



MORSECODIANS MESSENGER

The Official Newsletter of The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.)

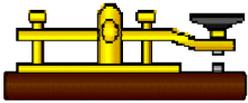
Editor: Larry Rice

Volume 1 Issue No 12

May, 2001

Morsecodians - Keeping

CENTENARY OF FEDERATION TELEGRAPH SPECIAL EVENT



TELEGRAM SENT 1ST AUGUST 1900

To: the honourable premier of nsw sydney =
result referendum upto 1-30 am
for the bill 44066 against 20039 returns incomplete =
premier western australia +

For 6 days, May 7th to 12th 2001, two groups of Morsecodians 3000 kilometres apart transferred nearly 700 telegrams lodged by the public using morse key, sounder and teleprinter as used so many years ago.

On the west coast, operators were stationed in the 1930's built Perth General Post Office where the chief telegraph office was located until 1989, and on the east coast, a telegraph office was set up in the Australian maritime museum at Darling Harbour, Sydney.

At the Perth end, telegraph operators transmitted and received a total of 530 inland telegrams over the morse circuits and 157 overseas and foreign language telegrams were handled by the crew on the teleprinters which co-existed happily with the morse circuits.

Formal early telegraphist style attire was the order of the day - eye shade peaks, white shirt, black waist coat, black trousers and bow tie.

A total of 45 Morsecodians were rostered to attend at both ends of the event, all were welcome, some enjoyed demonstrating their skills to the public so much they attended every day even though they weren't rostered.

It was a marvellous spectacle, tremendous fun and a great public relations exercise bringing visitors' attention to what came before facsimile and email.

We are indebted to our major postal and telephone provider sponsors Australia Post and Telstra who took care of the accommodation, furnishings and communciations; also the Centenary of Federation organisation, for which reason this special event was held; re-enacting electric telegraph communication from the early days.

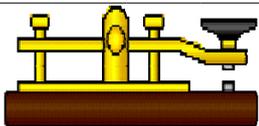
Donations from the public meant that a substantial amount was donated to the Royal Flying Doctor Service.



L-R: Morsecodians WA President Terry Keays; Mr. John Hyde MLA, Member for Perth; Mr. Ron Birmingham QC, Chairman, Centenary of Federation State Committee, Western Australia; Dr Peter Natrass, the Right Hon the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth and Mr. Ken Knox, PMG Telegraphist (seated).



L-R BACK: Mr Ken Knox, Mr Barrie Field, Mr Larry Rice.
FRONT: Mr Richie Bright, Mr Terry Keays, Mr Alan Jolley.



NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the newest members of The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia

- Ron Corey of Bunbury.**
- Alan Holmes of Waikiki.**
- Clarrie Hutton of Rockingham.**
- Kevin Rosam of Sorrento.**
- Wal Reeve of Maddington.**
- Brian Pollard of Lesmurdie.**

CHANGES

- Barrie Field now of Merriwa.**
- Ernie Walker now of Shelley.**
- Brian Willis now of South Fremantle.**

Contact Secretary for details.

The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.)

Committee members — 2001

President	Terry Keays	(08) 9279 4696
Vice-President	John Meadowcroft	(08) 9386 6636
Secretary	Richie Bright	(08) 9276 6936
Asst. Secretary	Max Bowen	(08) 9271 4807

General meetings are held three times a year, in the Hyde Park Hotel, North Perth.

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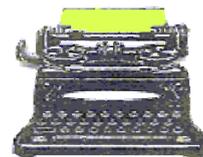
Club **Webpage:**

<http://home.iprimus.com.au/oseagram/mfwahome.html>

From the Editor.

Our late Presidents' fine efforts in producing 11 Morsecodian Messenger issues of such quality and depth will long be remembered.

The new Editor welcomes any articles, reminiscences and stories for inclusion in forthcoming issues.



Richard Youl

Richard Youl was one of the machine telegraphists at the Sydney end of our special event.

He is secretary of the Postal-Telecommunications API Historical Society of Queensland, operators of the Telstra Museum, Brisbane. His PMG career started in 1968 with attendance at the postal training school in Sydney, where learning to type on Creed teleprinters, aroused an interest in these fascinating machines. A few years later, when living in a northern Wollongong suburb, a Creed was discovered at a local scrap yard. At \$7, this was the beginning of a printer collection which now totals 20 machines and includes nearly all machine types used in the Telegram and Telex networks, as well as a couple with defence forces origin.

The hobby had been in limbo on and off over the years, but really took off after retiring in Brisbane and joining the Society where other members had worked in printer maintenance and they were able to offer assistance with technical problems, not to mention the availability of technical manuals. This was also his first contact with Morsecodians on the dial-up system, and it was not long before efforts went into making teleprinters able to work over the phone lines as well, particularly to a long-time friend now living in Melbourne who has a similar collection of teleprinters. The last year or so has concentrated on changing to the former McNair modems, and developing suitable interfaces.

Fully electronic interfaces to suit both double current (Sagem) or single current (most other) machines are now available and the network of dial-up printer owners has now reached 10 plus the Brisbane and Sydney museums with the Bendigo museum hopefully in the near future.

He can usually be contacted on Wednesdays at the Telstra museum, Brisbane (07) 3862 2958.

Re: the late Colin Smith.

Barbara, Chris, Penny and Stella wish to thank all the Morsecodians for their attendance at the funeral and the lovely morse message of G.B. Also for the many cards we have received.
Barbara Smith.



John Roberts 22 mile camp, Darwin
APRIL 1942 **Story page 3**

DARWIN BOMBED

as witnessed by morsecodian John Roberts.

My "in family claim to fame" as expressed by a brother-in-law years ago is that I am "fleet footed" and thus a survivor not a casualty. I arrived in Darwin 10 days before the first air raid on Australian soil which occurred on 19th February 1942. I was transferred from Adelaide CTO as an acting telegraphist a 20 year old. My transfer must have been considered to be important, it was unheard of for one so young to be flown anywhere on an military movement order, the flight took 2 days, an overnight stopover at Alice Springs. I saw very little of Darwin in that time I had little spending money I was waiting for the next payday. In fact the air raid came before the payday, which meant also that I didn't pick up the new pair of shorts I had ordered to add to my stock ,1 pair. I didn't enjoy one pay day during my approximately 9 month stay in the Darwin area, instead the Department forwarded monies due to me to my mother in Whyalla SA. Mother used to send me small amounts enclosed in her letters, we didn't have much occasion to spend in any event.

There was an expectation in Darwin in those days just prior to the first air raid that Darwin would eventually be attacked. That expectation became a certainty the day before that first raid when a convoy bound for Timor came back into port having been turned back by Japanese air attack. Next morning without warning sirens the first attack developed, aircraft initially noticed flying towards Darwin from the south. At that time I was on duty operating a Murray Multiplex perforator, a fairly noisy operation, just before 10 am I heard a succession of explosions, then almost immediately a much heavier explosion. I turned around to ask what was that and found that I was alone in the telegraph office. I went to the front door of the office to see what was going on and any person I could see was running. Instinctively I did the same.

In my progress away, I hurdled the front fence of the office, crossed the Esplanade and began to scramble down the steep slope to the waters edge of the Darwin harbour. My progress down this slope was halted a few meters down by an explosion above me which flattened me under a downfall of rubble. Fortunately the larger pieces missed me. After the dust settled I dug myself out, minus one sandal, and continued down to some light cover where I joined a few others sheltering there.

From there we had a view out over the harbour and witnessed the dive bombing and strafing of shipping. At the time I think I counted the sinking of 8 ships, though there were more than that sunk during this raid.

I probably missed some events by having to duck, or the scene was obscured by smoke and flame of which there was plenty. A tanker not far out in front of us was far gone in the midst of a sea of flame. A destroyer, the US Peary was badly damaged and sinking with only the bow visible with a solitary gun being fired from its bow . I did not witness the final moment of the Peary or of that lone gunner because it sank soon thereafter. Similarly, I wrote off the survival chances of another man I saw single-handedly driving a small lifeboat around the harbour in the midst of being strafed by Japanese Zero fighter planes, attempting to pick up some of the survivors from the ships that had been already sunk.

It was good to learn on my most recent visit to Darwin [the anniversary of the first air raid on 19th Feb. 2001] that both these men survived. The lifeboat driver was an officer on the hospital ship Manunda which suffered attack during that air raid. I was privileged to meet the gunner referred to above, Melvin Duke, at the anniversary celebrations in February but sorry to hear since that he has passed away. Eventually it appeared that the raid was over, I can't recall hearing an All Clear siren.

We commenced our climb back to the post office, we did not progress very far before we were stopped by the greatest explosion of the morning, which we found out later was the ship Nuptuna blowing up at the wharf nearly a kilometre away from us, we were conscious of debris flying over us. We eventually arrived at the post office to find the devastation and be told of the casualties, not by name and number which we later found to be 10 killed and a similar number injured and unfit for duty. The staff in the Darwin area at that time was approximately 80 of all classifications. The majority reported for duty promptly despite being badly shocked and carrying minor injuries. In fact these post office casualties were the numbers given in the press in the capital cities as being the total suffered. Years later the estimated figure was given as 243+

Also it was advised much later that the Japanese task force which attacked Darwin was the same force which devastated Pearl Harbour and brought the United States into the war. My own escape was by a small margin. From the commencement of my run to being covered by rubble was about 10 seconds. I found on my return to the post office that 3 large bomb craters fell across my route, if they had fallen a few metres further over the edge of the cliff, there would have been quite a few more casualties. Shortly after our gathering at the site of the old post office we were directed to assemble at the nearby lands department office. Our telegraph supervisor Bill Duke and the resident senior telephone engineer contacted central telegraph office Adelaide on an emergency telegraph set for instructions and to give advice of the damage and casualties.

The whole of the Telephone operating staff had been killed whilst sheltering in the same slit trench.

In the midst of this, a warning siren sounded and aircraft again could be heard going overhead, this time the nearby RAAF Base was hit and severely damaged as were the telegraph lines passing nearby.

Due to the damage to the post office buildings and also because of the effects of Japanese jamming of radio communications, it was decided that telegraph staff should salvage as much of personal effects as could be found and prepare to be transported to a site 10 miles south of Darwin beyond the damaged telegraph lines near the RAAF base. A temporary telegraph office was to be set up using an emergency kit to work morse under canvas, operating on battery power fed up line from Larrimah, the nearest repeater station to the south. One truck was provided for the transfer of operations and tent flies were supplied by the army. Our cook from the overland telegraph mess salvaged mess gear and a stew he had commenced preparing for the evening meal that night. From then on it was substantially bully beef and hard biscuit for a period until we were placed on the end of an army ration truck delivery line. Sometimes the meat we received didn't need much help to get off the truck. We were generally young chaps with healthy appetites. On the second or third day at the 10 mile, not that far from the RAAF base just out of Darwin, we heard what sounded to be another raid and headed for shelter in the surrounding scrub. It is remarkable how one can traverse prickly ground with no discomfort on the run barefooted, but on return at a careful walking pace one makes contact with anything at all sharp.

We had nearly established ourselves at the 10 mile when we were directed to move further south to the 22 mile camp with military camps nearby and welcome usage of showers. Working this time in a sydney williams hut, together with other forces signals staff. Later again we were moved down to Adelaide River in similar accommodations.

continued on Page 4

U.S. Telegraphers demonstrate their art.

“We are doing one of our dual demonstrations on April 1st [2001]. We’ve been doing this for several years. At the demo, we accept telegrams free of cost to anywhere in the U.S. and Canada.

The telegrams are written at the counter and then sent by American Morse to another room to be copied.

Then it is handed to the CW location where it will be forwarded to a relay office using International Morse.

After that it goes to a network of radio people and eventually, they are delivered. We’ve only lost one that we are aware of.

It is fun for us and for the CW people members and for the people who are taught about both Morse codes. “

Chuck Dayley. cfdaley@arias.net



A forthcoming book by Ricardo Cramer, ricardo1@inet.net.au

From dot dash to dot com

A catalogue of reminiscences by Post Office people in W.A.’s Nor’west during 20th century.

The Postmaster General’s Department (The Post Office) played an essential part in the development of Australia. In Western Australia from inception in the 19th century until today, its role has been consistent and important. Its operations in W.A.’s Nor’ west (Geraldton to Wyndham) has been particularly exciting and tinged with romanticism because of its relative isolation and importance to Australia.

The Post Office has been there from the start and its staff have been always a selective breed of competent and flexible men who were not only there to provide essential communications (and various other government services), but also they were expected to provide civic leadership and social intercourse to these far-flung communities. Of course they all witnessed the development of what is now Australia’s wealthy and important areas.

This narrative is not a documentary but a catalogue of personal memories of some of those staff, (now retired but still with us) of the more interesting and perhaps humorous people and events encountered by the Post Office people.

NEXT MEETING

10 AM MONDAY 25TH JUNE 2001.

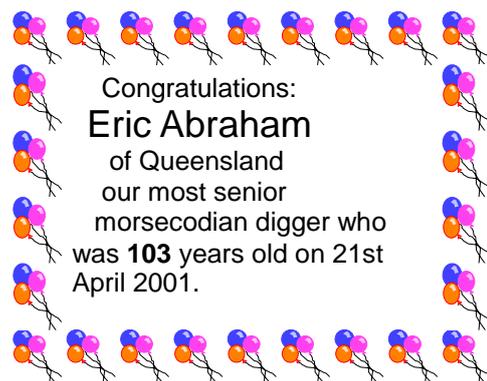
THE HYDE PARK HOTEL, NORTH PERTH

MEMBERS, PARTNERS AND FRIENDS ARE ALL WELCOME.

DARWIN BOMBED continued from page 3

During the whole period since the air raid we handled exclusively military traffic for the 3 services. Handling of Civilian traffic was forbidden. Outgoing signals for the armed forces were delivered to us by despatch riders. Inward traffic was delivered by them on their return to the various headquarters. Our line, eventually duplex, was operated 24 hours per day 7 days a week. At the end of our service in the Darwin area our staff totalled 6 telegraphists and a supervisor. Over the final weeks I did the midnight to 8 am shift, being the only one with a clear enough conscience that I could sleep through anything during the daylight hours. My tent fly was right alongside a military road with trucks passing close by throughout the day. On one occasion a shot fired at a driver who refused to stop at a check point nearby, didn’t wake me up.

Approximately 9 months after the first air raid, the Australian Army recruited a unit of telegraphists to relieve all civilians to return to our respective states. We were transported initially in cattle trucks behind a steam engine on the old railway line south to Birdum. Thence by army convoy on road to Alice Springs, a further three days away. After a wait in Alice Springs we were given accommodation on the Ghan south to Quorn then two further changes to Adelaide. Over all, ten days travel to return home. JOHN ROBERTS.



We appreciate the continuing support of our original and ongoing sponsor - API

