

"TAKE POST!"

Newsletter of the
2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft
Regiment Association

April 2004



VIEW FROM LAU LAU ISLAND, MILNE BAY, NEW GUINEA

Looking towards Gili Gili wharf with the vessel "Anshun" lying on its side after being sunk by Japanese shell-fire on 7 September 1942. — In the foreground is a 'C' Troop Bofors gun (C1) with supporting machine-gun in the immediate foreground. There were no guns on the island when the ship was sunk.
[Photo supplied by Mrs. Nancy Fitcher, widow of Charles].

REUNION NOTICE

The **Anzac Reunion** will be held on **Saturday April 24, 2004** from 12 noon until 3:30 pm (doors do not open before 11:30 am). The cost of Annual Subscription, lunch and drinks is **\$25**.

Please see the enclosed notice regarding lunch arrangements.

The venue is the same as last year —

**The Air Force Convention Centre,
4 Cromwell Rd, South Yarra.**

(Access to the car park is from Cromwell Rd).

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The **Annual General Meeting**
will be held at:

**The Air Force Convention Centre,
4 Cromwell Road, South Yarra**
at 11:45 am, Saturday, April 24, 2004
(doors do not open before 11:30 am)

The AGM is held just prior to the
Anzac Reunion.

Members are reminded that nominations for
Committee must be lodged with the Honorary
Secretary 14 days before the meeting.

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

*It is with sincere regret
we report the passing of
these former comrades:*

Arthur Block	Bty. 9
Jim Hardy	9
Jim Charters	7
Gordon Danger	RHQ
George Bartlett	W/shops
Bernie Shackelford	7
George Roberts	8
D Shanks	9
Frank Washbourne	8
Richard Plant	7
Keith Gregory	9
Bill Popplestone	8
A. W. Griffiths	7

Lest We Forget

2/3rd AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

President:

RON BRYANT
6 Blanche Ave, Parkdale, Vic 3195
Phone 9580 2494

Vice President:

LES HARRIS

Immediate Past President:

CEC RAE.

Hon Secretary:

JOHN CAMPBELL,
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Hon Treasurer:

JOHN HEPWORTH.

Newsletter Editor:

RON BRYANT.

Committee:

IAN RUTTER : DAVE THOMSON,
BRUCE TULLOCH : HARRY
SAUERBERG : MAL WEBSTER.

MELBOURNE ANZAC MARCH 2004

Please note that our assembly point has changed again.

We should assemble at 9.15 am between Collins and Little Collins Streets, at the opposite side of Swanston Street to the Town Hall, directly behind 2/2 Heavy Ack Ack.

On reaching the top step of the entrance to the Shrine forecourt, please march to attention. ("Eyes Right" will be ordered at the Eternal Flame *not* abreast of the official party). Men in civilian clothes will remove headgear and carry over the left breast. Uniformed officers will salute.

Vale— George Roberts



George of 8th Battery died suddenly on 11 June, aged 86 years. He will be well remembered for his music. If there was a piano in a Salvo hut, he would play it to the great entertainment of everyone in earshot.

George lived at Gerang Gerung. He was a farmer, being very interested in the breeding of merinos. He never married – his nieces and nephews became his family.

George had many local interests, including tennis, football, church (being the organist) and the local fire brigade. He had been captain of the local fire brigade and received a medal for 50 years service.

Not one to update his possessions like furniture, clothing

or machinery, he still had his 1953 tractor, which he was using this year to clear firebreaks around Gerang.

George, a gun-sergeant in 8 Battery, served in the Middle East and New Guinea from 1940 to 1945. His health deteriorated quickly in his last few months. He will be missed by his many friends.

Lieutenant Colonel Phil Rhoden, OBE, ED, brother of our late C.O. Lieut Colonel John Rhoden, died on 3rd March 2003. Phil commanded that fine unit, 2/14 Infantry Battalion, serving with distinction on the Kokoda Trail. Like John, Phil was a barrister and solicitor. He had many interests, including acting as Honorary Colonel of the Ivanhoe Grammar School cadets for 18 years, and became a Life Member of Lord Somers Camp and Power House Association.

We record our sympathy to Phil's family.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

To continue to be a financial member of our Association just fill in the enclosed remittance slip, add your cheque for \$5 and post it to **John Campbell PO Box 205, Mentone 3194**

If attending the Annual Reunion, subscription is included with the cost of lunch and drinks. Our thanks to those who forward their \$5 and to those who send welcome letters.

PRESIDENT RON REPORTS

Hearty greetings to all of our members who are lucky enough to be still on their feet and mobile in the 64th year since our Regiment was formed. Best wishes to any who are not so active. Our 2003 Reunion at Air Force Convention Centre was successful despite the further decline in numbers. About 40 members and a few related guests attended. The hot lunch and drinks served in the attractive dining room were of the usual high standard.

We are most fortunate to have this accessible and comfortable venue.

The Anzac March was remarkably well attended by well-wishers in good weather. It was pleasing to have a couple of men with us who had not marched for some time; but our numbers were still down (about twenty members marched).

We were supported by some family members, including descendants of Mal Webster (in strength), of Maurie Prideaux and of Alan Young, together with a few friends from other units.

The Drum Band of the Caulfield South School marched near us. We were not quite up to British Guards Regiment's standard, but the drums, when they had the right beat, enabled us to look better than a troop of guerillas. We passed the Eternal Flame at attention and looking quite good.

Time is running against us, so if possible, join your mates at the forthcoming Reunion and Anzac March. We want to postpone the day when we might have to merge our banner with others.

The leader of our Regiment is now selected by our Committee from those who have contributed time and energy to our Association, and who in fact can march. This year, our Hon-Secretary John Campbell and Bruce Tulloch have been invited to lead us.

For many years our newsletter "Take Post" has been set up by Max Parsons, long-time editor of the 2/12 Field Regiment newsletter (also named "Take Post").

In past years the newsletters were printed by the offset process which gave high-class reproduction. Last year, "Take Post" was still set up (photos and all) by Max but reproduced by photo-copier machine. The edition was well received so, with a cost saving of a couple of hundred dollars, we will continue to print our magazine by the photo-copier

A highlight of our year was the kind invitation by the Committee of the Werribee Racing Club to our members, who had commenced their training at Werribee Racecourse in 1940, to attend the unveiling of a memorial to our Regiment, and to dine with the Committee. At fairly short notice we collected about thirty members, with some partners, to make the visit. An account of the day's outing, as written for "Mufti", appears in this issue of "Take Post". We were honored by the Club's permanent Memorial and Plaque, and by the hospitality of the Club and the Werribee R.S.L.

I appreciate the letters I have received with good wishes and news from many widows and members.

My thanks go to Max and his wife Linda who have assisted me with the setting up of "Take Post" for 13 years, and to Ron Berry who has been keeping our computer records of members for 15 years.

To John Hepworth, Treasurer, to John Campbell, Secretary and to Committee members: congratulations on the administration of our Association

On behalf of our Association, I record our admiration and good wishes to the men and women of the services who have been so ably representing Australia in conflicts and peacekeeping abroad in the Anzac tradition.

In this "Take Post" you will find some stories of our men. Many of you would remember other events of interest, of bravery or humour, which should be on record. Let me have them before it's too late!

I hope to see you at the Reunion and March.

Ron Bryant



AS YOU WERE!

You were not so different back in those early days.

How's your memory?

In the rear rank:

No.1, Gnr Patterson
No.5, Bill Crowthers
No.6, John McPherson

In the front rank:

No.2, Archie Simpson
No.3, Charlie Heddle
No.5, Fred Brown

How many other numbers can you name?

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

During the year I received many letters and phone calls from members, or other members of families. Thank you all for those contacts. I hope that I am able to help with your queries; some times though, I am unable to solve them.

Joan Oman, widow of **Paddy Oman**, expressed her appreciation of "Take Post", and 'yes' Joan your son in WA is now on the mailing list. **Gwen Kruger**, wife of **Charlie Kruger** (8) writes that Charlie enjoys reading "TP". By the way the doctor who operated on Charlie's brain tumour was the son of **Tiny Brazenor** (8).

Frank Wallis (Sigs) living at Tathra, has written that he enjoys reading "Take Post" as it is his only way of keeping up with the news of his old mates.

It was a welcome three-page letter from **Bob Phillips** (9), who lives on the golden sands at Noosa. Bob reports that "Take Post" has jogged his memory of times past, and those memories ebb and flow. Thank you Bob, for the reminiscences of **John Hepworth**, **Frank Washbourne**, **Noel Moulton**, **Les Stephens**, **Chester Guest**, **Frank Coker**, **Bert Stringer**, **Chook Russell**, **Clarrie Cuttriss**, **Lou Potter**, **Bluey Davis**, **Jim Bell**, and **Doug Simson** — many now departed; but all remembered. Bob recalls the wild nights at the reunions at South Melbourne, when many of the above-named arrived at Bob's house after the reunion. Wife Phyl turned on a great supper for all and made sure they either stayed the night or got home safely. Well done Phyl! Bob concluded his letter: 'I mention these reminiscences in order to express my gratitude to Ron Bryant, for producing "Take Post" and to the members of the committee for keeping alive the old regiment, and wonderful memories, for both Phyl and myself, of my old army mates'. Thank you Bob for sharing your memories with us.

Kevin Grey the secretary of the 2/3 Composite Regiment, of which 9 Battery was a part, keeps me up to date on their activities in Sydney. Kevin writes that he has always felt that he knew **Cec Rae** (9) as they had many contacts over the years but in last year's "Take Post" saw a photo of Cec. How did that affect you Kevin?

Frank O'Toole (9) writing from Somersby NSW appreciates "TP" greatly. Thanks for your note Frank. **Les Stephens** (8) asked for names to faces on a photo taken at Werribee. The same request from **Alan Read** (9). I hope that we were able to at least get some right!

Eric Maxwell, son of the late **Vern Maxwell** (8), shows great interest and support for our Association — thank you Eric. **Keith Sitlington** (8) sent a message via **Jack Berkley** (8) via **Frank Washbourne** (8) wishing "greetings to all his mates". How about getting to the reunion Keith, we would love to see you there!

Edie Russell widow of **Jim Russell** (7) phoned asking me to pass on her regards to all of Jim's old mates. **Colin Reilly** (8) writes from NSW that because of medical problems he has not been able to attend reunions these past two years. I hope you will be able to make it this year Colin. **Doug Pulsford** (9) sends greetings. Doug an original member was transferred to 2/4th in early 1942.

Terry Butler (9) sends greeting to all — especially **Alan Read** and **Cec Rae**. **Ann Bragg**, daughter of **Joan** and **Jim Paton** (9) (deceased), advises that her mother has been very ill. I send best wishes Ann and trust that there is some improvement in her health. Joan was thrilled to see certain photos in "Take Post" and her spirits lifted to see and read about some of our members she knew. Thank you for your letter Ann.

A very nice note from **Mavis Crittenden**, widow of former president **Jack** (9). Mavis had received from me a photo of Jack leading the 2002 Anzac Day March. Thank you Mavis.

Bob Robson (9) writing from Dungog NSW, reported that the Anzac March in Sydney was good and also that **John Ballantine** (9) is much improved after surgery and a spell in hospital.

Jan Sullivan daughter of **Keith Sullivan** (9) advised of the death of her mother

Patricia. Sad news but thank you Jan.

Marj Cope wife of **Ern Cope** (8) had written to **Cec Rae** asking for a copy of his 9th Battery story. Cec then passed the letter to me Marj. Both enjoyed watching the March and seeing faces they knew, they did however miss meeting up with **Les Shields** (8). Will we see you at the reunion Ern?

Reg Dickson (7) writes from WA — "health is up and down but can't complain" — that's the only way to go these days! Reg hears from **George Howat** (9) and **Cliff Ross** (9) from time to time.

I am quite sure that I have missed mentioning something or someone but, like you, I am not as young as I once was!

All the best from —

John Campbell, Hon Sec.



Ian Rutter, Dave Humphreys, Dick Coggins

A TREK TO FREEDOM — by Malcolm Webster (7 Battery)

There are many incidents of incredible determination and perseverance by World War II ex P.O.W.s to elude recapture and seek freedom from German occupied Italy, following the September 8th, 1943 Armistice between Italy and the Allies.

One, in particular, involving my good friend Peter Macgeorge, I feel should be told. Peter, like myself, was an Australian soldier and became a Prisoner of War when rescued by the Italian Navy. He was aboard the British Destroyer 'Hereward' which was immobilised by Luftwaffe bombing and finally sunk with great loss of life, during the evacuation of Crete.

We were playing cards together in a 'pontoon' school at the Oschiena work camp in the Vercelli rice fields when the much awaited news came through, that Italy had capitulated. After the celebrations and becoming aware that the Germans were taking over the concentration camps and sending all Allied P.O.W.s to Germany, we all decided to abandon our work camp and head off in different directions.

Escape plans

Peter Macgeorge and a companion, Bert Townsend of 2/15 Infantry Bn, quickly dismissed the thought of crossing the border into Switzerland and face internment. Their plan was to head south towards the Allied lines, hole up close by, hoping that our advancing troops would overrun their position. Civilian outfits were obtained from sympathetic Italian farm workers at Oschiena in exchange for uniforms and surplus clothing.

As there was a rumour of an Allied assault in the Genova area, they made that region their first objective. On arrival at the Trini Bridge across the huge River Po, they were dismayed to find it guarded by Carabinieri. Surveying the bridge again at around midnight they were suddenly held at gunpoint by two of the guards. They were treated with suspicion as they had removed their boots to avoid noise on the cobble stone streets. Having a reasonable knowledge of the Italian language they disclosed to their captors the true facts of their identity and desire to reach the Allied lines. Thinking that their freedom was short-lived, they were indeed surprised when the guards permitted them to cross the bridge.

Cross country

With the aid of an Italian map acquired from a peasant they headed towards Genova. General direction was maintained by using the watch and sun method as a compass. Travelling through the mountains of Monferato and keeping well clear of large towns like Asti and Alessandria they were befriended by a farmer at Rossiglione, north of Genova. Listening to B.B.C. London, it was obvious that a landing near Genova was only conjecture.

Notwithstanding, Peter and Bert continued their incredible journey. Like most of us, they, too, expected a quick advance up the leg of Italy and early relief. We hadn't taken into account the resoluteness of the German forces defending the difficult terrain, which made the campaign a slow costly grind lasting nearly two years.

Leaving the Genova region they headed in an easterly direction via Bobbio to the source of the River Secchia, in the Appenine mountains. By then, their boots were worn out but fortunately they were given new English boots by an ex Italian Air Force member. Great care was taken to avoid approaching prosperous looking farms for food: They would reconnoitre a farm first before making contact and explaining they were ex P.O.W.s walking southwards.

It was soon established that the poorer farmers were more compassionate and willing to help, despite the risk of enemy punishment. At one particular farm a huge dish of polenta was prepared. When cooked, it was placed on a clean table and covered in rich gravy. The family members together with the two Australians, sat around the table, each armed with a spoon. Amid great laughter and loud clacking of colliding spoons, the polenta was soon spooned away. Washed down with traditional glasses of home made red wine, the meal soon induced a state of well being for our weary travellers.

All home comforts?

Next morning the farmer expressed disappointment that his two guests had not partaken fully of the family's hospitality. On inquiry, it appeared they were expected to enjoy further comforts in the beds of the two daughters. Peter explained they were tired from their long walk, also the lack of vital nourishment during their long stay in Italian concentrations camps.

Among other interesting experiences was their stealthy approach to one lonely farmhouse. Peering through a window they could see two Italians sitting at a table. One man was reading aloud from a newspaper to his companion, details of the severe punishment that would be meted out to those harbouring or helping escaped Allied Prisoners of War. Hearing this statement the Australians backed away without being seen or heard. On another occasion they were entertained by an Italian singing the Fascist anthem. Whilst singing he marched backwards around the room, demonstrating the recent decline of a once powerful regime that had ruled and dominated Italy for over two decades.

Walking southwards along the Appenine range or in country terrain, avoiding where possible roads except to traverse, they saw very few German troops. At night they would sleep in haylofts or cattle byres.

continued next page →

A TREK TO FREEDOM *continued*

Only boots would be removed and trouser bottoms tucked into sox to prevent pieces of hay entering. Other than meals provided by peasants they would continually eat grapes which were well in season. Vineyards seemed endless, and the grapes provided a much needed energy source to sustain both men. Additional food was found in the nests of free ranging hen's eggs, which were hard boiled and eaten with bread rolls.

Helpful peasants warned them of areas to be given a wide berth so as to avoid any contact with German troops. Occasionally the enemy was seen at a distance, mainly travelling on motor cycles. Although Peter and Bert had a grasp of the Italian language, they would at times explain their accents by declaring they were from the south of Italy. This was reversed when further down towards the southern part. An explanation was only necessary when queried about their identity which in certain situations was thought better to keep concealed. Their journey southwards passed east of Lucca and Pisa and near Volterra, Roccastrada, Viterbo, Lago di Vico and onwards, giving Roma a wide berth.

Fighting continued

Passing by Frosinone they could see from high ground the great devastation in the railway yards wrought by heavy Allied bombing. Close by their position they watched an American aircraft crash, following some AA fire. They considered helping the crew but quickly beat a hasty retreat as a detachment of German troops arrived on the scene. As the two travellers drew nearer to the German lines on the Volturno River heavy gunfire could be heard. They were wisely advised to rid themselves of a sack carrying their personal belongings and look more like peasants. Their clothing was very dilapidated and caked in mud; they were quite forlorn in appearance and looked most unlikely soldiers.

After walking for over 8 weeks and covering around eight hundred kilometres, some days trekking between thirty and forty km they finally arrived at an old farmhouse situated in a rock strewn, secluded valley, just a few hours walk from the German front line on the Volturno River, which was holding up the Allies advance northwards. The farmhouse, which looked neglected, was close to Venafro, north of the Volturno River. By a sheer stroke of good fortune or by a guiding 'Hand', the two Australians met up with some Italian farmers and their womenfolk at the farmhouse.

Later that evening more peasants arrived until the group, including Peter and Bert, became fifteen persons. It appeared that the peasants had become refugees when forced off their land by the 'tides of war,' now occupied by the Fifth American Army, under the command of General Mark Clark.

Coincidentally, these peasants had already decided that the very next morning they must try and cross the German defence lines and return to their farms before

winter set in. It was obvious that both sides were at a standstill without any signs of an Allied breakthrough. Hearing the plan, the two Australians were eager to join the group. The reception to their inclusion, posing as peasants, was greeted with much doubt and trepidation. It was finally agreed upon after Peter and Bert reassured the Italians they would withdraw immediately if the plan or the group was considered in jeopardy.

Just after dawn, the party of fifteen, together with a mule, headed off towards the German lines. The party travelled in single file along narrow rocky tracks, through steep mountainous terrain. They were strung out around one hundred metres with Peter and Bert at the rear. After one hour of hard going the group leader called a halt. He was obviously worried and plagued with doubts, and apologised as he suggested the two Australians withdraw at this point. The leader again emphasised it was extremely dangerous, not only for the pseudo peasants but, in particular, to the rest of the party. Although Bert had some reservations about the outcome, Peter was confident they could bluff the Germans if challenged.

Peasants accept risk

After further reassurance from the Australians and a lengthy discussion among the Italians it was agreed to proceed. It was a most courageous decision to make in light of the grave and severe punishment that could befall the peasants if the ex P.O.W.s were detected. Knowing full well the German SS methods of torture and ruthlessness, I shudder at the thought of what could have happened if the whole party's safety was compromised by the Australians. Proceeding again in single file with the now increasing sound of shell, rifle and machinegun fire they suddenly met up with a platoon of German infantry. There were at least twenty-five soldiers resting and smoking alongside a stone wall and being addressed by a German officer. It was the moment of truth and the point of no return for all members of the party. Peter MacGeorge, being last in line, was able to dispose of his map, diary of the great trek and 'dog tags,' which he jammed under a rock in the wall; Bert Townsend did likewise. Realising it was now or never they continued to walk up to the Germans.

The group leader was addressed by a German officer, who first spoke in German then switched to Italian when not understood. It was explained how they were driven off their land by the war and now it was important that they return to their farms behind the American lines before the winter set in. In the meantime, one of the quick thinking Italian women passed over some of her personal belongings. Peter was given a box and Bert was given a bundle of clothing. With the line of refugees halted but somewhat strung out, a German officer walked down the line scrutinising closely each person. The German soldiers continued to rest and seemed to view the whole scene with some amusement and even appeared disinterested.

Following further discussion between the senior German officer and the leader of the peasants, all the refugees were ordered to sit or kneel on the ground with all bundles and boxes placed in front. The officer poked or struck each bundle in turn. On reaching Peter, who was last in the line, the officer flicked open his box, which, much to Peter's surprise, contained cotton reels, needles, buttons, scissors and other sewing equipment. After stirring up the contents with his cane he moved away without any comment, much to Peter's relief

Germans provided directions

It was a tense situation for all of the group. Both the Australians felt very apprehensive and dry in the mouth but fortunately fitted in perfectly with the general nervousness being displayed by the peasants. They were ordered to stand up again, a motley lot, unkempt, unshaven and dirty; everybody a genuine looking refugee or victim of the war, now eager to return home. Then, after some discussion, a German officer conducted the party to higher ground. Unbelievably and incredibly he pointed out directions and warning how the group at some risk could negotiate the German minefields by travelling along a small but dry creek bed. It was extremely rough going with artillery shells passing both ways overhead seeking enemy targets. After some time, they all left the creek bed and climbed to the top of a rocky mountain top, from where they could view in the distance, the mid afternoon sun reflecting on seemingly endless lines of vehicles and war equipment.

At this point, and in sight of the American lines, both Australians experienced a tremendous feeling of euphoria. For a while they stood pondering about how they made it, what extraordinary good fortune to stumble on the band of refugees that very eve of their attempt to try and cross the German lines. And, above all, the almost cursory inspection by the Germans when they met and the apparent compassion shown by the front line officers. Then, it was goodbye as they parted from their newly found friends amidst excitement, embracing, hand shaking and a general feeling of achievement.

Contact was soon made with two American signallers, laying a communication land line. After explaining they were escaped Australian P.O.W.s from northern Italy they were directed to the American lines. On arrival, they were treated rather cautiously as the American command found it hard to believe that two 'Aussies' had come through the German lines that same day. Despite explaining how they teamed up with Italian peasants for the crossing; the Americans still seemed somewhat sceptical and exclaimed "*God damn man, unbelievable, incredulous.*" Notwithstanding, that evening they were treated to a magnificent meal of roast beef with steaming hot potatoes and later they were billeted with American troops in a commandeered farm house.

Next day, they were escorted in a jeep to British security headquarters at Napoli for further interrogation. It became necessary to give the authorities personal details, including service number, army unit, how and where captured, full parent's names, home addresses and finally, all their identifying scars. Afterwards, they were placed under house arrest and detained in a camp containing Germans and Italians. That night their identities were verified by the Australian authorities in Cairo and thus ended their remarkable trek to freedom, made possible by timely assistance from many courageous Italians.

Peter Macgeorge was given a week's leave for recuperation and recreation in the Napoli area. Most of the leave was spent on the beach, resting weary muscles which continued to ache for some time after the long walk from Oschiena.

From Napoli, he travelled down to Taranto and boarded an American Liberty ship. The Captain was an extremely flamboyant character, large cigar, bright floral shirt and a huge 'ten gallon' Stetson, who warmly welcomed everybody aboard his ship. Much to Peter's amusement the Captain was unfazed by members of a Sikh unit, lighting fires on the ship's steel deck to brew a pot of tea.

Homeward bound

After disembarking at Alexandria in Egypt, he went on to Cairo and enjoyed another week's leave. The homeward bound leg was aboard the '*Mariposa*' an American pre-war passenger liner which left Tewfik and headed fast and unescorted, in a southerly direction towards Antarctica to avoid contact with Japanese naval vessels. On arrival at Port Melbourne, Peter was interviewed by the '*Age*' newspaper; the article was published Monday 7 February, 1944.

After final debriefing, Peter Macgeorge was seconded to an Army Intelligence unit and given the rank of sergeant. Because of his first hand knowledge of prison camp life he was detailed to check out the security of internment and P.O.W. camps throughout central and north eastern Victoria. Among the main camps visited were Myrtleford, Rushworth and Tatura.

Peter recalls some very interesting events; firstly, a proposed visit to a German P.O.W. camp had to be rescheduled because the prisoners took a holiday from work to celebrate Hitler's birthday. The same happened when the Italians followed suit and celebrated Mussolini's birthday. Another interesting occasion was the discovery of a trap door in the stage of the German entertainment and recreation building. An investigation revealed a shaft leading down to an underground dugout which housed an elaborate radio system for tuning into most countries involved in the war. Also, a special log book was found which contained details of call signs and wavelengths.

At war's end Peter Macgeorge continued in his chosen field as a journalist.

THE PRISONER OF WAR MEMORIAL AT BALLARAT

by Mal Webster

I attended the Dedication of the P.O.W. Memorial situated near Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, on 6th February 2004. It was an impressive ceremony, alongside the magnificent 130 metre-long granite memorial bearing the names of 35,675 Australians who became prisoners during the Boer War, WWI, WWII and Korean War. [No Australians were captured in Vietnam]. Tony Charlton presided over proceedings on a day bathed in warm sunshine. He introduced the speakers, the main ones being the Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffrey, Defence Force chief General Peter Cosgrove, Minister for Veterans Affairs Danna Vale who represented the Prime Minister, the Premier of Victoria, the Mayor of Ballarat and an ex-POW who had been in Changi and on the Burma Railway that claimed so many Australian lives.

General Cosgrove spoke of the privations endured by the 8th Division personnel who became prisoners of the Japanese following the fall of Singapore in 1942, particularly the Burma Railway workers, those in the infamous Sandakan Death March and the sinking by an American submarine of the Japanese ship loaded with POW's which resulted in over 400 lives lost. The overall deaths of 8th Division prisoners was in excess of 8,000 men and women.

Following the concept for the establishment of a fitting memorial to the POW's, a committee was formed in Ballarat seven years ago. That committee developed the plan that came to fruition thanks to assistance from Tattersalls (Geo. Adams Trust Fund), many government and business organizations and also numerous individuals.

It is estimated that only about 2,000 of the ex-POW's still survive today.

Among the crowd of over 6,000 attending the Dedication I only caught up with Jim Goddard (7) and the widows of Cec. Donnelly and Betty Wrigglesworth. The latter and Midge Donnelly had travelled from East Gippsland.

It was a moving ceremony that brought back many emotional memories,



Members marching in Melbourne—Anzac Day 2003

THE SENTRY'S LOG

Many kind letters were received by our new president with best wishes, to him and to our members. Ron thanks all the writers for their good wishes and for their news. **Gwen Connor**, widow of **Gordon** (7) is cheerily battling on, after overcoming a bad experience of a "break-in" by a crazy drug addict, who fortunately was picked up by the police. Gwen says that **George Howat** (8) has been in touch with her. He hasn't been getting around much because of medical problems.

NSW members **Howard Vipond**, **Lin Davis**, **Alex Barnett** and **Terry Gleeson** noticed in "Reveille" the RSL journal in NSW a letter from one Bruce R. Stone, probably meant to be in light-hearted vein, purporting to be some of his experiences with 2/3 Light A.A. The story was in fact disparaging, so responses were sent independently by **Terry Gleeson** and our President. Mr. Stone sent in an apology. He had been referring to his experiences as a reinforcement with some other battery which had no connection with our Regiment.

We were pleased that Reveille published our views of the original incorrect story, under the heading "Get your Facts Right!"

Jean Tom, widow of **Bill** (8) was at the funeral of **Frank Washbourne** (8), so our representatives there were able to have a few words with Jean. Members will remember a report on her activities in "Take Post" 2000. Jean has been involved with Country Women's Association and numerous other organizations and causes for most of her life — a great lady who has never stopped working and giving her time for others.

Alan Jeffrey of 2/2 Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment kindly donated to our Committee a copy of the book "On Target" which has long been sold out. Good use was made of the book to replace one donated by John Hepworth's daughter to the National Library, Canberra. (Incidentally, if any family has a copy of "On Target" which is no longer required, perhaps it could be returned to the Secretary as we occasionally receive enquiries for a copy from members' descendants).

Tom Dawson (8) attained the age of 95 years in 2003, in good shape mentally and physically. Congrats were sent on behalf of members. (If you know of others reaching 90 or 95 years, let the President or Secretary know, and formal congratulations will be sent.)

During the last year or so, **Mrs Enid Hayes** has been writing to us to ask whether we are able to locate **George A. Miller** and **L.A. Miller** of 8 Battery. Mrs Hayes knew them when they were serving in Western Australia and would like to contact them. If anyone can assist, will you please let the President know.

Harry Goodwin who joined 9 Battery as a "Don R" and later became a cook with **Arthur Hampson** is in his 97th year. After many years' absence he attended the last two reunions with the assistance of **Harry Sauerberg**. Harry Goodwin is in reasonably good health,

AND THERE'S MORE! THE SENTRY'S LOG CONTINUES —

Education Age of 24/11/03 gave an account of an interview with Ron Barassi, former AFL footballer, coach, TV personality and a great supporter of Melbourne Legacy.

Ron's dad, (Ron the 1st) who was a Melbourne premiership footballer, was killed at Tobruk. Ron's devoted mother didn't have an easy time as breadwinner. Ron was keen on many sports and games, especially football. When at senior Tech. level, he was giving too much time to sport to the extent that he failed some exams. A teacher named **Dick Telford** gave him a timely lecture reminding him that 'his mother was working at two jobs to keep him at school'. Although Ron was playing with Melbourne thirds, he worked hard after that and passed his exams.

[Dick Telford was an 8th Battery Sergeant who died in 1999. "Take Post" of April 2000 reported on Dick's career as a science/maths teacher in the technical school system. That report mentioned that 'Dick's tireless efforts and his inspiration lives on in many who were touched by one of the State's great educational leaders.']

Another anecdote about Ron — As a junior nurse, **Les Harris'** (8) wife **Win** was working at the hospital where Ron Barassi was born. It was part of Win's duties to take the new-born Ron from the nursery to his mother to be fed.

Ron Bryant paid his respects to **Mrs. Constance Little** of Eagle Point, widow of **Charles Little** (8), and correspondent of the *Age* and "Take Post". Constance still fires a few shots at or through the newspapers. She sends her best wishes to all, especially to those who knew Charles.

Incidentally, **Col McNaughton** (8) has left his idyllic home across the water from Metung, and now resides at the same hostel at Eagle Point as does Constance. Col was in the picture at left but the light didn't pick him up.

Mrs Marj Cope wrote to say that **Ern** (8) was not well enough to attend last year's reunion although he is still working his farm. They had been visited by **Stan Rowan** (8) and his wife **Florrie** who had celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary and who both do well on their farm.

Blue Page (8) and **Frank Hands** (8) have both had knee reconstructions or repairs. Blue has had his done so often that his surgeons are quite intimate with his knee. Frank is going well enough now. Sadly Frank's wife Shirley passed on last year after battling years of illness with fighting spirit. Frank's close family has been of great assistance to him.

It was a long wait! — The waiting room was full of the afflicted. Directly opposite I caught the eye of the fellow with the stick. He looked faintly familiar. There was something about him. I wondered whether I had met him before.

"Hello Ian" he said quietly. I moved over, searching back through the years and gradually it came - Crete and the German invasion!

"Don't tell me", I said, "it starts with an R-, Rex, Ron, Roy — Roy West?"

"Nearly got it — Roy East!"

Back we went, We'd been on the same Bofors gun waiting for the parachutists to drop. And now after 62 years we met again.

"Well, well, you haven't changed a bit" we lied.

Did you know **NX 30633 Sig. R. W. McDonald?**

David McDonald has been documenting his father's movements throughout his war service. His father was in the Section attached to our Regiment in June 1941 in the Western desert. If any of our readers knew him, David would like to hear from you. David's address is P.O. Box 1355, Woden, ACT. 2606.

Ralph Hawkey (8), now 86 years of age, has kept in touch with us over the years. Ralph eventually had to give up farming and, four years ago, moved into Ottrey Lodge, Cobram, where he has lovely landscaped gardens in which to relax. His wife Phyl has been seriously ill and resides in Irwin House, also in Cobram. Ralph was pleased to read in *Mufti* of our return to Werribee racecourse which brought back many memories to him. He sends his regards to 8 Battery — F Troop men in particular. Ralph has always carried the scar and the effect of his gunshot wound received during the retreat from Benghazi which caused his repatriation. Nevertheless, he kept the farm going until late in life.



Constance Little with Ron Bryant

Attention 9 Battery! Mrs Nancy Fatcher, widow of Charlie, is applying for a War Widow's pension. Charlie apparently was a boxer and was knocked out on occasion in boxing bouts while in our Regiment. As Charles died of head problems it may prove helpful if the RSL advocate could get a letter from someone who knew him and who is able to state that he was a boxer.

Wally Webb remembers Charlie sparring around the tent lines.

If anyone can be more specific about his boxing, please write to:

Mrs Nancy Fatcher, 40 River Road,
Sussex Inlet, NSW, 2540

Our Regiment had many memorable characters who did not get any special commendation.

COMRADES IN SPIRIT

For example, an outstanding member was Lieutenant Jim Mann who drowned after the sinking of HMS *Hereward* off the coast of Crete, while gallantly helping other men in the sea. Brief accounts of his efforts appeared in "On Target" and "Take Post". No doubt he should have been awarded some honour posthumously.

I'm sure that some of our readers could recall stories of other brave, interesting or humorous characters – please let us have them.

I often remember **Dick Ince** of 8 Battery. Dick was a slight, mild mannered, gentle type, older than average, with a strong religious background. He was firstly obvious because of his unfailing habit when retiring for the night to kneel on his blankets in prayer. Raucous noise in army huts or tents would not deter him. The fellows would quieten down in respect when they noticed him at prayer.

At Tobruk, he was an ammunition number on the Breda gun. With enemy aircraft approaching, his trays of 20 mm. shells were laid out carefully around the gun pit on old cloth to keep them free of dust. In action, Dick would follow the traversing gun, inserting the trays of ammunition, completely disregarding the noise of planes bombing or machine-gunning – never looking up at the action – so that he could concentrate on the job. If there was excess tiredness, sickness or drop in morale with any gunner, he would stimulate them with his helpful manner, guidance and faith.

With crowbar—tank attack!

An infantryman had told Dick that one way to stop a tank was to lever off the track with a crowbar. Dick had found a crowbar which he retained as part of his equipment. Just after the Retreat from Benghazi, while our gun crew was temporarily lost, some tanks were skirmishing in the next wadi, with several stray shells exploding around our gun. To our surprise, as we had not even been close to a tank before, three tanks lumbered towards us. Dick approached the leading tank with his crowbar *at the trail*. The lid of the tank's cabin popped up. The tank commander shouted: "It's quite alright old chap, we're British!"

Some weeks later, Dick, with our Scottish driver, was laying low in a small dugout adjoining the gun pit during intense enemy artillery shellfire. A heavy shell hit the edge of their dugout, partly burying them. The shell had been fired from a few thousand yards. Had it come a few more inches, Dick and Jock would have been blown to pieces. Dick called for assistance and they were pulled out bloody, bruised and dusty. Another gunner got hold of the truck and drove them through continued heavy shellfire, although Dick had not wanted to leave the gun.

It was one of those quirky army events that resulted in the driver being Mentioned in Despatches for evacuating the wounded under heavy shellfire — *quirky* because the driver later unashamedly said that all he wanted to do was to get out of the area subjected to the shellfire!

Dick returned to his gun crew and was a constant morale booster throughout the Siege. Under the most severe shellfire, he would be quite serene, laying back in silent prayer. Because of the khamsins or severe dust storms, Dick acquired an army issue condom in which he kept his watch free of dust. On the rare occasions when someone would visit the gun site, a gunner would ask Dick the time, whereupon Dick would pull from his shirt pocket and dangle his condom-wrapped watch to the surprise of the visitor

Phil Roberts, only 19 years of age, commanded our gun crew. Phil, after the war, eventually became a British Army Major, serving with, amongst other units, as a troop commander in the famous Royal Horse Artillery who were with us in Tobruk. Phil left the British Army for the Church, in time becoming Canon of Salisbury Cathedral. Phil has mentioned that he was partly influenced by Dick Ince to go for the Church.

After the war, Dick returned to Ballarat and married Jean, a Girl Guide Commissioner. After a rather short but very happy married life, Dick died, and sadly Jean also passed away a few years later. An old saying is — *the good die young*.

The Sentry

Postscript

After the foregoing memoir had been written, **Ron Bryant** wrote to **Phil Roberts** who is still a Canon of the church at Salisbury. Ron had mentioned Dick Ince's name to Phil, who replied with this letter:

Dear Ron,

What a delight to get your letter this morning; I hasten to reply. Dick Ince is someone who has always been in my mind. It is difficult to say how he influenced me towards the Church; but he was certainly one of a number of people who did. I can remember in Tobruk that we would read favourite verses of the Bible to each other and discuss them; but I am sure that it wasn't so much what Dick said but the kind of person he was that influenced me.

I remember once when we were being badly shelled and Dick and I and the rest of the crew retired to dugouts as there was no air activity and it was better for us to sit it out. Dick suddenly asked me if I was scared. I told him that usually I was too busy for fright; but just sitting here with shells being aimed at us, then yes, of course I was; and we developed our discussion to agreeing that fear was not something to be ashamed of; it was overcoming fear and getting on with the job that mattered.

Then Dick said something which left its mark on me. He told me that he felt no fear at all and explained that his belief was that in life or in death God was there; and Him being with us, there was nothing at all to fear. I used to talk to him about my parish priest, Charles Murray, who became a Bishop and was killed in an air crash during or soon after our time in Tobruk.

Much later on, on the night before I was ordained priest I spent most of the night as a vigil; and I gave thanks for all the people who had influenced me for good. Dick was one of them; so it would be true to say that he was one of those who eased me into the Church. I shall light a candle for him when I go into the Cathedral for Evensong tonight – and one for you and Doreen.

I am doing fine and enjoying life. I am what my sons describe as a BLOM (bloody lucky old man)! We have given up overseas travel except for a trip to France, planned for March; but that's not as far as from Melbourne to Sydney!

We must keep in touch,

Phil

GUNNERS RETURN TO WERRIBEE

On 24 September, 2003 at the invitation of the Chairman and Committee of the Werribee Racing Club, 30 WWII surviving gunners were transported to the Werribee Racecourse to unveil a memorial commemorating the men of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-aircraft Regiment.

In August 1940, the Regiment was formed and commenced training at the racecourse. The 900 men who marched in were volunteers from recently recruited civilians who, with the exception of some militia men, were beginners as soldiers. They were housed under the grandstand and in horse stalls, sleeping on palliasses.

The memorial, covered by the Australian flag and the Regiment's banner has a plaque with a brief history of the Regiment. These were unveiled by Alan Harvey, Chairman of the club and the Regiment Association's President Ron Bryant. The splendid bronze plaque was donated by Mr Rick Wolany of Wolany Toyota.

In his address to the assembly Ron Bryant mentioned how the troops became fit with long route marches around what was surrounding country at that time, 63 years ago. He went on to say:

"Inoculations against smallpox, typhoid and tetanus were inflicted on us for our own good. With our close living under the grandstand and in horse stalls, we shared our influenza virus with each other during the cold months.

"There had been little equipment for training, and certainly nothing resembling an anti-aircraft gun for

use against our intended foes — the German airmen with their dive bombers which had been used so devastatingly in Europe. By the time we left here in December 1940 to embark on the magnificent troopship 'Mauretania' for the Middle East, the men were fit, disciplined, but untested soldiers, eager to go overseas to help Great Britain.

"Within one year the men had become experienced soldiers who had been in vicious battles at Tobruk during the Siege, or on the island of Crete fighting airborne troops or in the Western Desert and Syria.

"The plaque records that 88 enemy aircraft were destroyed and another 200 aircraft were damaged. The cost had been high, as 73 gunners were killed and 137 became prisoners of war. Most of the remaining men with our reinforcements spent four years or so manning their guns in the Middle East, Pacific Islands and in Australia."

After a Memorial service at which wreaths were laid in memory of fallen comrades, the gunners, partners, committee and guests were led by Pipers to the Committee Room where they were dined and wine in much better style than they ever had in camp there!

Bob Westwood welcomed the diners on behalf of the Committee and John Campbell responded by reminiscing in light vein.

At the conclusion of the day, the Melbourne guests were returned to the city in comfortable buses supplied by the RSL and the community. The old gunners were

very grateful to Graeme Heddle (whose father Charles had been a member of the Regiment, as were two uncles also) and to Geoffrey Smith and Bob Westwood for initiating and planning the day of memories.

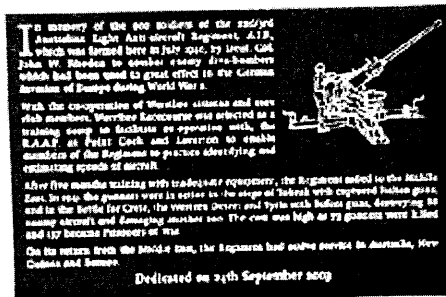
The guests were honoured by the wonderful hospitality of the Werribee RSL and the Werribee Racing Club and also by the efforts of many Werribee residents who contributed

their talents.

Late News Flash!

It had been a normal raceday which included our ceremony and the hospitality extended to the 2/3rd guests. Races included the *Benghazi Retreat Maiden Hurdle* and the *2/3rd Light Anti-aircraft Regiment Maiden Plate*. So the guests were able to 'have a fling' on the horses.

Just as the guests were entering the buses for their return trip to Melbourne, there was a dramatic fall in the seventh race. Five horses and jockeys including Darren Gauci crashed and brought a premature end to the meeting. Jockey Duric broke an arm, Gauci bruised his collarbone, and three other jockeys suffered bruises. We were relieved that there were no very serious injuries with the jockeys or horses.



The 2/3 LAA Plaque at Werribee

TOBRUK — IN THE RATS' FOOTSTEPS

In 1993 "Take Post" Lin Davis (8) wrote an interesting account of his journey back to Tobruk and in *Tobruk House News* of February 2003, Garth Pratten, a former Australian War Memorial historian wrote of his visit to North Africa. Garth's grandfather had served in Tobruk. *The following extracts from his observations on Tobruk complement the earlier story by Lin Davis:*

Isolation, a benign climate and local neglect have all contributed to preserving the battlefield around Tobruk in much the same state as when it was abandoned in 1942. It is littered with rusty metal in various forms, from jerry cans to barbed wire, even unexploded shells.

The 48-kilometre semi-circle of concrete posts — the Red Line — built by the Italians and then occupied by the Australians as their first line of defence, still hems in the town. Scars of war remain visible on many of these posts, and climbing down into them provided a tangible sense of the claustrophobic origins of the Australians' famous nickname. I was surprised to find less permanent structures, such as stone shelters built where the ground was too hard to dig, still dotting the desert. The original tracks, followed by the drivers taking supplies to the perimeter, are still marked by long rows of rocks.

In terrain still strewn with landmines, these tracks provide a modicum of security to the intrepid battlefield explorer. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Tobruk battlefield is Ras el Medauar, known to Australians in 1941 as Hill 209. From a distance, it is barely discernible as a long, low hump on the horizon.

Stand on Ras el Medauar, though, and one can look over much of the Tobruk perimeter. The tactical value of the hill has been readily appreciated by the many armies that have passed through the area. The Turkish fort stands atop it, and there are indications this may have been built on Roman foundations.

The Italians grasped its significance and incorporated it into their defences. Seeking to exploit the commanding position of Ras El Medauar, the Germans seized it and a large chunk of the Australian perimeter during their second attack on the Tobruk fortress between 30 April-2 May.

Determined Australian action stopped the attack but the resulting salient — dominated by enemy positions on Ras El Medauar — became the most dangerous area within Tobruk perimeter. Perched atop the ruined fort, surveying the flat desert before me, I could see that to move above ground anywhere in this sector during daylight hours was deadly.

The Tobruk war cemetery is immaculately kept by a local gardener employed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. There are 559 Australians buried here, including Corporal John Edmondson, the first Australian awarded the Victoria Cross in the Second World War. It is a lonely place. Few Australians pass this way and the neat rows of graves stand behind a locked and bolted gate.

I had to climb the wall to get in. Pausing to read an epitaph on one of the graves — *He lies in a strange land but lives in our heart forever* — I hoped that someday more young Australians will divert from the well-worn backpacker trails to tread softly among these graves.

Garth Pratten

EL ALAMEIN COMMEMORATION SERVICE

As Manfred Rommel (son of the General) was unable to attend the Service at El Alamein on 20 October 2002 his speech was read out on his behalf. This is what he wrote:

"Unfortunately, the state of my health doesn't permit me to travel to Egypt. Otherwise I really would have attended the 60th Anniversary commemoration of the El Alamein Battle to show my respect towards Field Marshal Montgomery and his soldiers as well as towards the soldiers from Italy and Germany who fought in the battle 60 years ago. I would have acted as my father would have wished.

"Many soldiers were killed in action there. The graveyards near El Alamein are memorials to remember those killed in the battle that became a decisive change in World War II. It was the defeat of the Italians and the Germans. Whatever might have been prevalent in the minds of the people at that time, today no one can fail to perceive that it was necessary that Hitler and his Third Reich should be destroyed; if Hitler had won, this would have aggravated the immense suffering mankind had to bear.

Voicing this sentiment on this particular occasion does not mean to disparage the Italian and German soldiers killed in action. On the contrary.

There is a wide chasm between soldiers risking their lives and a dictatorship abusing the soldiers' action by applying it to purposes the soldiers would not have accepted unless they had been deceived and misled by propaganda.

We Germans have a reason for thanking our Italian comrades. But we have a reason, too, for thanking those who were our opponents from Britain, America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Poland, Greece and France. Reason for thanking them for their willingness to reconciliation. Thanking them for the friendship that has connected us for six decades. We also say thank you to the governments of these nations. They have restored in us the belief in democracy, and the belief that peace is necessary and is possible among all nations.

Manfred Rommel