Morsecodians
Keeping Morse-code Alive

NEXT MEETING
The Italian Club
21st June 2010 10 am

Please note the time and date for our next get-together. Members and non-members welcome.

Thanks to API, our sponsor.
The above newspaper article from the Centralian Advocate on Friday 16th April explains the presence of four rejuvenated septuagenarians in Alice Springs from 8-20th April 2010.

433 messages were lodged and transmitted to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney whilst 262 were received. These figures were down on previous years but the absence of the Friday night Festival celebrations would have contributed to this. Sydney lodgements were also well down.

Attending Alice Springs was a thoroughly rewarding experience and a great opportunity to re-gain some long missed operating practice. After an initial hiccup with water damage to our intended accommodation the alternative caravan park villas provided were of a high standard.

All participants co-operated well in providing visitors to the telegraph station with a demonstration of communication as it existed in an earlier era.

This was much appreciated judging by the comments made by many visitors.  

Charlie Spalding

Royal Show roster 25th Sept-2nd Oct 2010

- Sat. 25th  Greenslade Jolley Keays Macdonald Ravenscroft
- Sun 26th  Bright Fathers Field Hopkins Knox Rice
- Mon 27th  Bright Keays Ravenscroft Spalding Thomson Whitney
- Tues 28th  Fathers Greenslade Hewson Jolley Knox Spear
- Wed 29th  Darroch Meadowcroft Pitts Tyler D. Tyler R. Willis
- Thu 30th  Bright Hopkins Field Sinclair Thomson Whitney
- Fri 1st  Knox Greenslade Jolley Mcshane Tyler D.
- Sat 2nd  Keays Meadowcroft Murray Sinclair Spalding
Leopold Gilbert Cohen

Inventor of the Simplex Auto Jigger.


It seems best if we refer to Leo in these notes by his Christian name. Using Cohen seems a little disrespectful, and using the prefix Mr. can become somewhat monotonous. Leo was born at Kalgoorlie W.A. on 11 August 1900, his father being Herman Cohen, and his mother Evelyn McMillan.

He was first appointed to the Postmaster General’s Department at Healesville, Victoria, as a telegraph messenger on 18 January 1915. His annual salary was Pounds 39, with a Living Away from Home Allowance of Pounds 12 per annum.

He appears in the 6 September 1917 Commonwealth Gazette as being a messenger in training (telegraphist-in-training) at the Chief Telegraph Office (CTO) Melbourne with an annual salary of Pounds 78. Another of his friends, J. W. (Bill) Layther was in the same class. Other Messengers in training included some very well known folk—Reg Jebb, Jim Garvey, Frank McEvoy, Frank Maguire and Frank Loftus. Qualified telegraphists at the same time and known to many of us, were Gus Kruse, Bill Nougher, Bert Tobin and Jack Willats. Some of the data were obtained from an historian, Mr John Waghorn of Lalor, Victoria with a combination of my own.

In 1920 Leo became a Postal Assistant (unattached), which meant he could serve anywhere in Victoria. His annual salary was Pounds 126.

In the Commonwealth Gazette of 18 November 1927, he is shown as being a telegraphist in the CTO Melbourne on an annual salary of Pounds 294. It is believed he was a telegraphist well before 1927.

In 1934 he was Senior Postal Clerk Grade 1 at Hawthorn (324).

In 1937 he was Senior Postal Clerk Grade 1 at Canterbury (324).

Things are not quite clear from here on. Leo was a Major in the Australian Army (A.I.F.) during World War II and enlisted on 13 November 1939, but in what capacity we do not yet know. His Army No. was VX209. We will have further information on this in a few weeks time.

He next appears as Postmaster Grade 3 at Warracknabeal in the 1948 Commonwealth Gazette stating officers positions as at 1 January 1946, and remained until about April 1950. The January date is curious - As we understand he was discharged from the Army on 30 January 1946. Perhaps his new position was held and advised to him by the PMG before he demobilised.

He then became Postmaster Grade 3 at Burwood from 1950-1951.

Until his death at 53 years of age in 1954, he was Postmaster Grade 3 at Burwood and finally (probably) Armadale, Victoria. We are unsure of the precise date of his death at the moment.

During the War, he had a friend James William (Bill) Layther (his former telegraphist-in-training colleague) as his official representative, handling sales of the Cohen jiggers. Bill was born on 10 February 1901 and joined the PMG in 1916. He shows in the 1927 and 1937 Commonwealth Gazette listings as being a telegraphist in the CTO Melbourne.

During wartime, Bill Layther was Postmaster at Mooroopna, Victoria and had his name as representative on the Cohen brochures which accompanied each jigger sold.

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Bob was born in Preston, Victoria in 1935 and went to work as a Junior Postal Officer at Burwood in 1951. Regarding Bob Goodridge — he has been able to provide a few very interesting personal memories of Leo. Bob later purchased one and more recently, donated it to the Hawthorn Telecom Telegraph Museum. It is chrome with a Leo Cohen name plate on top. Leo didn't talk about anything in the Gazette about that, but postal workers moved around quite a lot.

The only other remaining telegraphists of whom I am aware who met or knew Leo Cohen are Bob Goodridge and Fred Ryan. Fred was a telegraphist in Melbourne in 1937/38 who moved later to Queensland and then finally to Canberra where he retired as Senior Supervisor/Office-in-charge. Fred went to South Melbourne Post Office (from his memory) after he completed his telegraphy training in 1937/38 and purchased his jigger personally from Leo Cohen who was working there at the time. We haven't seen anything in the Gazette about that, but postal workers moved around quite a lot.

Regarding Bob Goodridge—he has been able to provide a few very interesting personal memories of Leo. Leo Cohen arrived on the scene that year as PM but after Bob had commenced working there. During 1951, Bob and another telegraphist—to be Terry George, attended the Postal Training School in Flinders Lane Melbourne for approximately half a day several times a week, enrolled in what was called a Morse Feeder Class. This was the medium for young boys who had learned the Morse Code alphabet, to be trained in the practical reception and transmission of Morse Code using the standard post office sounders of the day. They were taught by qualified adult telegraphists from the CTO Melbourne. Stew Browne, known to most of us was one of Bob's instructors. Bob and Terry improved their operating speeds and were accepted into a full-time training course for Telegraphists in 1952.

As such, Bob said he didn't see Leo all the time and was not aware that Leo was the inventor of the Australian Simplex Auto jigger. Bob later purchased one and more recently, donated it to the Hawthorn Telecom Telegraph Museum. It is chrome with a Leo Cohen name plate on top. Leo didn't talk about jiggers but did offer some sage advice to our fledgling telegraphist—"When you get into the CTO Bob, don't settle in there—or you will never leave!"

Leo helped out on the Morse circuit from time to time which was connected to Melbourne. This occurred during lunch hours or occasionally during other busy periods i.e. Pension day when the postal clerks were flat out making cash payments as was the custom in those days. Leo apparently used the Burwood Post Office morse telegraph keys when operating. Bob remembers Leo sitting back receiving telegrams on occasion. Bob mentioned there was a female Senior Postal Clerk at Burwood at the time who was very good on the Morse line. From memory she may have been between 30-40 years of age. Leo was an immaculate dresser and rode one of those quiet French-manufactured * Velocette a water-cooled motorcycle to the office. He was sometimes attired in a good sports coat (perhaps Harris Tweed) complete with cravat, and a deer-stalker or small peaked cap.

Bob didn't know of Leo's army career and said on reflection he had the bearing and demeanour of a military officer. Leo wasn't aloof or authoritarian nor was he a strict disciplinarian. When he arrived at Burwood, some of the ex-service postmen were inclined to have a few drinks at lunch time at the Palace Hotel and forgot to return to complete their second rounds—in those days there were two rounds a day and one on Saturday mornings. Not long after Leo arrived, the postmens' behaviour seem to rapidly improve. Any disciplinary action wasn't obvious to Bob, as a young chap.
Bob said Leo was an athletic type of person and seemed to have an eye for the ladies—not uncommon for the type of recruit that found his way into the Telegraph Service. He didn’t mind jumping up from his desk to help if any enquiry was made by a pretty female. Bob said he is not aware of any photographs of, or writings made by Leo. We asked Bob if Leo had a good sense of humour—one would not get so close to the Postmaster at a young age. He may not have drank either—but who knows, Bob’s recollections are a most welcome addition to these notes. At least one other person was in the known link of Cohen jiggers. He was Stewart M. Perrin who was a Grade 3 supervisor in the Melbourne CTO when I began work there in 1955. He sold Cohen jiggers up until Morse code was no longer used, in 1962. Stew Perrin used the same style name plates as in earlier years but without Leo Cohen’s name on them (this needs further clarification) and by this time the number sold was well in the 7000’s. However, Bob met Stew as a young teenager but was never aware of the Cohen/Perrin connection. At a young age, Bob moved with his family to Koondrook on the Murray River, where his stepfather became non-official Postmaster. Mr Goodridge knew Stew Perrin through his Cohuna connections and Stew visited the Goodridge’s on a few occasions. Former Melbourne telegraphists will be amused to learn that Stew Perrin and Des (Hooky) Moore were both born in Cohuna Victoria. A chalk and cheese comparison if ever there was one. When Bob entered the CTO he saw Stew Perrin (whom he had previously called Stew), and thought—this is great. I know someone among all these strangers. But when he approached him and said “Hello Stew”, the reply he received was “Mr Perrin here.”!! Stew Perrin was born in 1908 and was a telegraphist in Melbourne in later years. He joined the PMG presumably as a telegraph messenger in July 1923 and would have certainly known Leo Cohen later on. The nexus between Leo Cohen and Stew Perrin is to be further explored. One exciting piece of news I heard was from a chap in Mildura some ten years or more ago. He said he had a photograph of Leo Cohen—perhaps the only one in existence—and I am still trying to persuade him to let me copy it. There were quite a lot of changes or improvements to the Cohen jiggers over the years including left handed semi and left handed fully automatic machines as well as the standard right handed ones. Most telegraphists assert the Cohen was the Rolls Royce of machines and many of us still own them. It is very hard to prise a jigger out of an owner. These machines have been sold worldwide usually in a second-hand condition. They have accompanied their operating owners in many global situations—to name a few—Papua-New Guinea, other South Pacific nations, Antarctica, South East Asia, on ships at sea, Railway Services in the Australian States and even in aircraft. They have seen service in all the Australian Armed Forces, Police Forces, Civil Aviation and the Overseas Telecommunications Commission. Perhaps there were others. I trust this will add a little more information about that very clever telegraphist/inventor, Leo Gilbert Cohen.

*(English-manufactured model LE-200—I had one too! Ed. MM)*
VALE John Roberts 1922—2010

It is with deep regret that we record the death of John Roberts a long time member of the Western Australian Fraternity.

Born in Kadina South Australian, John was a 19 year old telegraphist working in the Adelaide CTO when he was transferred to Darwin a week before the Japanese bombing of 19th February 1942.

Although working at the time of the attack, John managed to get out just before the Post and Telegraph office suffered a direct hit, which killed 10 of the staff and badly damaged the building.

After the attack was over, John and other surviving staff gathered a few personal belongings and moved to a point 16 kms south, where, using an emergency telegraph set, they connected to the line and commenced working Adelaide with battery power fed up the line from Larrimah. Shortly after they moved south again to the 22 mile military camp.

Later still they moved to Adelaide River where John and the other 6 telegraphists spent the next 9 months working duplex around the clock to clear the heavy traffic. They were eventually relieved by an Army recruited unit and they returned to their home states.

John also worked in the Brisbane CTO during the Coral Sea Battle, at Alice Springs and was Postmaster at Corrigin, Carnarvon and Midland Prior to retirement.

He was awarded the Civilian Service Medal for his contribution to communications during the war.

VALE Robert Squiers 1929—2010

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Robert (Ned) Squiers, a member of the Western Australian Fraternity. Born in York in 1929, the family moved to Katanning soon afterwards. When he was 14 he become a telegram boy with the PMG and eventually a Postman.

He joined the RAAF in 1948, successfully completed a Telegraphists course and during the next 34 years served his country, not only at various bases in Australia but also in Japan, Hong Kong and Malaya with No. 9 Squadron in Vietnam. In 1964, Ned was posted to No 3 Telecommunications Unit in W.A.

RSS is a format for delivering text—in this case, contained in an Internet news-feed.

A gifted gentleman, namely Mr Bob Denny has presented morse-code enthusiasts with a wonderful little program that converts up-to-the-minute news bulletins (RSS) into either radio morse (your speakers) or sounder morse (your sounder via a COM port) at the click of a button.

Thanks to Barrie Field who put me onto it and helped to beta-test it.

Get the program here:- http://morse-rss-news.sourceforge.net/

A help page can be accessed by clicking the "Help Me" icon on the program page.

Meeting with Northern Corridor Radio Group.

Three of our members met with several members from the Northern Corridor Radio Group on Sunday 23rd May with the object of investigating the possibility of establishing a joint display of communications equipment and artifacts in Whiteman Park.

This will be conditional on the approval of members of each group at their respective next general meeting.

A combined approach will then be made to administrators of the park with a proposal regarding the above.