AAP PREPARES FOR LAUNCH

New Financial Service

AAP is preparing to launch its latest real-time financial service, billed as the most sophisticated of its type in Australia.

The "New Quote Retrieval Service" (NQRS) initially will cater for securities and futures markets, superseding the company's highly successful "Multi-Quote Terminal" (MQT) introduced five years ago.

Offering faster delivery of information, simultaneous "window" displays, increased screen capacity, full colour and a range of new services, NQRS is the culmination of a five-year project aimed at developing a service to maintain the company's pre-eminence in the financial information market into the next decade.

"By comparison, every other financial service on the market will be rendered obsolete once NQRS is released," Assistant General Manager David Jensen said.

"By utilising some of the latest available technology from overseas and marrying it with our own technology to meet every conceivable market requirement, we have a product that is simply the best there is."

Some key features:

- Information delivery will be almost instantaneous through AAP's new Data network (ADN).
- Subscriber terminals will have more than twice the capacity of previous products with larger 80 character width screens and 25 lines of information.
- The screens will feature full colour and allow subscribers to view four different services simultaneously through "window" displays.
- A new range of trading summaries that will, for example, display the top stocks by volume or value at one exchange, or across all exchanges and even categorise them into mining, oils and industrials if desired by the user.
- Facilities for charting.

The ability to offer the user virtual customisation of the product is a significant step forward in the marketing of a screen-based financial markets information system.

The level of selectivity extends to allowing a subscriber to choose for display special categories of information such as every all ordinaries contract at the Sydney Futures Exchange for each month or similar information for options, bank bills or everything on the database relating to one particular stock.

The NQRS is being tested in-house and will soon be placed in selected Sydney brokers' offices for field testing before official release and the addition of money market and other services next year.

Already, AAP technicians have cabled more than 600 buildings in Australian capital cities in preparation for the launch.

Liz Kyme of Financial Services Product Development, with the NQRS terminal, with a close-up of a display screen inset.

INSIDE:

Since AAP introduced "Voice Mail" to Australia last year, international companies such as Shell, Mobil and Elders have put it to work for them and AAP remains entrenched as the market leader.

This year the Company's Voice Mail system has been selected by other organisations including Westpac, Qantas, Telecom NSW, NEC, CML and the Primary Industry Department.

AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd (Comco) holds around 90 per cent of the market with 18 systems sold at last report, more than the combined competition provided by NEC, Siemens, Honeywell, IBM and Wang.

Voice Mail, already a burgeoning industry in the United States, is a telephone messaging system designed to simplify business communications.

Sender's voice

It allows users to communicate with each other independently at times convenient to them.

Voice Mail messages can be sent to multiple recipients, marked urgent for priority delivery, copied to others or designated confidential to prevent copying.

Recipients hear the message in the natural voice of the sender, and can check on when and where it was sent from.

At all stages users are guided by human voice prompts which "talk" them through the various steps necessary to access their confidential mail boxes, review or send messages, or use the system's many other features.

Voice messaging is designed to eliminate one of the most frustrating and often costly problems in business communication by allowing two-way conversation without the need for both correspondents to be available at the same time.

It can reduce the traditional communications problems of differing time zones and turn into relics phrases such as "He's in a meeting," "She's on the other line," "He's travelling this week."

Three versions

AAP became the first international distributor for Aspen (Automatic Speech Exchange Network) when it signed up the sole Australian Distribution rights from its maker, Octel Corporation of California.

Aspen, which comes in three versions, is designed to integrate with any PABX telephone system.

The smaller version is capable of handling the voice traffic of between 50 and 500 electronic "mail boxes."

A larger Aspen can handle from 100 to 3,000 telephone "mail boxes,"

ASPEN ARRIVES IN AUSTRALIA

with up to 9,000 possible depending on usage patterns.

The largest Aspen, known as the Maxum, can accommodate up to 10,000 mail boxes and is suitable for public bureau use.

When fully integrated with the PABX, Aspen becomes an even more useful tool within a corporation.

Incoming calls to a particular person's extension, if engaged, will automatically be routed to their Aspen mailbox to allow a message to be left, at the same time as it illuminates a light on the recipient's telephone to say a message is waiting.

Ease of use

Comco has completed the technical design and arrangements with the six major PABX suppliers in Australia to allow full integration of Aspen. All six suppliers now also act as sub-agents to make Aspen available as an option with their own systems.

Comco General Manager Barney Blundell said the Aspen technology was not just that of a "glorified answering machine." "It is purpose-designed to provide affordable voice messaging with emphasis on ease of use," he said.

He described the Aspen venture as a logical extension of AAP's activities, complementing the Company's terrestrial and satellite communications network.

Comco Assistant General Manager Brian Perkins said: "Aspen has changed the nature of telephone communications in Australia for all time. For corporate Australia, the humble telephone has now been recognised as the universal Information Terminal."

Integration

Product Manager David Blanks, who evaluated four main messaging systems in the United States, said Aspen was chosen because it had the best range of features and they were easy to learn and operate. "Also, Aspen's small physical size was suitable for the Australian office environment, it had a lower entry-level cost and we were impressed by its PABX integration ability," he said.

Blanks said a "basically wary and conservative" approach by Australian companies to radical communications concepts proved to be the initial barrier to acceptance.

"It was almost as if the concept was too good to be true. Our first sale came when the Shell Company appeared like Santa Clause to say 'yes' at Christmas 1985. Three months later, Shell ordered an expansion. Aspen has helped Shell improve its communications with employees in

Sydney and outback New South Wales. Four more Aspen systems were ordered late in 1986. Shell now has systems in each capital city which service each local area and pass messages between systems."

Oil company

Blanks said Mobil Oil had experienced extensive cost savings by using Aspen to send voice messages to hundreds of employees and retail outlets throughout Australia.

Before installing Aspen, telexes were used to communicate price changes, and because petrol deliveries are cash only, prompt notifications of price changes is very advantageous to resellers, and Aspen is now getting the word out fast.

The Elders Finance Group saw the potential of Aspen after completing a field trial in July 1986. A system was ordered for their Melbourne office and plans are being made to extend the service to other states.

AAP gets first-hand feedback from Elders employees, because their Melbourne office is located just one floor above AAP.

Comco provides around-the-clock service and customer support for Aspen Australia-wide.

Leading Edge

AAP Sydney's indoor cricket team, the Leading Edge, has forged its way to a grand final victory by proving superior in tight situations.

Competing in the Cl grade at Eastern Suburbs Sports City, the Leading Edgers finished second in the minor premiership then went on to win their major semi-final by one run and their grand final by two runs, 117-115.

The Leading Edge team has played in the competition for several years and been beaten in previous grand finals. This was its first victory.

Team members were: Media Marketing Manager Geoff Want, Assistant General Manager John Lowing, Technical Development Manager John Pilkington, Finance journalist Mike Osbourne, Rod Stevens of Computer Operations, Andrew Kelly of Technical Development, Steve Blundell, son of Comco General Manager Barney Blundell, and former AAP staffers Tony Silva, Mathew Pittman and Brian Pacholke.

Said team Captain Geoff Want: "It was a good all-round team effort. That's what won the competition."

SAME JOB, NEW BOSS

A change of uniform and a change of employer, AAP will lose 16 staff members next year when the Sydney Futures Exchange moves to new premises. The AAP staff will continue to perform the same function, reporting price movements at the Exchange, but will simply transfer over to a new employer, the Exchange itself. AAP has had a long association with the Exchange, having designed, built and installed the SGE Computer system. The longest serving AAP staffer at the Exchange is Angela Ganino, who has worked there since 1979.

'I think we've just been sunk!'

The sage who reckoned that war is 99 per cent boredom and one per cent sheer terror was spot on, according to Perth Bureau Chief Mark Lever.

Lever found out that war at sea, at least, has little to recommend it for the thrill-seeking reporter when he took part in a major United States and Australian naval exercise recently. The Australian defence forces used operation "Valiant Usher" to test the navy's ability to look after journalists assigned to join a fleet in the real thing.

He said his experience aboard the destroyer HMAS Hobart showed that patience, tolerance and a healthy constitution were prerequisites for any seaborne war correspondents.

"Being on board gives you virtually unlimited access to the details of the operation," he said.

"But telling the rest of the world — is another matter with a military censor on board, limited access to communications and other journalists to contend with.

MARK LEVER

"A lumpy three-metre swell made it clear that warships are built for speed not comfort.

"I wasn't the only one aboard to feed his excellent wardroom supper to the fish."

Lever said the one per cent of terror came when he was winched on and off the too-small stern of Hobart by a navy helicopter.

"The ship was belting along at 17 knots into that sea and the deck kept disappearing from underneath me," he said.

On his last night he was aboard the landing ship HMAS Tobruk when a green flare signalled that an

enemy "submarine" had penetrated the fleet.

Tobruk happened to be between the submarine and the rest of the fleet. On the bridge commander Mike Donaldson calmly told AAP's correspondent: "I think we've just been sunk."

Lever was grateful to be dumped on dry land at dawn to watch a battalion of US marines storm the dunes north of Lancelin, 120 km north of Perth.

An awesome array of hardware including tanks and heavy artillery swarmed ashore in amphibious troop carriers, helicopters and their latest toys, LCACS — Landing Craft Air Cushioned — or big hovercraft to non-jargon speakers.

Lever said Australia's standing in the arms race was demonstrated when a battered army truck arrived to take journalists and sundry military observers back to civilisation.

"A Lieutenant-Colonel reckoned it was the oldest truck in the army and probably served in Vietnam," he said.

Normally when there are early morning coups in Manila we are alerted by the throb of helicopters and aircraft passing low over our house on their way to or from Villamor air base.

This time it was different. The phone went shortly after 3 am. It was a left-wing contact. "Wake up, James," he screamed down the line. "There's a coup. They're trying to get into Malacanang."

A call to Reuters established the Malacanang Palace raid had been fought off, but there were unconfirmed reports that rebel soldiers were trying to take over Camp Aguinaldo, the army headquarters, about 25 minutes' drive away up the six-lane Edsa Highway where millions gathered in February 1986 to put President Ferdinand. Marcos to flight.

Hundreds of troops

The front of the camp was quiet, although the gates were closed and blocked by military trucks on the inside.

In one of the streets at the side of the camp it was a very different story. Here hundreds of troops were waiting in trucks, buses, jeeps and armoured personel carriers.

They were in combat gear and each truck bristled with heavily armed men with M16S, M60 machine guns, grenade launchers and recoilless rifles. There was only one way to find out if they were friend or foe, and that was to ask.

Go away!

"Where is your commanding officer?" I asked the nearest soldier as I climbed out of the car. He did not answer, but the hostile look he gave spoke volumes.

Wandering up the column, I put the same question to another group of men and asked them if they were pro-government or with the rebels.

"Go away, Joe," was the reply. "We don't want to have to shoot you."

I did not need a second invitation and I left hurriedly with a colleague from the French newspaper Le Monde. We counted 13 trucks and buses as we left, each of them with 50 or 60 troops in them.

Shadowy

A ten minute drive through darkened and deserted streets and we were approaching the government-run television station, Channel 4, stopping to ask a taxi driver whether we were on the right track.

"Don't go down there," he said. "There's a war going on."

Ignoring his advice we cruised in first gear down towards the noise of the gunfire, our hazard lights flashing and our internal light on to show would-be attackers we were not hostile.

About 200 metres down the road we

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Our man on the spot . . . and Jim Dallmeyer sent this photo to prove it!

Manila correspondent James Dallmeyer was AAP's man on the spot during the abortive coup in August against the government of Mrs Corazon Aquino. As he recalls here it was the first time in 14 months of covering the Philippines that he felt genuinely threatened.

saw shadowy figures flitting between some trees. Two of them suddenly dropped down on one knee and took aim straight at our car, only 50 metres away.

We were in reverse and gunning back up the road before they would have had time to get their safety catches off.

Another attempt to get near the TV station proved fruitless — the crackle of gunfire as we reached the corner of the road had us diving for cover.

This was the place where a handful of journalists, including Pacific defence reporter Robert McDonald, were pinned down for about one hour before they escaped during a lull in the fighting.

Deadlines

McDonald later returned to take more shots of the fighting. He never got them developed.

By this time it was clear we would not be able to get close enough to Channel 4 to see what was going on without exposing ourselves to grave risk, so with deadlines in mind, we drove across town to Malacanang Palace.

The sight of two massive landing vehicle transports drawn up across the street to the Palace was reassuring. It meant the marines, led by their staunchly loyal commandant brigadier General Eduardo Biazon, had arrived to secure the area.

At that time Biazon did not know about the troops at Aguinaldo, so we told him we thought they were rebels. Less than 12 hours later it was to be his men who flushed the rebels out of the army headquaters.

The signs of fighting outside the

Palace were there for all to see, including a grenade that my French colleague picked up for inspection, replacing it with the utmost care when he realised it was unexploded.

Camp Aguinaldo at 12 noon was not a happy place, we had gone there to attend a news conference to be given by rebel leader Colonel "Gringo" Honasan, but when we turned up at the appointed gate it was already clear from the gunfire and explosions coming from inside the camp that his attention was engaged elsewhere.

On top

Two rebel sentries hiding on either side of the gate told us to go away. They looked extremely edgy, so we did.

It was then that it dawned on us that General Fidel Ramos had opened fire from Camp Crame, on the left of Edsa, lobbing 81 mm mortars over the walls of Camp Aguinaldo. It was as if civil war had broken out.

By this time I think most of us had thought of the prospect of Gringo and his boys winning the day, but gradually, the government troops got on top.

By the time I returned to Camp Aguinaldo as the fighter planes zoomed over firing their rockets, much of the rebel camp was already back in government hands.

This coup was certainly different. It did not have the farcical, fiesta mood of previous coups. The rebels were serious and determined.

For the first time in 14 months of covering the Philippines, a country most people believe wrongly to be a highly dangerous place, I felt genuinely threatened.

AAP appoints National Media Manager

Geoff Want has been appointed to the new postition of National Media Manager in a move designed to bring the company's dealings with Media clients under one umbrella.

Geoff, formerly Product Development Manager, will be responsible for harnessing resources in many areas of the company which combine to service AAP's Media clients.

Reporting to Editor-in-Chief Barry Wheeler he will oversee the provision of typeset services to the Media, such as Formguide and Stockset, and will become the sole point of contact with subscribers for these services.

Geoff will also administer contracts with Media clients and assist in contract negotiations.

He will maintain liaison with other divisions within AAP on Media Services and hopes to establish a more intimate rapport with subscribers at production and managerial level.

New packages

Geoff's brief also covers the marketing of Picture Services to newspapers, television and magazines, and he will investigate the potential for developing new packages for the Media, including the previously untapped suburban newspaper market.

He will be joined by Media Services Manager Wally Parr, who will concentrate on a number of areas including arrangements for special filers, dial-up filers and supplementary traffic carried by AAP for other organisations.

Wally will also handle the marketing of special services to the Media such as the Olympic Games Photo Service, World Cup Rugby and Royal Easter Show.

He will continue to oversee contract

GEOFF WANT

negotiations and subscriber liaison for AAP's special news services to non-media subscribers: Nauru, Antarctic, Shippress, Navy and Telecom sports results.

Barry Wheeler says the new Media Marketing division aims to maintain traditional Media services, which have accounted for a substantial part of AAP's overall income, and expand into new Media markets.

"We have to become more aggressive in maintaining, even improving, our share of the Media market in the face of emerging competition," he says.

Back North

In other Company movements, former Editor-In-Charge and Queensland Manager Paul Reid has returned from Sydney to his former base in Brisbane as Queensland News Editor.

Medianet Manager Rex Mitchell has taken over Paul's former position as Manager, Commercial Services, and will continue to oversee MediaNet. Rex has been appointed to the Company Executive Group (CEG).

Ian Dick has become Queensland State Political Reporter.

Jakarta bureau may reopen

The Indonesian Government eased its ban on Australian journalists by offering AAP a five-week working visa, which Manila correspondent Jim Dallmeyer took up in November.

The easing of the ban, imposed in April 1986, is seen in diplomatic circles as a first move by Jakarta to try to normalise relations with the Australian media.

Relations deteriorated sharply after the publication of an article in the Sydney Morning Herald in April last year which drew comparisons between the wealth of Indonesia's President Suharto and the Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos.

Editor-in-Chief Barry Wheeler said: "Being offered the working visa is the culmination of several months of patient representations. We sincerely hope this is the first step towards the reopening of our bureau in Jakarta."

Outrage

The Sydney Morning Herald article, writen by the paper's then foreign editor David Jenkins, caused outrage in Jakarta, prompting research and technology minister B.J. Habibie to scrap a planned visit to Australia.

A planeload of Australian tourists was turned back when it arrived at the airport on the holiday destination of Bali. They were told they did not have visas.

The Indonesian Government reversed its snap decision that Australian tourists needed visas, only a day after the aircraft had been forced to fly back to Australia.

They also postponed the working visa of Mr Dallmeyer, who was about to take over AAP's Jakarta posting from Leigh Mackay.

Mr Mackay took up the post 1983 when AAP became the first Australian news organisation allowed to open a bureau in Indonesia following the departure of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) correspondent in 1980 and the Sydney Morning Herald correspondent in 1981.

The last Australian journalist to be based in Jakarta following last year's diplomatic row was Michael Byrnes of the Australian Financial Review. He was denied a visa renewal last November.

Other media organisations interested in basing a correspondent in Jakarta include the ABC, whose Managing Director David Hill travelled to the Indonesian capital earlier this year for talks with army chief Benny Murdani.

FROM AA TO AARDVARK

AAP has its own entry in the Macquarie dictionary.

This remarkable observation was made by Sydney systems controller Clem Gillian.

Clem does not read dictionaries in her spare time. She spotted the AAP entry shortly after embarking on the mammoth task of committing the Macquarie

into spellbinder, the facility in AAP's Baudrunner video editing system that helps journalists who have momentarily forgotten how to spell.
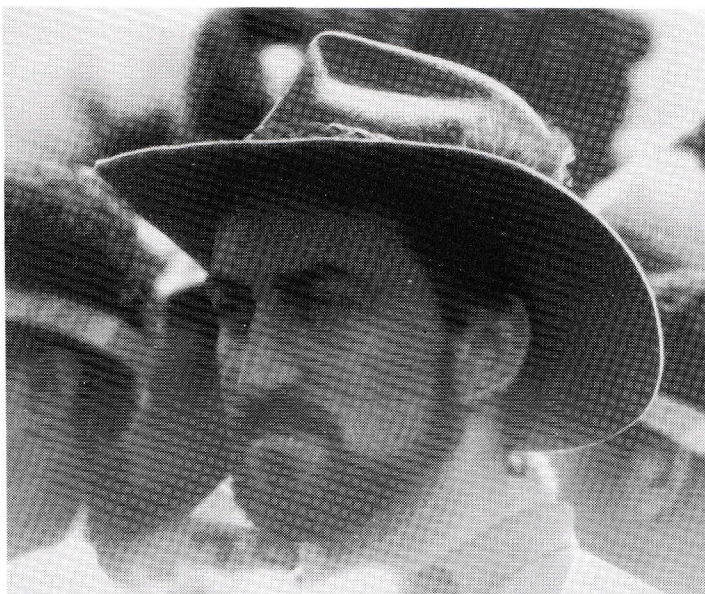
For the disbelievers still among us Clem points out, without comment, that the AAP entry is on page 15 of the Concise Macquarie, between alcoholics anonymous and Aardvark.

Slings and arrows of outrageous election: politics PNG-style

Dressed for the climate . . . the intrepid Ian Vallance on the election trail in the Highlands.

An Australian election can be a rough old school, but it's tame compared with the Papua New Guinea version.

Voting takes weeks, some tally rooms are besieged by axe-wielding warriors; this year one was burnt to the ground.

Voters are openly bribed, some manage to vote more than once, riot police are frequently called in and some officials even get killed in the line of duty.

AAP Port Moresby correspondent Ian Vallance recounts what it was like to cover the 1987 PNG General Election:

In Australia, voting occurs on one day, it's over by 6 pm and within a couple of hours you usually know the result.

In PNG, voting lasts about three weeks and the outcome is not known in some cases until a week after counting is finished.

It was four weeks after the polls closed before we knew that Paias Wingti was still Prime Minister.

Riot squads

They were fairly tense days and nights. Electoral commissioner Luke Lucas was often seen in the central tally room in Port Moresby with other officials hunched over the results as they came in from outlying areas.

Hundreds of people were besieging tally rooms around the country waiting for word from the scrutineers inside who would report latest figures to their candidates.

Lots of them in the highlands were carrying axes, which aren't offensive weapons there.

Police riot squads were on duty but they could not act until the axes were used.

The crowds disrupted counting at several booths and in one case they burnt down a tally room. Fortunately the police had suspected this was likely and had whisked the

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ballot boxes away a few hours earlier.

At one village a crowd burnt 7000 votes, which was one-third of the whole electorate.

Officials decided that if the winning margin had been less than 7000, they would have to order a recount.

As it turned out that wasn't necessary.

There was often no real news in Port Moresby itself, so I took a trip to Enga, a remote area of the highlands, getting a lift on a helicopter with one of the electoral commissioners.

Guard on boxes

That night, several hundred warriors had attacked the District Court-house where the ballot boxes were being kept.

They were being guarded by three local villagers being paid a couple of kina a night for their trouble.

When we arrived, one had been shot dead, one had an arrow through his chest and the third had run away.

We saw the warriors as our helicopter landed and they presented an imposing sight with their feathers, paint and full tribal regalia,

They were supporters of a candidate who was trailing in the count.

One day later the helicopter was about to drop off the Electoral Commissioner at another village when warriors burst out of the bushes and fired arrows and threw stones at it.

The helicopter took off again with the electoral commissioner hanging on to its landing pads, and set him down half a kilometre down the road.

At one booth a guy told me he had voted three times for his brother and planned to do so again.

It was common to see supporters with fistfuls of two-kina notes offering them to anyone who would vote for their candidate.

One Electoral Commission officer died during the election.

The officers go in teams from village to village picking up the ballot boxes, sometimes taking weeks in

the remote areas.

In this case, the only way for the team to get across the river was to swim, and one member drowned during the attempt.

The Electoral Commission this year had a nine million kina ($A14 million) budget to conduct the election, which included outlays on education campaigns.

It ended up 3.5 million kina (A$5 million) in debt.

Papua New Guinea has a five-year fixed term Parliament, although governments can get overthrown in the meantime.

No-one knew who the Prime Minister was until the first morning the new Parliament convened, because voting for the position takes place on the floor of the Parliament.

As an indication of the fickle loyalties of PNG politics, one member voted for the opposition's candidate for speaker, then crossed and voted for Paias Wingti for Prime Minister.

No issues

Later he claimed he had been drugged.

One of the physical problems in covering a PNG election is communications.

From the outlying areas it is virtually impossible to file anything, and I had to arrange a backstop to cover for me in Port Moresby.

Another problem, in a country where the outcome of the election is unknown for such a long time, is continuing to maintain interest by the Australian newspapers in the outcome.

There are no issues.

Politics PNG-style is purely a matter of personality clashes, and there are plenty of them.

Forty-five people contested the highlands seat of Kundiawa.

All had their own scrutiners in the tally room, checking the figures and lodging objections as they went.

The winner ended up with 7.9 per cent of the vote.

Communications contracts with big US company

AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd (Comco) has announced plans to acquire the satellite and microwave network contracts and operations of McConnell Dowell Nichols Pty Ltd (MDN) which specialises in communications to remote areas.

Comco plans to integrate them into AAP's existing earth station operations in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

AAP Chief Executive Lee Casey said agreement had been reached for Comco to take over MDN's major network hubs and equipment and MDN's agency for Skyswitch DAMA (demand assignment multiple access) voice equipment.

Comco General Manager Barney Blundell said acquiring the MDN Network would boost AAP's small dish rural coverage to 59 remote earth stations, making AAP the largest operator of rural data and voice satellite earth stations in Australia.

Comco's staff levels would rise to 17 in Brisbane and 11 in Perth.

"Comco's exciting facilities provide extensive two-way voice, data and facsimile communications between Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane using a highly flexible system on 6.8 and 8 metre earth station antennas," Blundell said.

"In addition a separate small dish satellite (SDS) network provides a range of services on a 128 word-per-minute feed to 50 earth stations around Australia.

"This SDS network is to be upgraded next year to a two-way operation providing up to 15 channels of data or voice at chosen sites. The addition of the Skyswitch technology allows remote mining sites to operate efficient telephone services from such locations using very small amounts of satellite capacity. The present network has nine mining sites in operation and a number of additional sites are under negotiation."

Blundell said the Skyswitch equipment proved extremely economical, especially for outback locations, because it meant satellite transponder space did not have to be leased; satellite space could be used only when required.

He scored 33 stableford points, three short of the winning tally posted by long-time golf devotee Bruce Baxter. Comco's Alistair Craig (off 25) was third on 33 points.

Hole in one a day early

Editor-in-Charge David Eskell scored the first hole-in-one of his 17 year golfing career, but couldn't repeat the feat the following day in the AAP Sydney Annual Championship and had to settle for runner-up behind Picturegram Room Supervisor, Bruce Baxter.

David put himself in a jolly mood by notching his ace in the Bonnie Doon Monthly Medal event, hitting a five wood into a stiff nor-easter at the 163 metre 16th hole.

His tee shot pitched two metres in front of the hole and rolled in. Unfortunately he didn't see it because his view of the cup was blocked by the lip of a bunker.

"There was a ball at the back of the green and I thought it was mine," he said. "I examined it and realised it wasn't, and couldn't see any others around. So, being the eternal optimist I peeked in the hole and there was my Optima 3."
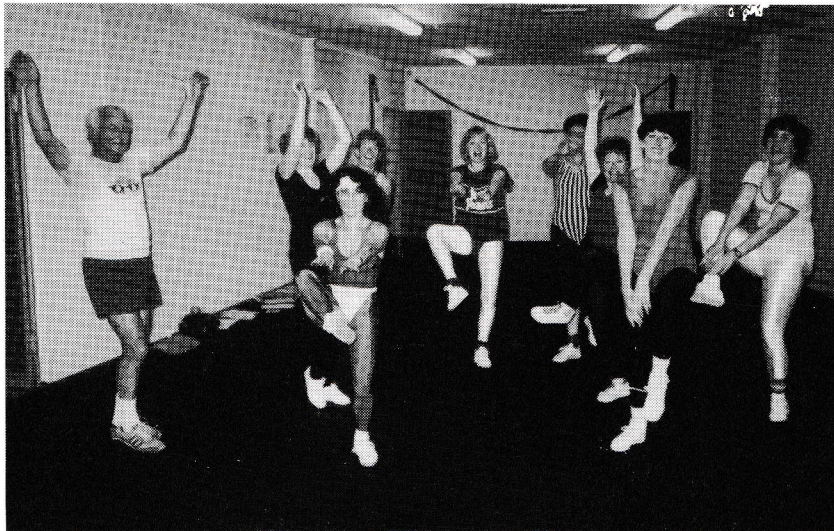
Hacker

The hole-in-one was the bright spot in an otherwise "shocking" day for David, who shot a net 82 and won nothing except drinks back at the Club House.

David, who describes himself as "still a hacker, and playing off 25," could have used a repeat of the ace the following day.

It may have been enough to snare him victory in the AAP Championship at the testing Strathfield course.

Why has this London cab strayed far from its base? And why is it bearing the AAP-Reuter logo?

The short answer is: to raise money for charity, the cab was the British entry in this year's Redex outback bash and AAP was among its sponsors.

British team spokesman John White wrote to thank the company for helping his team raise $14,000 out of a total of around $800,000. The money will be used by the Variety Club to help handicapped and underprivileged children.

"We received a great deal of publicity," he wrote. "The taxi was seen at least once a day on various TV channels around Australia for 11 days. We were also in all the papers in the areas we passed through.

"You also helped the team to win the ultimate cheats award for fooling the

"SAVOY HOTEL, PLEASE DRIVER"

competitors and officials into believing that the taxi was quicker than most of the other vehicles, as you may well appreciate, this event is all about having fun, and cheating and bribing your way to the top.

"The award meant that all our efforts and your sponsorship succeeded in achieving our original goal. On behalf on the variety club, the British team would like to say a very big thank you."

"Shake a leg" has taken on a new meaning for AAP Sydney staff who have discovered the benefits of devoting their lunchtimes to improved fitness.

Now into its second year, the twice-weekly aerobics group has attracted regulars from the Sussex Street and Glebe offices as well as from head-quarters co-tenants 2GB-Macquarie.

Executive, secretary, journalist, young, old. None of these ranks exists — just hard and easy classes.

Exercises can be performed at the speed most suitable to each individual and a careful check is made on the heart rates during the session.

The group, founded by the Chief Executive's secretary Dawn Willis, is run by professional instructors.

SHAKE A LEG WITH DAWN AND COMPANY

The introduction of showers and change rooms has greatly improved the amenities and bigger groups are expected over the summer months.

The primary purpose of the aerobics class is to increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs and improve flexibility and muscular endurance.

The regulars say they are also in it for the fun, although one or two admit the moment they look forward to most is the end of the session.

AAP goes to school

AAP's news service has become part of the curriculum for primary and high school students in Tasmania, thanks to an innovative scheme called Tasnet.

Tasnet allows students to gain access to AAP's regional news service (RNS) through personal computers at their schools.

RNS, which carries the major world, national, sport and finance news stories and features, is copied and dumped into a database in Hobart similar to that at each of AAP's media subscribers.

Students at any of the schools making use of the plan use personal computers to type in special passwords that gain access to the AAP news file.

"It's been of tremendous benefit to their media studies," said AAP Editor-in-Chief Barry Wheeler.

"The students get access to the news at the same time as the newspapers, so they can make their own news judgements, then see how the professionals handled the copy when they pick up the next morning's newspapers.

"That way they can see what news judgments have been applied by the

papers and compare them with their own.

"They can gauge which parts of the world the newspapers are interested in, and why, and can see which stories the papers omit and which stories they cut.

"It also keeps the students abreast of current affairs and encourages a greater interest in the news of the day."

The scheme started two years ago in Tasmania, where the education authorities devised the software themselves, and was extended to South Australia earlier this year.

"It has proved very popular and very successful," said Wheeler.

"It's a neat piece of software, effective and simple to use."

Practical use

Tasnet was put to great practical use by a group of Tasmanian students visiting England earlier this year.

AAP supplied the software which enabled them to dial into the AAP system from London and send messages and stories on their trip to their school newspapers.

Tasmanian education officials say Tasnet has helped students in isolated areas such as Geeveston to present programs on a local community radio station.

Tom's quiet Sunday night....

AAP Journalist Tom Hyland and his wife, Mary, were enjoying a quiet Sunday night.

The kids were fast asleep and it was cold outside.

Tom's main task for Monday morning would be write a preview of the Victorian Budget, but that wasn't going to disrupt his evening.

The peace and quiet was short-lived — a helicopter swooped low over the Hyland house, search lights piercing the windows, rotor screaming.

They raced outside to see what was happening.

Gunfire

Blue lights were flashing and two figures crouched low behind a parked car.

A policewoman yelled: "Go inside, close the door, stay inside." There was a rapid burst of gunfire.

Tom spent little time mulling over the shouted command.

He armed himself with a notebook and went in search of the police.

The horror that unfolded shocked the country — a suburban area had turned into a slaughterhouse.

Twenty-four motorists and pedestrians were shot at random in Clifton Hill, seven died.

It all took place less than 500 metres from the Hyland house.

News flash

On the other side of Melbourne, Senior Desk Editor Mike White was watching motor racing on TV when he heard the initial news flash shortly after 10pm.

After a quick check with Alan Gemmell on night shift in the office, he headed straight for the desk.

By the time he arrived in Collins Street, Tom was filing from the scene.

Alan was despatched to the area to back Tom up.

With Mike on the desk and Tom getting regular updates on the number of dead and injured the story flowed well ahead of the competition.

Tom, back on deck at State Parliament the morning after to write his budget preview, was still feeling shell-shocked.

It was cause for more colour, and what emerged from his TRS80 touched the entire office as well as the subscribers.

"The horror of last night's shooting somehow seems worse because the scene is so ordinary. The deaths seem more squalid because the victims had no chance, no way of knowing what awaited them."