfer from Wellington N.Z. When Wellington Station was under the shadow of being closed down the Company called for volunteers to go to the Far East on a five year assignment. Jack Henderson, Pat Sladden and I applied and Jack and Pat left first and were transferred to Port Darwin (as it was then) while I waited and went straight to Singapore.

It is hard today to realise that there were no Air Services in those days, one waited for a boat. For instance on New Year's Day 1930 I was in Nelson N.Z. staying with my people on pre-embarkation leave of a fortnight - little enough when one realises that the separation would be for five years. On 15 January I caught the evening ferry the "Arahura" for Wellington, where it arrived in the small hours of the following morning. After a hectic day there, during which my first Passport was held up awaiting my father's consent for me to leave the country, me being under 21, and which was telegraphed for, I boarded the "Maunganui" for Sydney sailing on the afternoon of the 17th. Arrived in Sydney on the 21st I had one day there and then joined a little KPM (Koninlijke Paketvaart Maatschapij - or Royal Mail Packet, a Dutch line) boat called the "Tasman" which then pursued its slow way via Brisbane up the east coast of Australia. Brisbane on the 25th, during which I noted the excessive humidity and rain, and then on up through the Great Barrier Reef to Macassar in the Celebes which we reached approximately a week later on 6 February. A day there and then on to Soerabaya, Samarang and Batavia (Djakarta), arriving in Singapore on 14 February, just on a month since leaving home in N.Z. A routine voyage one might say but, at the impressionable age of 20 and being my first experience of the Orient it has stayed in my mind.

By arriving in Singapore first by this migration of young operators to the Far East I had missed going to Port Darwin, a convenient staging post, which I didn't regret. Two weeks after my arrival Reggie Young and Jack Henderson arrived from Darwin and a month later, on 29 March, Graham Little, Pat Sladden and Eric Meredith, also Selwyn Kempthorne with his brother the Bishop of Polynesia, arrived on the "Marella". The Kempthornes, Selwyn was in the Company, were en route to England. We were variously quartered up River Valley Road in Singapore where our chief desires were to get some form of transport, car or motor-bike and after having got into debt due to the so-easy habit of signing 'chits' for everything, applied to be transferred to Cocos to get out of it.

But I have digressed from my reminiscences of Bill Hyde. He was my senior by eight years and at the time I first met him he had served at Singapore and Cocos twice as well as Darwin, and been married for three years. Cocos was a bachelor station where one could not take women, where one lived, admittedly cheaply, in a Company's Mess but it takes little imagination to realise the disruption to his domestic life which has six visits to Cocos (a yearly station), 4 after he was married, entailed. On the other hand Cocos for the young bachelor was ideal; duty free liquor, cheap living in a Mess, no transport worries as we lived on the job and an open air life with fishing, sailing and tennis to our heart's content. There also was a well stocked library with fresh books each boat, and a billiard table to wile away the long evenings. We also did some work and most of us were studying for our Preliminary Examination.

There were many clubs in Singapore at that date - social, sporting and the national ones of expatriates such as the Swiss Club - some more expensive than others. The ones most suitable to the young impecunious employee of a mercantile firm were the Singapore Cricket Club where one could play a variety of games as well as cricket and the Singapore Swimming Club at Katong and I very soon became a member of both with their superb facilities. A fortnight after my arrival I went by taxi with Freddy Skottowe to the Swimming Club where we met Reggie Young, Bill Hyde and Jack Henderson. Bill Hyde very kindly put me up for the Club, seconded by Drysdale off 'ships', and introduced me to members of the Club committee; although not yet elected I was granted the privileges of the Club, was able to sign for a round of drinks which I promptly did - and that was that. I wonder whether Bill Hyde remembers that occasion. Those were the days of the old Swimming Club with no artificial swimming pool; the pool where we swam depending on the tide was a part of the sea enclosed by a fence, or 'pagar' the Malay word, off the beach outside the Club house. Before the Pagar was built, to make the area safe from sharks, I was told that one could dive into the open sea off a diving board; legend has it that a woman did so and was never seen again, presumed taken by a shark, but in those waters it could have been a crocodile.

In Singapore in my time there was no Company's Mess or Quarters for bachelors so we had to make our own arrangements. With an Australian friend of mine, one Jack Jolly of the Agriculture Department, I went - after a month in a town hotel called The Grosvenor, in Orchard Road, long since defunct - to board at Mrs. Goodall's in River Valley Road. I had a large rather bare room with a ceiling fan and an adjoining bathroom and WC - courtesy titles only as they were primitive according to modern standards but private. The bathroom consisted of a "Shanghai jar", a large earthenware jar filled daily with fresh cold water, a wooden grating to stand on and a wooden dipper. One stood on the grating and sloshed the water over oneself, cool and refreshing and the generally accepted method throughout the Far East at that time. If you wanted a warm bath the Malay 'boy' brought in a bucket of hot water, which you mixed with the cold according to taste. It was very effective and I remember Mrs. Goodall once saying that she thought a long bath, where you sat in your own dirty bath water, a filthy idea. There were, however, large rats and one had a habit of visiting Jack Jolly's bathroom at night, presumably for a drink out of the jar. From the bathroom floor was a drainpipe which led through the outside wall to the main drain and one night when he heard the rat and chased it, it scuttled down the drainpipe, but thinking itself safe went only a little way down leaving three inches of tail sticking out. Jack got out his revolver and shot down the drain; no more rat. I don't know why he kept a revolver but he had lived for some years in Pahang, one of the most jungly states on the East coast of Malaysia. The WC adjoining our so private and personal bathrooms was of the 'thunderbox' type, and cleared out daily by the nightsoil coolie in the middle of the night who had his own access to the room, went upstairs by an outside staircase. It may be a libel but I always understood that it was then carted and spread over the Chinese market gardens. Many years later in Hong Kong, at a sewage outflow into the harbour I saw a Chinese woman in a small boat collecting the 'choice bits' with a net at the end of a long pole like a butterfly net; this was in 1949.

It appears from my old diaries that in 1930 I was friendly with Freddy Skottowe, who was older than I and had already served at Gibraltar, Lisbon, Carcavellos and Alexandria. He lived in a small flat over a garage in Oxley Rise nearby. He was open handed and hospitable and often when I went

round for a yarn I would find he and Bill Hyde exchanging stories and putting the world to rights. In 1932 Skottowe and I were the two operators in Labuan, with the Manager Stanford and Dave Mitchell from Adelaide.

In the East social drinking, daily applications of this useful medicine, was a way of life but although a minority drank too much there was little drunkenness in the accepted meaning of the word. Most were moderate but regular drinkers like myself. Of the real 'drunks' in the service most of them were amusing companions and easy to live with; there was always the danger of them having a sober period when they were very different people. Of the very few teetotallers they could be quite hopeless, and suffered from stomach trouble. I know one notable exception, Edgar Tapscott, who was our conscientious hard working Mess President in Cocos, who never touched alcohol but sat through the longest party drinking 'softs'. He had a happy knack of 'suffering fools gladly' and we all liked him. I have a memento of him in a small silver cup he donated in Cocos to the winner of a tennis tournament, won by me when the opposition was singularly weak.

It must have been some time in 1930 that Bill Hyde went to Cape St. James and it was at the end of that year that I was happily transferred to Cocos. We were not to meet again for many years, when we were both stationed in Penang in 1947 and in the intervening time we had wandered over different areas of the world. He had variously been to Seychelles, Port Sudan, Suez and Alexandria, mostly during the War years, while I had been to Cottesloe, Sydney the London Training School, Fanning Island in the Pacific, Suva, Darwin, Cocos, Colombo and Singapore. Our lives had progressed along different lines, we had heard of each other from colleagues during that time and I had met his wife in Singapore during the rather hectic days immediately after the War.

From Penang I was transferred to Hong Kong in 1949 and hear vaguely that Bill had resigned from the Company in Sydney. His name then rather dropped out of one's consciousness for the next thirty years, by which time he had become almost legendary. At the end of 1981, while visiting Adelaide, I had occasion to visit my old friend Graham Little in the Royal Adelaide Hospital and met in a neighbouring ward a Mrs. Hyde, Bill Hyde's sister-in-law and on enquiring about Bill was surprised to learn that he was very much 'alive and kicking' at the ripe age of 80. Brax Horrocks contacted him and he came to the annual get-together of the OTVA the following day looking according to my diary "not all that much changed though I haven't seen him since the Penang days of 1947".

On 11 February 1930, en route on the "Tasman" to Singapore we stopped in Batavia for a night which I spent at the 'Exiles Mess' which consisted of three bachelors one of whom was Tufty Baker who many years later became one of the Directors of Cable & Wireless Ltd. in London - the first Australian to occupy such a high position. The other members of the Mess were Nabob Grant and F.E. Wilson, some years older than I but kind and hospitable as incidentally all Europeans were in the East of those days. It was in Batavia, in a large and lofty high-ceilinged room that I first saw a 'Dutch Wife' a 3-ft long bolster in the centre of the mosquito curtained bed; in theory you slept with the bolster between your legs for coolness and these Dutch Wives were in general use at that date, not only in Java but also in Singapore and Malaysia.

There were a number of men in the service at that time, an older generation than mine - by that I mean eight or ten years older than I was - who had experiences of what one might call the Somerset Maugham era, and which was rapidly disappearing. Besides Tufty Baker I think of Eric Story, also Australian, John Cockburn and several others who had experience of romantic sounding stations such as Cape St. James, Banjoewangie, Batavia, Sharp Peak (China) and Shanghai - all of which were places on the list of where one might be sent to. One of these older men I remember as having the reputation of being a hard drinker, a hard worker, a clever electrical engineer, a good fellow and a lover of parties - on what one might call the 'slightest of excuse'. He was as thin as a spike and I remember him being particularly kind to me, just turned 21 and so much his junior. I thought at the rate he was living he would burn himself out and die young. However, he progressed steadily in the service and escaped being interned by the Japanese during WW11. I met him again many years later in Colombo, when he was just as efficient and still drinking heavily, and we were later in Singapore in 1945 just after the close of the Japanese war where he had the alarming but endearing habit of dividing the world into those who he termed "one of us" and the rest. Luckily I came into the "one of us" category and he was always delightful to me although one late night, at The Great World in Singapore, he got us involved with two burly soldiers 'other ranks' who, quite legitimately after what he said to them, wanted to punch his nose. Although about 3rd in seniority on the staff list, suffering from the effects of a night out he would insist on telling the Manager, Straits District, how he was doing the job all wrong - which I always thought the MSD took with extraordinary forbearance. J. retired in the ordinary course of events at the age of 55 and in view of his electrical skill and ability the Company kept him on in the E-in-C's office in London where I met him when I was on leave from Dar-es-Salaam, in the lift, looking sleek and respectable. He died at the age of 80, as far as I know in the "odour of sanctity". He had a long-suffering wife and several children, none of whom I knew.

In the 1930's, now more than half a century away though it doesn't feel like it, life in the East followed a pleasant routine which to us was unfortunately upset by shift work. We drank little during the day, except at week-ends, and between 4 pm and 6 pm took as violent exercise as we felt inclined. After a shower and a change of clothing we met our friends and sat and drank and gossiped for two or three hours, after which we dined late leaving little time for aught except bed. It was during the pleasant time at the end of the day, when we relaxed over a drink in the cool scented evening that yarns were exchanged and stories told of colleagues and friends, with the highlights exaggerated until they attained an almost legendary aura about them. I remember one man who was often getting into some sort of strife, so that his unmerciful colleagues were in the habit of saying, "and the wretched R.K. did this" "and the wretched R.K. did that" to add point to the story when one of us, who deserves to remain anonymous even after fifty years, on being introduced and meeting R.K.M. for the first time, in Cocos I think, in reply to the courteous inquiry "Have you met Mr. M.?" replied without thinking, "Ah, the wretched R.K." a remark hardly designed to 'win friends and influence people'. I don't suppose there is any moral from this story except to note that sitting amicably round a table having drinks at sundown, which we did a lot of, had its dangers.



ELLIS SMELLIE - THIS IS YOUR LIFE (Continued)

"You can take the boy from the country, but you can't take the country from the boy." City life was not for Ellis. He was offered a job by the Eastern Extension Cable Company at 2.10 per week and the mess bill would be 2.00 per week. This they told Ellis was so that only the sons of well off people would apply. Also the Navy would sign him on for five years to go to England to bring the H.M.A.S. Australia home when built, in the capacity of radio operator. But Ellis regarded five years too long a time to sign up with the Navy.

Then to Spencer Street came Jimmy Brown. He had been a colleague of Marconi's and was the first officer in charge of the first wireless station in America, Sias Concert. He had also worked the telegraph lines in South Africa where he was paid on the number of messages sent per hour. He now had a large wife and a small family and no money. He had joined the railways and as a State public servant then transferred to the Commonwealth Public Service. He could then join the recently established coastal radio service which were building the Melbourne wireless station in the domain.

But all this scheming was unnecessary when the coastal radio was transferred from the clerical division to the professional division of the post office at the insistence of Graeme Valsillie, the inventor of the Valsillie System used at that time. Valsillie appointed Brown officer in charge of the Thursday Island station and Brown asked Valsillie to send Ellis to his station if he asked for the job. Valsillie had given the title of Engineer Operator to his telegraphist and the money to go with the title. So, on 28.8.1912, Ellis left his railway position of 70 per year, and picked up 234 per year on Thursday Island. This was after a delay while Valsillie and the public service commissioner were disagreeing about Ellis' salary. Because Ellis had been offered 132 per annum to go to Camoeweal in Queensland the post office said at age 19 that's all he should get, but Valsillie, as always, got his own way. Included in that £234 was £50 district allowance. When Ellis arrived at Thursday Island the buildings were erected but unfurnished. Two wooden masts were being built on the ground. Ellis helped with the mixing of the concrete and laid down the earth mat. Trenches, 18" deep, were dug every 20' one way and even 10' the other way and old copper wire from telegraph lines were laid in them. One job Ellis had was to take about 20 lines, bunch them together and lay them the full length of the ground. These were then put into the jaws of a carpenter's brace and twisted for the whole length. Two of these were taken from the office and one laid north and south, the other east and west in the trenches. Other lengths of 3 wires were likewise twisted together and put in at intervals. From these main leads all the other trenches were joined up with copper wires. And then at each crossing of the wires, they were soldered together. For days on end, dressed in shorts only, Ellis was burnt brown by the sun doing this soldering with a blow lamp. The man in charge was Donald Macdonald, a post office mechanic on 144 per year. He was a perfectionist. At no other station were those wires soldered in the trenches. He went from Thursday Island to Darwin and his place was taken by Charlie Tapp who was younger than Ellis. Tapp had not been a landline telegraphist and had had only wireless signal experience. His top speed was about 20 words per minute, as against 40 words per minute for an expert landline operator. But Ellis was in for a shock. When Port Moresby opened some while after Thursday Island, early in 1913, Ellis was on duty when the first message came through from Port Moresby. Other stations working static and induction noises, blotted out the signals, and after trying for one



hour and failing to take the message, Ellis was ready to give up. Tapp walked in and took the message first sending without the slightest trouble. He was able to follow the weaker signal under other stronger stations working. The conductor of a band or an orchestra can pick out one instrument and listen to it exclusively.

It took Ellis two years solid practice before he could do this. This had two spin-offs. One was he being the only one to break the German code and his being able to tell Navy office the secret call sign of the German warships after the 1914 war broke out. The latter was because he used the German warships - Griesmau, Scharnhorst, Emden and Greer and Komet practising wartime routines for his own practice. As he then knew the "fist" of each and every man aboard those ships. One would send slowly, others faster and each could be picked out. This identified the ship he was on and the messages from Thursday Island, giving the secret call sign for the night, of those ships at high priority. It was a "clear the line" message. A secret code was sent by Yap in the Caroline Islands, the German occupied. It was a key which made a false dot on the way down. This put an extra dot before each dot and an extra dot before each dash. It sounded like sixty words per minute. About 4 am one morning Ellis was listening to this station, almost fell asleep and read what was being said but he could not repeat this or read the station again. On the outbreak of the First World War with Germany, 4 August 1914 to read that sending from Yap again was a must. Ellis found the only way to do it was to send himself into a sort of trance. This was to allow the rhythm only to be heard and not count the number of dots and dashes. This was done but only bits and pieces were written down, gradually by clearing his mind of all thoughts, the rhythm was read more and more, until a good copy was made of what was coming in. It was ten letter code, a consonant, a vowel, a consonant, a vowel for all the ten letters in the word. After about a fortnight, the formation of the letters was worked out and the extra dot became apparent. An ex New Zealand operator Len Mowlem, tried and almost succeeded in reading it. Yap started sending at sunset and would sometimes go until 2 am. Ellis would then take over the sending of the intercepts to Melbourne Navy Office, and often be there until daylight. The officer in charge, Charlie Tapp, took all the credit for this. He even did not sensibly reply to a telegram from Melbourne asking for the secret of his being the only station to read that German which we called the "dotty code". This caused a brawl between Ellis and Charlie. Ellis went to the Post Office with a long message explaining everything fully. But when he arrived at the Post Office, he decided not to send it. This may have a tragic error as other German stations using the same code may have gone unread. An army telegraphist once told Ellis "we could not read the German code, it was much too fast for us". Had Ellis sent that message, the German stations all over the world could have been put on tape and anyone knowing the morse code could have transcribed it.

A Japanese warship gunned the Yap station down. Charlie Tapp took a copy of every one of those messages, a big trunk full, away with him when he left Thursday Island. Years later, Fred Newman, a coastal radio clerk in Melbourne, told Ellis that the ten letter consonant and vowel message could be decoded quite easily. He also told Ellis that his estimate of the position of the Emden was accurate and a British warship missed the Emden by twenty miles. This episode started with Charlie Tapp waking Ellis at 10 am with a message from Navy Office in Melbourne, asking for an estimate of the Emden's position. Ellis, terribly on edge, with the enormous mental strain of being in a sort of trance for hours on end, ordered Tapp out of his room, but sleep was impossible. Where was the Emden? About midnight the signals from the

Emden had two variations, a fast variation of several times a second and a slower variation of about two seconds. Let us assume that was because the signals came over the highest mountains of New Guinea. At 3 am the rapid variations had gone and the longer variations were now shorter. Signals crossing lower mountains. At daylight, with the signals fading out, as the sun came up, the Emden's signals were the same as the merchant ships after they had just passed North through the passage between two islands. After an hour Ellis and Tapp worked this out on a map and sent the estimate to Melbourne. Once again Charlie Tapp got the credit for this accurate estimate.

#### SID LAWS

The staff at Thursday Island, unchanged for two years, was Charlie Tapp in charge, Ellis second in charge, Len Mowlem and two Englishmen, Bill Wing and Len Bain. The latter two were ship's operators. The period between when Ellis arrived and the station opened, had many personality clashes between Donald Macdonald, a post office mechanic, then of 144 per year, Jimmy Brown, the officer in charge, and Flynn, an ex British Navy C.P.O., who was hard to get on with. Sid Laws, a brilliant telegraphist, when using a New Zealand double current key, which causes the relay to respond quicker than the Australian relay which has a spring to return the relay tongue to the off position on long lines. His dots would not go through over here. The day he arrived at Thursday Island he asked Ellis, could he join him for his daily walk around the island. He explained to Ellis that Mr. Valsillie trusted him and he could help Ellis advance in the service, but on one condition. It was to tell him about all the trouble that had occurred. He knew they had all told Ellis all about it. Ellis replied that he wished to have no more to do with a man who would ask him to betray the trust of those four men, that he would work under Laws, the same as anybody else, but outside of official duty he wished to have nothing to do with Laws.

Laws then went to Townsville and told the staff there that he would sack Bobby Jordan at Port Moresby and Ellis Smellie of Thursday Island. He went to Port Moresby and had Bobby Jordan sacked. Although he has always been criticized for what he did, Ellis is still proud of the fact that he quietly eased Sid Laws out of the service. He telegraphed his resignation and went south. An incident that Ellis is not proud of took place in Collins Street Melbourne. He and a coastal radio man were talking when they both saw Sid Laws coming with his hands stretched out to shake hands with them. Each thought the other would greet Laws but neither did so. They were both sorry for Laws, acting as though he had been struck a blow, turned around the way he had come. It was all a mistake, they would have shaken hands with him. It was different, however, when Bobby Jordan came up to Ellis patting him on the back with great thumps, and thanks for easing Sid Laws out of the service.

When the station opened early in 1913, one operator there was Paddy Walsh. Jimmy Brown, the officer in charge was once the first manager of the first wireless station in America. From memory it was Siars Concert. He was an Irishman who knew Marconi and his associates. A good telegraphist, he had worked in the South African post office where he was paid by the number of messages handled. He went to Honolulu to take charge of a wireless station there and wrote to Paddy Walsh and Ellis for them to go over with him. Paddy Walsh would have to do a six months period on a ship before taking up duty, but Ellis could join the coastal station on arrival. This was probably in thanks to them for financing his transfer to Honolulu from Thursday Island. Many reports came back that Paddy Walsh kept open house for

Australian ship's officers both mates and the radio man in Honolulu. He had married a wealthy girl he met at Thursday Island when she was a passenger on board a ship passing through. Ellis decided to stay in Australia and not take up American citizenship. Years later, Jimmy Brown, then radio inspector in Sydney, repayed Ellis the money.

### Syd Cusack

About 1926, when Ellis was on the staff of Perth radio (Applecross) a ship's radio officer came and asked him how, by "mind over matter" he had caused, while at Thursday Island, Syd Cusack, then at Port Moresby, to change from one of the worst senders to one of the best. Cusack was ex British Navy where he had been trained, when he made a mistake, sent the error signal and repeated the word he also repeated the word before the one he had "broken" on. If he broke on this word he then repeated the one in front of it. Ellis told him never to send an error signal but to continue on sending as Ellis would have the word written down.

If Cusack did not do this, Ellis made him repeat the message. It was often a mirth provoker. For instance, Cusack rarely sent the word 'tomorrow' without one, two or three error signals. T is one dash, O is three dashes, M is two dashes, R is dot dash dot, an awkward combination for the best of operators. Cusack would mess it up and pause in the middle of the word. Ellis roaring with laughter, would imagine Cusack pondering "what will I do" make an error signal, knowing Ellis would make him repeat the message, or carry on. Also Ellis may tell him for the umpteenth time "please give me credit for enough brains to ask you to repeat any words missed", or be told "I object to you repeating a word that has already been written down". Cusack must have been sick and tired of the whole thing, but he began to take greater care of his sending and became a very good sender indeed, making no errors at all. One evening, Charlie Tapp took a bunch of messages from Port Moresby while Ellis was eating his supper. Tapp then asked Ellis who was on at Port Moresby. When told Syd Cusack, he said "no, I cannot read Syd Cusack. This man is easily read." Ellis then said "send some of your da da da da tuning signals, he will then know it is not me on and will revert to his old style and I will have the job by using "mind over matter at three hundred miles to make him a good sender again". Tapp did this, Cusack reverted to his old style, Tapp could not read him and Ellis took the rest of the messages. Ellis hoped that that ships radio operator would inform Tapp how the deed was done and stopped Tapp saying it was only mind over matter.

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### CRICKET PROBLEM

Submitted by Tom Condon.

Back in the 1930's, Sir Arthur Eddington produced a cricket problem. It sets out the scores in a mythical cricket match and gives certain basic information from which the student must work out the required facts. The puzzle is quoted below. It is absolutely genuine and soluble as it stands. For a long time I worked thereon and failed to obtain the answer which, of course, must be as foolproof as one of Euclid's. Eventually, on the journey

from England to Australia in 1956, I solved it. To those that are not interested in mathematics and not prepared to spend many hours on the subject, my advice is don't try. For anyone with leisure and a love of cricket, it presents one of the most absorbing studies I have come across and I recommend it to you. To illustrate the way one has to work, let me say this. Tosswell, who bowls seven overs, of which five are maidens, for thirty-one runs, must have had seven fours and three singles hit off him because we are told the total score was made up of fours and singles. No other combination in twelve balls can possibly give you a total of thirty-one runs. That is the kind of hypothesis which must be applied throughout. If you get as much fun as I did trying to find the answer, I'll be well rewarded, but don't blame me if you get mighty exasperated at times.

#### Cricket Score

Atkins	6
Bodkins	8
Dawkins	6
Hawkins	6
Jenkins	5
Larkins	4
Meakins	7
Perkins	11
Simkins	6
Tomkins	0
Wilkins	1
Extras	<u>0</u>
Total:	<u>60</u>

#### Bowling Analysis

	<u>Overs</u>	<u>Mdns</u>	<u>Runs</u>	<u>Wickets</u>
Pitchwell	12.1	2	14	8
Speedwell	6	0	15	1
Tosswell	7	5	31	1

The score was composed entirely of fours and singles.  
There were no catches, no-balls or short runs.  
Speedwell and Tosswell each had only one spell of bowling.  
Pitchwell bowled the first ball to Atkins.  
Speedwell was the other opening bowler.  
Overs were of six balls each.  
Whose wickets were taken by Speedwell and Tosswell?  
Who was not out?  
What was the score at the fall of each wicket?

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MORE MEMORIES FROM BRAX HORROCKS

About three years after my time at Cocos, 1943-44, I was transferred, very much against my will, to Suva and Fanning. My main for resisting was that my daughter was then about 12 years of age and settled into a very pleasant girls school in Adelaide, and I was reluctant to take her away for four years or more, including two at Fanning where it wasn't even possible to have education by correspondence. So I took my family to Suva, but went on to Fanning alone.

Returning from Fanning I was fortunate in being able to find a position with the Electricity Trust of South Australia and became one of their Rural Development Engineers. Whilst with the Trust I wrote a few articles for their magazine "ADELECT", and enclosed one which could possibly be of interest to others who have crossed the Pacific.

The Empire flying-boat Coriolanus was fully loaded with passengers and mail as it left Sydney Harbour on December 12th, 1947, on its last flight to Suva; it had flown more than two and a half million miles in ten years for Qantas Airways and earned its retirement.

The first faint signs of day were showing as it left the water and headed North over Palm Beach and the mouth of the Hawkesbury. We were flying very low and after a while noticed a subtle change in the colour of the trees and undergrowth and later recognized banana and coconut palms and saw cultivated patches which were probably pineapple plantations.

It was hot as we chugged ashore in a launch for morning tea from our landing on the Brisbane River, nevertheless there is a quality more than mere heat in a tropical sun which is not unpleasing. Aloft once more and flying much higher, the Coriolanus headed North-East for Noumea some 800 miles distant. Patches of fleecy clouds passed lazily beneath, and far below a turquoise Pacific crinkled into a million facets. It was late afternoon before we sighted the coast and fringing reef of New Caledonia and saw puffy white clouds impaled on the peaks of distant mountains. Gliding into a landing we passed over rusted hills shaggy with paper-barked melaleuca trees and guilies thick and jungly with pandanus, casuarina, and coconuts.

New Caledonia was discovered by Captain Cook in 1774. Marist missionaries who landed in 1840 paved the way for French annexation which took place on September 29th, 1853, under the very nose of a dilatory British Commander, Captain Denham, who, although he had received orders months previously to hoist the Union Jack on New Caledonia, had tarried overlong in Sydney and thereby lost for England what was to prove an island rich in the valuable minerals chrome and nickel.

Landing at Noumea so soon after leaving Australia it was strange to hear nothing but French. I struggled to muster nouns and verbs from the back corners of my school-day memory; I know enough Singhalese to get my washing done in Colombo, enough Malay to order a drink in Singapore, and enough pidgin English to enquire my way at the

Katherine, but spoken French is beyond me. However I managed to order some sort of meal at the Hotel du Pacifique and afterwards enjoyed black coffee under the tamarind trees in the quaint courtyard. It was hard to realize that little more than a century ago this island had been inhabited only by stone-age Melanesians. Noumea now has 11,000 inhabitants, many descended from French political exiles and common criminals dumped there during the first few years after annexation.

Suva, on the island of Viti Levu, is the largest town in the South Pacific and is built on the side of a hill sloping gently to a jade-green sea. Many of the streets are lined with hibiscus, frangipanni, flame and other flowering trees which with the tall coconut palms and vivid green undergrowth give a very pleasing impression.

The outer reefs of the Fiji group of approximately 250 islands were sighted by Tasman in 1643 and by Cook in 1774, but the first European to sail among the islands was Bligh of Bounty fame. He and the 18 members of his crew set adrift by the mutineers sailed through and charted some of the islands during their famous whaleboat voyage to Timor. Some sandalwood trading followed, and missionaries landed in 1835. The group was annexed by Britain in 1874.

The present population is about 275,000. Indians were brought out in the early eighties as indentured labourers for the sugar plantations and have so increased as to outnumber both Fijians and Whites.