

# IMPACT

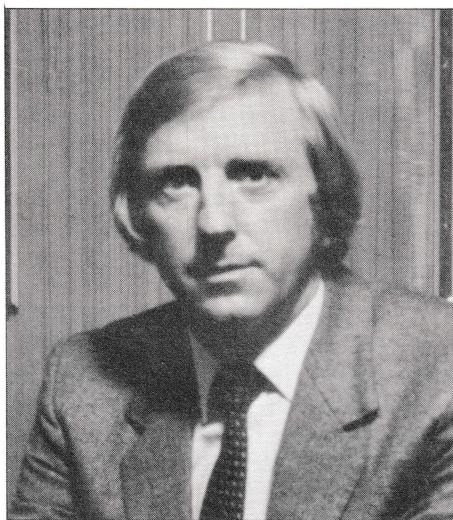
Australian Associated Press Group Newsletter

Vol. 1 No. 1 May 1985

## An Overview for all the Staff.

This is the first issue of a new company newsletter which we hope will help keep everyone up to date on activities within the AAP Group. The establishment of a subsidiary company — AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd — and the establishment of our new Technical Centre at Glebe in Sydney last year has emphasised the need for this newsletter. Staff who used to work together are now working in separate locations, and there has been a rapid rise in the number of new staff joining the company. Together with the sharp growth of the company in recent years, this has contributed to an increasing difficulty in keeping you all informed of how the company is developing, and in particular acknowledging the exceptional contribution you are all making to this development. We hope this regular publication will help in this respect. Bruce Hewitt has agreed to take on the onerous task of Editor, fully aware that staff newsletters never please everybody and can make the Editor somewhat unpopular. However, Bruce is more than equal to the task and I hope you'll give him every support in making this newsletter a top class publication. It will take time for it to settle into the format that we will ultimately want and this is where constructive suggestions from you will be welcome. It is intended to be your newsletter — not a management one.

This publication will cover both companies — AAP Information Services as we are now known and Comco, the name used in-house for AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd. Comco



Lee Casey  
Chief Executive

is very much AAP — it is a subsidiary with AAP holding the controlling 51 percent shareholding. Barney Blundell, General Manager of Comco, sits on the AAP Executive Committee, while John Lowing, AAP's Technical Services Manager, represents AAP on the Comco Executive Committee.

Most of AAP's technical staff is moving to Glebe where the two companies' technical staffs will be working side by side.

AAP this year is 50 years old. It has achieved its present success because of the contribution you are making.

This newsletter is designed to give an overview of the company's activities and in particular to concentrate on the people of AAP.

I hope you'll help make it a success.

## AAP...The First 50 Years. 1

By Bruce Hewitt

AAP turns 50 this year, older and wiser and ready for another adventurous half century.

The chances of a long innings, reaching into the 2000's

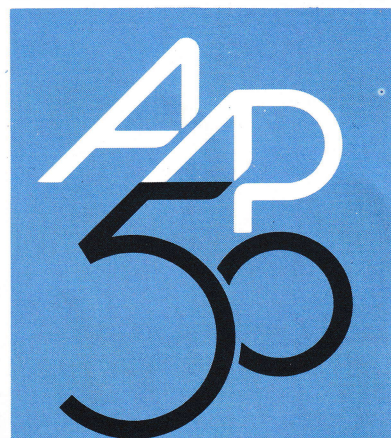
and beyond, may seem brighter now than they did in 1935, midway between a world depression and a world war.

The terrible 1930's seem remote and unreal now, even to some who lived through them, and it is not easy to imagine or remember what the infant AAP was like. So many landmarks were then away in the future.

Most importantly, AAP's decision to become a part-owner of Reuters, and the subsequent establishment of the highly-successful AAP-Reuters Economic Services joint venture in Australia, were a long way off.

The computer men with their screens and scopes, who were to change our lives and our language, were decades away, and satellites were in the weird minds of space fiction writers.

### FIFTY YEARS



THE RELIABLE SOURCE



Even the undramatic Commonwealth Pacific Cable, which brought the first fully reliable press communications from the other side of the world to Australia and New Zealand, did not happen until the 1960's.

In the beginning, 50 years ago, AAP was a simple service bringing overseas news to Australia from London and New York, through the merging of two rival wire service companies, the Australian Press Association and Sun Herald Cable Service.

It was one-way only, by commercial cable, like wool sale prices and Christmas greetings, with no teleprinter network at this end, no pictures, no radio news, no local stories and none of the other services that were to become AAP's bread and butter.

The original aim was to land 850,000 words a year from London and 175,000 from New York — targets that look more like AAP's daily intake from the world today.

Wordages were all-important, and one of AAP's early struggles was to get cable costs down to one penny a word over Empire routes, which was finally achieved under wartime pressures in 1941.

Earlier the charges were four times greater, and all manner of devices of compounding words and using superlatives in cables were tried on the cable offices to save words. (Some of the famous examples of cablese will be given in a later article)

Wartime radio teleprinter services came into press use in the late 1940's, first the German Hellschreiber from London to AAP in 1949, then the American Radio-Teletype (RTT) from New York (1951), Singapore (1954), and finally London (1955).

They were faster and better than commercial cables, but the simplex radio signals washed out for hours on end and disappeared altogether in the sunspot seasons, to the undying agony of the newsroom staff at Collins Gate, Melbourne.

This was the second and best-known of AAP's head offices in Victoria, for 22 years, after an original two-year stay in the Argus Building in Elizabeth Street. The two buildings have escaped the developers' jackhammers and are virtually unchanged today, the

massive green Argus block still a reminder of the great newspaper published there until 1957.

Collins Gate in Little Collins Street, handy to the commercial heart, was a rather cheerless place — a long narrow second floor office above an antique silverware shop.

As was the news agency mode in those days, it had a "slot" or hole in the wall between the newsroom and the teleprinters for passing copy through to the operators. Various later desks were called "the slot" but this was the last of the traditional kind and there was no nostalgia when it was left behind. Later desks were vastly better.

Collins Gate was AAP's wartime headquarters where some of the great stories of the time were handled and from where AAP journalists set off for the London and New York bureaus and to war correspondent posts in Asia.

All the staff survived the dangers and trials of World War II, but one correspondent had to endure years of captivity in the Philippines, and others had narrow escapes from London's bombs and torpedoes in the Atlantic.

AAP's London bureau had moved into the Reuter Building at 85 Fleet Street in the fateful September, 1939, in nice time for

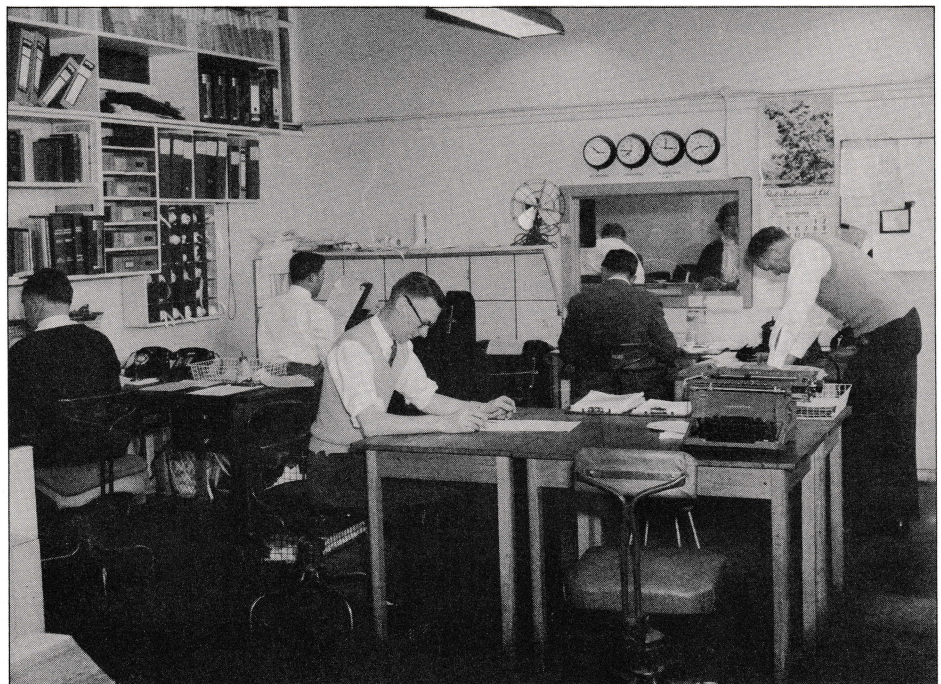
the blitz on central London.

The staff were on duty the night the bombers all but destroyed St Bride's Church next door, and on another time of terror when a huge landmine which could have demolished the building was left hanging by its parachute in the telephone wires outside.

Incredibly, our staff came through the blitz and the later buzz bomb and rocket attacks on London unharmed, except for one concussion victim. Another London staffer had to be rescued from a torpedoed ship in the Atlantic before he had even reached the office. He also survived the Malayan and Korean campaigns and today lives peacefully in Auckland.

AAP's traditionally strong coverage of the Olympic Games got its start nearly 30 years ago at the Melbourne Games, still the only Olympics held in the Southern Hemisphere.

The staff roster for a week in 1956 took one foolscap page, and the Games had to be tackled, along with all the other demands, by what today seems an absurdly small staff of a dozen journalists and a few casuals. The coverage was a success and marked an important breakthrough for AAP in both Games and local news reporting.



AAP Collins Gate Newsroom, Melbourne, 1956, showing, centre: The SLOT through which news copy went to the teleprinter operators. At right, LYALL ROWE, News Editor. Seated left traffic supervisor TREVOR ROOT, and BRUCE HEWITT (then NZPA).



A bold move in hiring our own communications for the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and the successful cover of the Perth Commonwealth Games against all comers two years later set AAP well on the road to the Games pre-eminence it enjoys today.

Unprecedented interest in New Zealand in the Melbourne Games lent urgency to NZPA's plans to close its own office in Sydney after 70 years and move into AAP in Melbourne, which it did in February, 1956.

NZPA brought its RTT channel (Zearad) to Melbourne at the same time, and has run its service to Wellington from AAP newsrooms ever since.

Another important move in 1956, following the Reuter share purchase by AAP for 70,000 pounds some years earlier, was the merging of Reuters Economic Service with AAP at Collins Gate after many years of separate representation in Melbourne.

The few remaining staff left behind the historic old Reuter office in lower Queen Street with its black teak furniture and moved into more functional surroundings.

It was from this old Edwardian Reuter office that some famous news messages were sent including the urgent word to London in the worst days of the war in 1942 that General Macarthur had landed in Australia with his dramatic "I shall return" promise to the Philippines.

All that remains now of the Queen Street era is an autographed photo of Baron Reuter in the AAP Sydney conference room, and an ancient black tin box with the fading inscription, "Reuters Telegram Company"

Space considerations and the advantage then of being next door to OTC brought about AAP's next move in August, 1959, to the new EZ Building at 390 Lonsdale Street and a vastly improved open-plan newsroom of journalists and operators working together in bright and pleasant surroundings.

Morale improved immediately and rose again when early explorers discovered a pleasant pub near the back door with a fine Melbourne counter-lunch service of the time — 20 items on the blackboard changed every day and none costing more than 10 shillings.

The improvement from Collins Gate was so agreeable that not everyone welcomed the announced office move to Sydney after four years of rumours that the Compac cable would bring big changes.

Satellites have dwarfed the importance of Compac, but it was the super-link of the 60's that gave AAP its first leased two-way news wires between Europe and Australia; that brought the world news agency services from London and New York directly to Sydney; and that made possible much of AAP's progress in the next 10 years.

The closing of the New York bureau, once the American agency wires and others could be piped through Montreal into the Sydney cable, meant fewer jobs abroad but a gain in a strengthened head office news staff to cope with a vastly increased news flow.

It also meant there were more experienced staff to provide the expanded coverage to Reuters from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific generally that the new cable communications made possible.

Overall, the Compac cable advance, at one stroke, removed AAP from 30 years of uncertainty and frustration in overseas communications and placed it firmly on the way to its destiny as a national news agency.

## Personality Piece: David Vu.

*"I too have tried in my time to be a philosopher, but cheerfulness was always breaking in."*

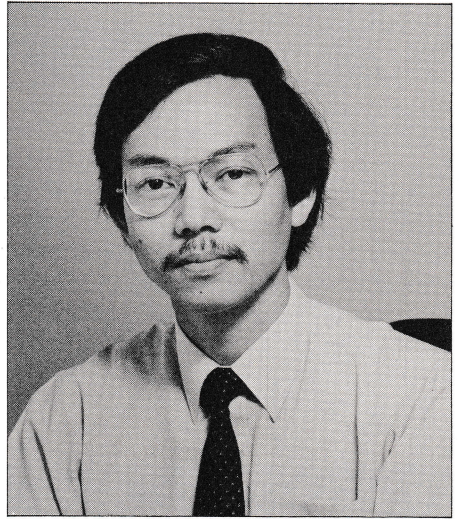
Boswell's Johnson, 1778.

If David Vu is typical, today's doctors of philosophy are a better-humoured lot than they were in Boswell's time. No one who has worked with David at AAP or Comco in the last four years can remember when he was anything less than cheerful.

His quiet good nature makes us all feel better, and less envious perhaps of his ability to take so many marvellous talents lightly.

David came to Australia from Vietnam in 1965 as a Colombo Plan scholarship student to do an

electrical engineering degree at the University of N.S.W. He graduated in 1969, and somewhere along the line, as he puts it, completed a research degree on works related to microwave transmission facilities for radio telescopes.



Comco Development Manager, David Vu

As a personal bonus for good behaviour, he met in 1967, a Vietnamese lady student named Kim, who was studying economics at Latrobe University in Victoria.

Around this time, David also learned some inconvenient facts about Australian geography and the trials of living in Sydney and running a romance in Melbourne on a student's pay.

The answer, of course, was to marry the girl, which he did soon after they both graduated. They now have a two-year-old daughter called Caroline running their lives at Pymble.

From 1972, David worked as a teaching Fellow at the University of NSW while doing a PhD on the development of high performance antenna for radio telescope and satellite systems.

In 1976, after completing his PhD programme, he joined AWA in Sydney and played a major role in developing INTERSCAN, a new navigational microwave landing system, which has now become the accepted world standard.

After joining AAP in 1981, he worked first with a team studying the use of satellites for business purposes in Australia, and then as Communications Development Manager, directed the development and implementation of the Multipoint Distribution System (MDS) for delivering information directly to



subscribers by microwave. His work in this field has contributed greatly to AAP's standing as a world leader in MDS Microwave technology and the delivery of data services by this means.

He has also been involved in planning the AAP satellite network scheduled for completion next year.

Having survived a mammoth office move from Sussex Street to AAP-Reuters Communications (Comco) impressive new headquarters in Ross Street, Glebe, there seems every possibility that Dr Vu will still be smiling when he and his engineering brothers complete the AAP satellite installations by April next year to the five major capital cities and by June, 1986, to regional subscribers.

## Banker's Luck.

A Melbourne bank manager's luck, and another's concern for the rules, brought 50 years of AAP business to the National Australia.

The National branch manager's luck was in the day AAP's first approach to a closer rival bank for an overdraft was turned down.

Bill Wynne, son of AAP's first manager, remembers his father, Arthur Watkin Wynne, telling the story many years after the original office was opened.

"There was a branch of a certain bank either in the same building or next door, so Dad introduced himself to the manager and asked for an overdraft of 12,000 pounds to get AAP started," Bill recalls.

"The manager wrote the figure on his desk pad and said the overdraft would be arranged.

"As Dad was leaving, the manager said: 'By the way Mr Wynne, what is the paid-up capital of AAP?'"

"When Dad said it was 16 pounds, the manager said he didn't understand and proceeded to explain the term paid-up capital.

"Dad said he quite understood its meaning and explained that 15 of the major newspapers of Australia were to hold one share of one pound each in AAP and he had been given one share of a pound, making a total of 16 pounds.

"The manager said he was sorry he could not accept the account because it was the policy of the bank not to allow an overdraft beyond the paid-up capital.

"Dad went to his own Eastern branch of the National where he was welcomed and offered a number of services."

Bill Wynne, now living in retirement in Beaumaris, also remembers the excitement the day in 1947 when his father returned home to say he had just signed the biggest cheque he had ever seen or was ever likely to see — the 70,000 pounds for the AAP shareholding in Reuters.

## Well-Rounded All-Rounder.

Prime Minister and cricket captain, Bob Hawke, observing an opposing batsmen's ample girth, patted it pensively and said: "Not too many quick singles today's, eh Ian?"

The batsman, Ian Dick of AAP, with equal goodwill, proceeded to hit the ministerial bowling round the Yarralumla Forestry ground for a top score of 53 (retired), in the Canberra Press Gallery's 185.

Dick also took the wicket of ALP national secretary, Bob McMullan and helped to restrict the Prime Minister's XI to 164, (Hawke 21), and give the Gallery a win by 21 runs.



*Ian Dick*

Which goes to show, you should never take a news editor lightly, especially if he is a well-rounded all-rounder.

Ian played grade cricket for Mosman in his youth and had two stints with Hertford in England, one in the 60's and the other while he was AAP London Bureau Chief in 1982-84.

He was also a first grade rugby league player in Queensland, and had several seasons of rugby union with Canberra Royals. He also plays occasional tennis and golf.

## Old Mates Network.

AAP's current cadet course has been able to call on former staffers for tips to the young from outside normal stable sources.

Most recent speaker was Sydney barrister and former AAP EIC Brian Kinsella, who gave the course an instructive two-hour brief on Australian courts and the perils of our defamation laws.

Some specialist help had been sought by the cadets who include two law graduates.

Brian Kinsella was with AAP in Sydney and London and is well-remembered for a masterly job as EIC the night of the Hilton Hotel bombing.

First guest earlier in the course was Sydney Sun Editor-in-Chief, Ron Ford, who was with AAP in Melbourne in the 1950's before a distinguished career with Fairfax.

He told the cadets plainly what he wanted from AAP services as a metropolitan editor, and how he saw the future of evening newspapers.

Complaining mildly about being talked into the lecture by an old AAP mate, he said: "I don't even do this for our cadets!"

### EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE:

The 50-year review of AAP will be completed next issue. There will also be a Personality Piece each issue, and hopefully more staff sporting successes.