



Take Post

April 2014

Newsletter of the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Assoc'n

Campo PG57 - Gruppignano—a daughter's story

Editor's Note: As part of an Italian holiday in 2013, Kaye Huggins (daughter of Cec Donelly, VX46836, 7 Battery) visited the area where her father had been a POW in Campo 57 located at Gruppignano. Kaye kindly agreed to write about her visit and to provide photos of the former camp as it is today.

Whilst this article is primarily Kaye's story, I thought it would be appropriate to add to her personal story by providing a broader history of the Italian POW camps and escapees. The broader history has been primarily derived from the substantial work undertaken by Bill Rudd (VX39694, 2/7 Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers), in conjunction with the Central Army Records Office (CARO), and which may be browsed on www.anzacpow.com, and from Malcolm Webster's self published book "An Italian Experience".

Kaye's Story

A holiday in Italy was planned and I especially wanted to visit the area Campo 57 was in where my father had been a POW, as were many of the 2/3rd members who were evacuated from Crete.

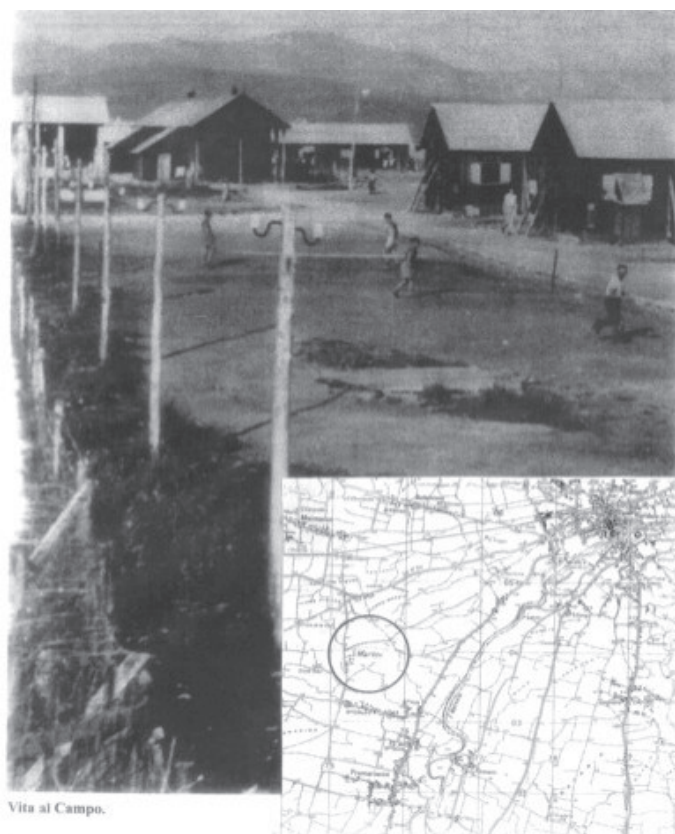
Gruppignano, where the camp was known to be, no longer existed as far as the Internet was concerned, or it was so small that it doesn't rate a mention.

My search led me to an excerpt from a book, which stated the nearest town was Premariacco. With the help of an Italian friend I wrote to the Mayor of the town asking for any information on the campsite.

Fortunately he had passed on the letter to a young woman, Romina, who spoke English and who had information on the camp - in fact, her parents lived in a house that had once been one of the guard houses at the camp site.

She emailed me information, including a map, of how to get there. She also gave me details of a travel agent who has information on visiting the camp.

Unfortunately, her responses to my specific enquiries were almost non-existent.



Campo PG57 Gruppignano as it was during WW2

The camp is situated between Premariacco and Udine. We took a train from Rome to Udine, which is a large town, and then a taxi to the camp site.

(continued on page 8)

2nd / 3rd Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group, comprised of direct descendants of original members, was formally established in 2008 and today numbers over 100 members.

If you are the son or daughter of an original member and/or have children who would like to participate in the activities of the Remembrance Group, please contact Colin Bragg, Honorary Secretary on 03 9592 1642 or 0419 887 820 or send us a message through the "Contact Us" section of the Association's web site.

It is not an onerous role and currently costs only \$20.00 per year to participate. Your support is important if the men and the deeds of the 2nd/3rd are to continue to be remembered and promoted into the future.



We Will Remember Them

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

VALE

TJ (Thomas) McGill	NX145530	9
RD (Bob) Phillips OBE	VX44404	8
CJE (Cec) Rae	VX48132	9
RV (Ray) Everlyn	VX37472	9
WS ("Blue") Page	VX29847	8
WJ (Bill) Garrigan	VX32518	7

BATTERY

They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun,
And in the morning,
We will remember them.

Lest we forget!

2nd /3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association

Take Post is published by the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association for the benefit of members and friends of the Association.

The 2nd / 3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was raised in Melbourne in 1940 and served with distinction in World War II, with Battle Honours from Crete, Tobruk, the Western Desert, Syria, Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Lae, Buna and Borneo. The Regiment experienced a high number of battle casualties through deaths, wounded and prisoners of war.

Formed in 1945, the Regiment Association has been active in commemorating and celebrating the history of the 2nd / 3rd ever since.

In 2008, the Association's Constitution was amended to allow descendants of the original 1,935 members of the Regiment to become members of the Association and to provide for the future carriage of the Association.

The 2nd / 3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association is an Unincorporated Association managed by a voluntary Committee of Management.

Web Site

www.anti aircraft.org.au

Office Bearers 2013/14

President

Lynton Rose
1 / 5 Cloris Avenue
Beaumaris VIC 3193

Telephone: 03 9599 2264
Email:
rhondalynton@optusnet.com.au

Honorary Secretary

Colin Bragg
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street
Brighton VIC 3186
Telephone: 03 9592 1642
Email: abr18751@bigpond.net.au

Vice President

Matthew Heddle

Honorary Treasurer

Ann Bragg
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street
Brighton VIC 3186

Committee

Graham Heddle
David McDonald
Anne Rae

Newsletter Editor

Colin Bragg

Association Research Officer

David McDonald

Keeper of the Banner

Matthew Heddle

Take Post has been printed by Bizworks and Freeman & Read Printing,
Shop 1 (Rear), 72 Church Street, Brighton, Victoria, 3186.
Telephone 03 9592 9093

PRESIDENTS REPORT- 2014 AGM



Because of our involvement with the 2/3rd our focus tends to be exclusively on WW2 and the proud role played by the Regiment in that conflict. However this year being the 100th anniversary of the commencement of WW1, I thought it appropriate to reflect on the impact that the ironically named 'Great War' had on our nation.

This was prompted by a recent stopover in the NSW town of Gundagai. Like most country towns Gundagai has a war memorial – travellers see these memorials but rarely stop to take in their significance. In Gundagai the main war memorial is Anzac Grove near the Murrumbidgee River. The memorial sits at the centre of a grove of 52 Kurrajong trees representing the 52 Gundagai soldiers killed in WW1. Total Australian casualties were close to 60,000 – a number so great that it is hard to comprehend, but often in life it is the little things that have the greatest impact. In this case 52 young men were killed from this one small town with a population at that time of less than 2,000 people.

Back in Melbourne I was motivated by this experience to look closely at another WW1 memorial which has been a familiar landmark since my childhood and one which I either drive or ride past nearly every day. It is the imposing war memorial overlooking the bay at Brighton Beach. Until now I had never properly examined the rows of names on the memorial. I was staggered to count the names of 614 soldiers from Bayside – (Brighton to Beaumaris) who were killed in WW1. This at a time when Melbourne's total population was just 670,000 and Australia's was less than 5 million. With memorials such as these replicated all over the country we can better understand the devastating impact the loss of so many young lives was to such a young nation. At about 65% the Australian casualty rate was among

the biggest of the war.

The 'Great War' was supposed to be the 'war to end all wars' – just 21 years later the world was plunged into WW2.

In this edition of Take Post under the heading 'A time to reflect' Secretary Colin Bragg raises some pertinent issues for the Association to consider. Questions posed relate mainly to the future makeup of the Association, in particular whether there will be sufficient interest and involvement from the membership to take up positions on the committee and/or as office bearers.

The current administration assumed responsibility for the running of the Association in 2008. Much has been achieved and the objectives articulated by the 'old guard' at the handover have been met. In fact I believe this administration has exceeded expectations. But in that time there has been no change to the committee or office bearers. The strength of any organization is its ability and willingness to regularly regenerate with new talent and new ideas. With that thought as a guiding principle I informed the committee at our recent meeting of my decision to stand down from the Presidency.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have served the Association over these past six years. Having been the first non service member to hold the office of President of the Association and being the first descendant to follow their father in that role are significant honours. I am both very proud of and humbled by the honour. However, having overseen the successful transition from the previous administration and with the Association in a good position, it's time for new leadership to take the organization to the next stage of its development.

This should not be seen as a daunting task as most of the 'heavy lifting' has been done. In the same way that the 'old guard' appealed for descendants to take over the running of the Association, the current administration would like to see some fresh faces to help take the Association forward, building on the solid foundation already in place.

In my 2012 President's report I highlighted how other WW2 associations without a succession plan were being forced to cease operations. Our Association is in a stronger position than many others with

initiatives such as the highly successful website and a significant descendants group aka 'the Remembrance Group'. However, we need a succession plan of our own. We need members willing to continue the important work so vital to the future of the Association. I am confident that we have enough members within our ranks who will 'answer the call'.

My sincere thanks go to each member of the committee for their continued dedication and willingness to work for the good of the Association over the past six years. Ann Bragg, Anne Rae, Graeme and Matthew Heddle, Colin Bragg and David McDonald. Much has been achieved in that time and that should be a source of great pride for all involved.

But this has only been possible due to the tremendous drive and professionalism of Honorary Secretary Colin Bragg. He has been the real engine room of the Association and deserves enormous credit for the countless hours and commitment he has given to the task.

Research Officer, David McDonald, has ably complemented and supported Colin. David is an invaluable authority on all things military, and the 2/3rd history in particular. His extensive knowledge and wise counsel have made him a vital member of the committee and the Association more broadly.

Sadly we lose more of our 2/3rd service members each year and in 2013 we lost Cec Rae – a man who made an enormous contribution to the Association over such a long period and who embodied all the fine qualities for which the Regiment stood.

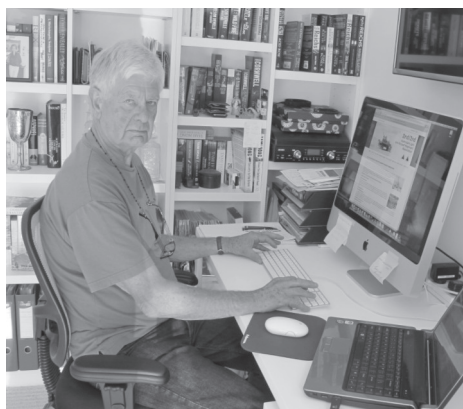
Cec was a man of the highest integrity and strength of character capped off with an irreverent sense of humour.

This edition of Take Post includes a fitting tribute to Cec Rae, a snapshot of his life and his decades long work for the Association.

He will always be remembered whenever the story of the 2/3rd is told.

Ironically, I concluded my report last year with the recollection that during a morning tea with Cec, he had described the 2/3rd as a 'brotherhood'. Well Cec, there are few who have served that brotherhood as well as you.

From the Secretary's Desk



A Time To Reflect

The Annual General Meeting of the Association held in April 2008 was a significant day in the history of the Association.

The meeting approved amendments to the Constitution allowing descendants of the original service members of the Regiment to become full members of the Association.

This decision allowed the election of a brand new Committee at the 2008 AGM, comprised (with the exception of long serving Treasurer John Hepworth) of direct descendants of original service members.

When John Hepworth retired in 2009, the Committee became comprised entirely of descendants of original service members.

Since the early days of the Association, and in fact well into the 1990's, it was not unusual for Committee members and Office Bearers to serve for twenty to thirty years.

Of course, over the period of those fifty years, there were many more original service members who made the annual pilgrimage to attend the AGM and to attend the Annual Reunion.

Over the past six years, and with a great deal of support from the former Committee and from many members of the Association, we have been able to deliver some sig-

nificant achievements.

However, time continues to march on, and over the next year or so, the Committee and the Association needs to address some fundamental issues. Such as:

What will be the role of the Association after the last of the original service members (currently numbering 27) has passed on?

Will there be sufficient interest from descendants in continuing to attend an AGM and Annual Reunion?

Should we putting a Committee "succession" plan in place now?

What is the level of interest from members in assuming a Committee role?

Who will take on the responsibility of maintaining and updating the web site?

Who will assume the responsibility for responding to queries received through our web site?

These questions are posed for the purpose of generating discussion, soliciting suggestions, establishing criteria and/or guidelines and of providing direction for the current Committee.

Thoughts would be appreciated.

The Year In Review

As has been the case in recent years, most of the enquiries or notifications I receive arrive electronically through our web site or direct to my email address.

Occasionally, I receive a letter in the mail and invariably they advise of the passing of another original service member. I learnt of the passing of **Tom "Mac" McGill (9)**, **Bob Phillips (9)**, and **"Blue" Page (8)** by letter and of the passing of **Cec Rae (9)**, **Ray Everlyn (9)** and **Bill Garrigan (7)** by telephone.

These are sad and inevitable events but we should be grateful that these men were able to return home and lead long lives.

Association Research Officer David McDonald copied me with an email he had received from Mary Jordan regarding the Berkshire Valley HQ Sign.

"Dear David

Recently I came across a letter you had written to my mother in law, Robin Hamilton about the state of the Regiment's sign that your father had been in at the Berkshire Valley entrance and other information of interest to her, along with a request for her to find someone to fix it up. Robin had given her son (my husband) Fred the papers to read and that is how I got to learn of your request.

Today I have painted the sign in time for Anzac Day this coming week and made it more respectable as you had asked her to have it done, she is far too old to be able to organize those things and finding handy men in the country is pretty much impossible.... so we have a handy woman on the farm instead.....me.

I hope you like the attached photo, I ought to have done a before and after! The museum will be open this weekend at Berkshire so hopefully we will have a few people coming out for a look at it and they notice the sign.

*Kindest Regards
Mary Jordan*

Donations

Once again the Association has been the recipient of donations, which help us to continue to do what we do. In particular, I would like to acknowledge donations received from Foster Crooke, Rosemary Weatherly, Alan "Bushy" Read

.....and the Sentry's Log

Esme Curtis and Dot Harris, but I would also like to thank all members who have made a contribution throughout the year.

Web Site

The web site is very much in maintenance mode now, although we have added a Donations section and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to the site.

We have also added captions to the scrolling photos at the top of the web site.

Because of the interest in POW escapees during the year, we have added a list of all 2nd/3rd members who escaped to Switzerland from Italian POW camps (see under Regiment History).

Membership

Our descendants membership is holding steady, but sadly, only 27 of the original service members survive at the date of this newsletter – which takes me back neatly to the questions raised at the beginning of my report.

SENTRY'S LOG

During the year **Dave Humphreys (7)** and **Alan "Bushy" Read (9)** provided material for our records and/or for inclusion in future issues of "Take Post".

"Bushy" spoke of his pride in his granddaughter when she gave a speech at her school about the Nursing Service and Sister Bullwin-kle.

Dave provided additional information about his gun crew on Crete, and advised he had caught up with Dot Harris (daughter of **Les Harris (7)**), now that Dot is a Bendigo girl.

I received a phone call from former Secretary **John Campbell (8)** in February, who was putting his new telephone and hearing aids through

their "sea trials" – clear as a bell John – enjoy your holiday in Queensland later in the year.

On my behalf, David McDonald responded to an enquiry from Michael Williams regarding his grandfather, William Ernest Mason (7).

"Hello Michael, thank you for your enquiry via our Association's web-site..

The Regiment's War Diaries are held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. There is only one copy of each diary, the original, in existence. Information on the war diaries generally is online at <http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm52/>.

Unfortunately the Regiment's war diaries have not been digitised. We - the Committee of the Regiment Association - have approached the War Memorial requesting them to digitise the diaries, and have offered to pay for this work, but they have declined. Apparently they have a policy of digitising certain diaries ahead of others, probably reflecting patterns of demand for access to those resources.

The Regiment's war diaries held at the War Memorial are reasonably complete - some gaps exist though. They are available for the public to inspect at the War Memorial's Research Centre. So far as I know, that can only be done in person so you would need to visit Canberra to peruse them."

In May I was contacted by Marco Sogetto, an Italian researcher, researching Allied POW's who escaped into Switzerland through Aosta Valley near the Monte Rosa Massif.

In particular, Marco was seeking information regarding three 2nd/3rd ALAA Regiment members – Thomas Russell, Ernest Preiser and Bill Waller, all of whom had been captured on Crete.

Marco was aware the Regiment history had been chronicled in "On Target", and in his email, he stated *"I am trying to find a copy but it's a rare and very expensive title"*

You can imagine Marco's delight when I advised him that "On Target" was on our web site and could be downloaded at no cost.

I had several telephone conversations and emails with Glen and Corinne Duggan regarding Australian POWs who escaped into Switzerland, including the three that Marco had enquired about earlier in the year. Glen is the grand nephew of Tom Russell.

Numerous enquiries asking why a father / grandfather was not on our Regimental Rolls, when their Service Certificates indicated they were Regiment members, led to a FAQ section being added to the web site.

Leonie Hannam emailed: *Hi, I'm thrilled to have discovered this website on Anzac Day last week. I'm one of two grand-daughters of Ernest Edward Cassidy, listed on your web-site. I've not been aware of this Association previously as my grandfather died when my mother was young, and my grandmother would never speak much about him or "the war", hence I've never known much about him. This site is giving me some new information about him and the men he served with. I'd love to know more about joining the Association.*

Clint Mighell, in enquiring about his grandfather (Frederick Miller) concluded by stating:

PS ...it's a great website! A big well done preserving the memory of our soldiers.

As always, my thanks go to the members of the Association for your continuing support and your encouragement—it makes it all worthwhile.

Colin Bragg

Tenth Anniversary Service Of The Ex-Prisoners Of War Memorial At Ballarat



Guest speaker at the 10th anniversary service was Dr Rosalind Hearder PhD. A heavily edited extract of her speech is included below. The full version of Dr .Hearder's speech may be viewed on our web site.

"I would like to start with a story. One day many years ago, I was interviewing a former Australian prisoner of the Japanese in the Second World War, for my PhD research. After several hours of talking about his POW experience, I asked him what he thought about a young person like me wanting to write about this topic. He leaned towards me and said very gently, 'Girly, you'll never get it right!'

It is very appropriate that this Memorial is here, because as I've heard before, 'All roads lead to Ballarat'.

Many Australians can trace a connection to a POW, including me – my great-uncle John Wischer was a prisoner of the Germans during the First World War.

I love this memorial because it commemorates every Australian who was a prisoner. It honours those who died as prisoners, often in terrible and desperate cir-



Editor's Note: In late January 2014, I received an email from Peter Brimacombe, son of Harold Brimacombe (7 Battery) and a POW, offering to lay a wreath on behalf of the Association on the occasion of the tenth anniversary service of the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat.

Peter advised: "My father Harold was a member of the 2/3 LAA and while on Crete was spotted by Jack Hipworth and immediately seconded as his driver.

The Hipworth & Brimacombe families were close and lived on only 4 doors apart on Victoria Street Kerang. Jack was well aware that Harold had fudged his age and should not have even been there. Harold & Jack didn't see each other again until post war and would celebrate the Crete evacuation on 28th May for many years to follow. Long nights they were.

I much later learned that Jack Hipworth had brought the Unit Banner home which he later entrusted to Harold. I gave it to Cec Rae a couple of years after Harold had passed on and was provided with the honour of

marching with it on the following Anzac Day here in Melbourne."

I accepted Peter's kind offer to lay a wreath on behalf of the members of the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment who were taken prisoner during WW2.

Peter presented the Banner to the Association in 1995, and it is now in the safe keeping of Graeme and Matthew Heddle.

The POW Memorial, situated near Lake Wendouree in Ballarat was dedicated on 6 February 2004.

The granite memorial is 130 metres long and bears the names of the 35,675 Australians who were captured and became prisoners of war during the Boer War, WW1, WW2, and Korean War.

The names of 134 members of the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment are included on the Memorial Wall.

Among others at the dedication in 2004, speakers included the then Governor-General, Major-General Michael Jeffrey, and the recently announced Governor-General, General Peter Cosgrove.

cumstances. But it also recognises that for the thousands of survivors, their memories and the legacies of captivity did not stop when their wars 'officially' ended. In many ways, the decades that followed were just as hard for survivors as they tried to readjust to a normal life and society – one that rarely understood what they'd endured. This is what I want to reflect on today.

A 1984 study of 2000 Australian ex-prisoners of the Japanese (conducted by a group of former POW medical officers) similarly showed the lasting damage of captivity. Fifteen per cent had permanent vision damage from the years of malnutrition, a quarter had chronic respiratory illness and skin diseases, and half had back and neck problems from forced labour and beatings while in captivity. Several still suffered from recurrent malaria and premature senility.

One Australian I interviewed spent years in a German POW camp during the Second World War, living in constant terror. Although he gave a false name to his captors, he feared every moment they would find out he was Jewish. He carried this memory of fear throughout his post war life.

One former POW doctor, reflecting on his POW experience after many decades said, 'I think the whole thing isolated me and I've been isolated ever since.' Before talking to me, he had never discussed his experiences, even with his family.

For survivors of captivity, some aspects of post war life were common across all wars. For the rest of their lives, they shared an intense appreciation of basic values. Most experienced varying forms of



Senator Michael Ronaldson, representing Prime Minister Tony Abbott, lays a wreath.

post war health problems – both physical and psychological. All grieved for friends and comrades they had lost in terrible circumstances.

Here at the 10th anniversary of the Ballarat POW Memorial's dedication, we imagine what these 36,000 men and women endured during their particular wars, and in the aftermath. We may never 'get it right', but places like this remind us to never stop trying. "

WHEN YOU GO HOME TELL THEM OF US, AND SAY FOR YOUR TOMORROW WE GAVE OUR TODAY

Dr. Rosalind Header

In 2003, Dr. Header completed her History PhD at the University of Melbourne, on the roles and experiences of Australian medical personnel in Japanese captivity during World War II. She has written two websites for the Australian War Memorial on Australians in France in 1918 and on the Korean War.

Dr. Header has published articles in the field of Australian military history, and has a particular interest in the area of Australian military medicine.



Peter Brimacombe lays a wreath on behalf of the ex-POW members of the 2nd/3rd ALAA Regiment Association.



The Ex-POW Memorial web site may be browsed at:
http://ballarat.com/pow_memorial.htm

(continued from page 1)

Romina had provided me with the name of a taxi driver who knew the campsite. The drive to the camp took about 15mins.

I was pleased to see a signpost to the camp on the main road, and then another signpost when we needed to turn onto a minor road. When we stopped at the campsite the first thing we saw was the chapel, which I had seen in photos during my Internet research.



The Chapel at Campo PG57, Gruppignano

There were two ladies standing at the chapel, which was locked.

One of the women said she could open it, and I asked her if she was Romina - and she was. She had spent the morning with a New Zealand couple, whose father had been an inmate at the camp, and she wondered why I hadn't contacted her to tell her I was coming.

Well, I had, but obviously there were communication problems. As it happened, it didn't matter, as I was at the camp and by coincidence so too was Romina who could unlock the chapel and let us see inside.

The chapel had been beautifully restored under the guidance of

Father Ambrose Loughnam and the local community.

Father Loughnam, a New Zealander, had worked on the chapel during the war. The local community still cared for the site and they do have a few visitors according to the visitor book in the chapel.

Inside the chapel was a book with photos of the camp and on the end wall hangs a cross with signatures of soldiers who also had

worked on the chapel during their time in the camp. All that stands at the camp is the chapel and a few houses outside

some of the buildings were still visible on the site.

However, as the grass was knee high there seemed little to be gained in exposing any of the remaining foundations.

For all the bad memories the camp may hold, it is situated in a really lovely farming area, lush and green with the mountains in the background.

Italian Prisoner Of War Camps

The great majority of Allied POW's who were incarcerated in Italian prison camps were captured in North Africa or in Greece / Crete. Whilst their captors were primarily German, the prisoners were handed over to the Italians for transportation to Italian POW camps.

A total of 134 members of the 2nd / 3rd became prisoners of war, with most of them also being transported to the Italian POW camps in northern Italy. Many of them were used as farm labourers, as were Italians interned in Australia.

Major Italian POW Camps housing Australians and New Zealanders

Campo PG52, Chiari, New Zealand Officers

Campo PG57, Gruppignano, Australian Other Ranks

Campo PG66, Capua

Campo PG78, Sulmona, Australian Officers

Campo PG99, Prato All'isarco

Campo PG106, Vercelli } Privates and Corporals used as

Campo PG107, Torviscaso } farm labourers.

the camp perimeter that had been occupied by the camp guards - including the house occupied by Romina's parents.

The main road that ran through the camp is still there and we were advised that the foundations of

Campo PG 57 - Gruppignano - Udine

Campo PG 57 was a specially built camp for Allied POW established in the far north province of Friuli, some 80 km northeast of



Campo PG57 camp site as it is today.

Trieste near the provincial capital Udine.

Udine itself is only a little over 100 km from Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

The site chosen was on a river plain of the Natisone, southwest of the town of Cividale and the nearest railway line.

The site allowed room for expansion of the camp facilities and its main feature was the ruined old Chapel of San Martino, sometimes known as San Mauro or Gruppignano. The old chapel was torn down and construction work on the prison facilities started in 1940.

The nearest hamlet was Premariacco, site of an old Roman settlement, which gave one of the many names for the location of the prison buildings.

Most POW arrived there by train at the railway station at Cividale de Friuli, the much larger town to the north of Premariacco.

By June 1942, PG 57 Gruppignano held some 2,000 Australian and New Zealand POW.

The fierce fighting around El Alamein resulted in many Allied POW captured by Rommel's forces, and subsequently handed over to the Italians for transportation to Italian prison camps. As a consequence, the Italian authorities brought forward

their expansion plans, and two new compounds, 3 and 4, were constructed at Gruppignano to extend the already operative compounds 1 and 2.

By the end of 1942, the four compounds housed some 4,000 Anzac POWs, a figure not much less than the total number of AIF POWs in all German camps.

Early in 1943, following the drafting of Italian "Other Ranks" held in Australian POW camps as agricultural labourers on manpower depleted Australian farms, many of the Privates and Corporals held in Gruppignano, were likewise drafted out to work on farms controlled by Campo 106 Vercelli and Campo 107 Torviscaso.

Some New Zealanders were included in the drafts for Vercelli, but very few Australians were sent with those New Zealanders drafted out to Torviscaso.

Both work camp complexes were situated in the north of Italy, Vercelli, west of Turin and near the French border and Torviscaso on the other side of Italy, near the Austrian and Yugoslavian borders. When the Italian Armistice was signed, these remote locations were to prove most advantageous to escape attempts by their inmates.

At the announcement of the Armistice between the Allies and Italy in 1943, Australian and other

POWs in the working camps simply walked out of them when the Italian guards left them to their own devices.

All told, in what was probably the biggest mass-escape in military history, some 20,000 Allied POWs were temporarily "on the loose" in Italy.

Some made it safely south to Allied Lines. Others stayed "underground" in Italy, many actively fighting on with various partisan bands.

The Germans recaptured most, but 5,139 crossed the Alps, to the sanctuary of neutral Switzerland. These included some 420 Australians, including 19 members of the 2nd/3rd Australian LAA Regiment.



Cross with signatures

Editor's Note: Howard Vippond sent me the following article "as a record of some interesting events that resulted from decisions made by Winston Churchill in 1942." Howard advised the article is based on his own recollections, the history of the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion, the biography of Lt. Col Blackburn VC, the transport of troops by SS Orcades and the operation of U.S. submarines in the China Sea during WW2.

In January 1942 the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment's Workshop Unit left Hill 95 in Palestine and travelled by train to Suez in steel carriages that were only suitable for carting cattle. The unit was to board a ship at Port Tewfik without their equipment, which was to follow in another vessel.

At Suez they were attached to the 2/7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and went aboard the troopship S.S. Orcades. All those on the ship thought they were returning to Australia to prepare to repel a possible Japanese invasion.

On the ship were 3,400 men intended to be an advance guard of the 7th Division; the officer in command was Lt Colonel Blackburn V.C.

The other units on board the Orcades were the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, less B Company, the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion and the 2/5th Field Company.

The 2/1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment went aboard without its 3.7 anti-aircraft guns, and similarly, the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion was without its Vickers Machine Guns.

The Orcades left Port Tewfik apparently bound for Australia, but after leaving the Red Sea and while in the Indian Ocean, it was ordered by Winston Churchill to sail to Tanjong Priak (Indonesia), but later he diverted it to Ooathaven, South Sumatra.

Singapore had surrendered on the 15th February 1942 and the Orcades reached Ooathaven on the night of the 17th February.

During the night a fierce storm was raging as the troops were being ferried ashore.

When they reached the wharf they found it crowded with British soldiers and airmen escaping the Japanese who had taken aerodrome J1 or J2.

All Australian troops returned to the Orcades, and the ship departed on the 18th February without taking anyone from Sumatra aboard.

On the 19th February the SS Orcades berthed at Tanjong Priok, (Batavia), Java.

Anchored in Batavia harbor were the Netherlands heavy cruisers "De Ruyter" and "Java," the "Houston" from the U.S.A and the Australian light cruiser "Perth". Not in the harbor were many other Dutch, British, American and Australian warships.

Most of these ships were sunk soon after in the Battles of the Java Sea.

While the 2/1st Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment's Workshop Units remained on board, the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, the 2/2nd Pioneers and some other units disembarked.

These units and other Allied units formed "Blackforce" to support the Dutch oppose the imminent Japanese invasion of Java.

The Japanese invaded Java on March 1st after its Navy successfully defeated the Allied Navy, which was attempting to prevent troops from landing.

Without air support "Blackforce" had no hope of defeating the superior Japanese Army and it surrendered on the 9th March.

After the Australian units left the Orcades, British and Dutch civilians embarked and the ship sailed to Ceylon {Sri Lanka}. While the ship was in Ceylon a number of A.I.F units from the Middle East embarked and the ship sailed to Adelaide.

Some of the Australian soldiers, who disembarked at Batavia on the 19th February 1942, were killed in Java, some died toiling on the Burma Railway, some perished in the China Sea and some survived as prisoners in Japan.

After their battle against the Japanese the surviving members of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and the 2/2 Pioneers were taken prisoner in Java. From there they were eventually taken to Singapore and then on to Rangoon to work on the Burma Railway,

The railway was completed in October 1943 and the fit Australians from those units together with other allied soldiers embarked on ships to be transported to Japan to work in the mines or factories.

The prisoners were put in the holds of ships loaded with cargoes of rubber and other materials, which were vital to the Japanese war effort. At that stage in

the war Japanese cargo ships travelling through the China Sea to Japan were being sunk in huge numbers by U.S. submarines.

Some of the Australian POW's boarded ships that avoided the submarines and they disembarked in Japan. Others were on ships that were sunk by American submarines.

Many of the POW's who survived the sinking perished in the following days as they clung to makeshift rafts.

On one occasion a Japanese warship actually picked up their seamen but left the POWs to their fate without food or water, covered in oil and exposed to the tropical sun. On other occasions the Allied survivors were machine gunned.

An American submarine searching for Japanese ships sighted the survivors of one of these sunken ships and took them to Saipan. From there the POWs were flown to San Francisco for medical attention and after recovering, the Australian prisoners of war returned home by sea.

Salute to the Brave and Enduring

Barbara Paton Thomas

(Daughter, JC Paton, 9 Battery, VX48145)

The debt is huge we owe these men
Who lived in filth and grime and mud
The risk of death or maim was high
Mosquitoes and dysentery were nigh

Western Desert, Middle East, New Guinea too
Destinations forever with you
Comradeship of mates surely kept you going
And back home girlfriends, wives and families all
Kept the dream alive in the face of such privation

The fight to keep your country free
Preserve the unique style of Aussie freedom
Was paramount to you
It must have seemed so trivial
After surviving and at home

To hear the simple grumbles when the road had been
so long
No wonder words were said
'To the Western Desert you should go
If you don't want to eat a bit of dirt on your tomato!'

In awe we should survey that banner of brave souls
When the marching of the heroes is as a bell that tolls
Ringing out the glory of those who gave their all
Remembering for what they fought in answering that
call

Editor's Note: Bill Stokes, son of Major Philip Stokes, OIC 8 Battery, contacted me in December 2013 regarding the transfer of one of his father's "souvenirs" to the AWM. The following correspondence explains:

3 December 2013

Dear Mr. Stokes,

On behalf of the Australian War Memorial I would like to thank you for generously offering to donate material relating to the Second World War service of VX47598 Lieutenant Colonel Phillip William Clifford Stokes, 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The Memorial's curators have assessed the Military Heraldry and Technology portion of your donation and are very pleased to accept the Italian gun sight and spirit level into the National Collection.

To finalise your donation could I ask you to complete and return the following documents:

Transfer of Ownership Agreement GR22619

This formally transfers ownership of the material listed from you to the Memorial. Please sign Copy 2 and return it to us in the Freepost envelope provided. Copy 1 should be retained for your records. NB Please note that the caption provided is only preliminary.

Once again, thank you for your contribution to the preservation of Australia's military history and for considering the Australian War Memorial as the most appropriate institution for ensuring the long term preservation of your material.

Yours sincerely
Amanda Rebbeck, Acting Curator
Military Heraldry and Technology

The Transfer of Ownership Agreement—Military Heraldry & Technology describes the item as :

Acc Number	REL47423
Object Type	Artillery
Description	Italian gun sight with built in spirit level: Brass artillery dial sight housed in a wooden box
Title	Lieutenant Colonel PWC Stokes 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The Japanese At Lae and Finschhafen

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted from the October 1997 edition of the 2/12 Field Regiment Newsletter, also called "Take Post"

"We have all read and discussed the New Guinea campaign from our own point of view; you may find it interesting from a Japanese viewpoint. The following is taken from "The Southern Cross" written by Yoshihara Tsutomu, chief of staff of the Japanese 18th Army, and translated by Doris Heath"

Chapter XI:

The Enemy's Landing at the Mouth of the Buso River, Paratroopers at Nadzab and the Sarawaged Crossing.

On the night of September 3, 1943, a large enemy transport convoy suddenly began a landing near the mouth of the Buso River. Naturally the army had estimated that such an event would occur sooner or later, but for the front line units it was like a peal of thunder in a clear sky. Then on the 5th huge flocks of enemy aircraft came flying over Nadzab and paratroopers began to descend, completely blotting out the sky.



Wrecked Japanese barges at Scarlett Beach

While the Lae units were keeping at bay the tiger at the front gate, the wolf had appeared at the back gate. This sudden outbreak meant, for the base group, which had waged eight long months of bloody and desperate warfare, the token of the end of the Salamaua campaign. But a piece of good fortune in the midst of misfortune was the fact that the GOC at Lae, Major General Shoge, a man of cool courage, was able to concentrate the whole strength of the Lae garrison troops.

The nucleus of the Lae force was the Kamino Battalion of 20th Division, with an anti-aircraft machine-gun cannon unit and airfield equipment units etc. - a very small fighting strength. However, as a result of the aptness of Major-General Shoge's direction and the strenuous efforts of Major Mukai, Staff Officer, they were able to hold back the superior forces of the enemy for two weeks by dint of fierce fighting, giving the main base group strength and time to finish its concentration at Lae.

Well then although the attack was fierce from the troops who

landed at Buso River area, because of the restricted nature of the terrain it was comparatively easy to counterattack. But since the attack from Nadzab plain threw open the rear of Lae, the enemy was able to advance in any area. The Lae garrison's worry was all for that area.

Although the true facts of the matter were not apparent, the movement of units that had dropped on Nadzab was very sluggish; if they had attacked in their vast strength, it would have been the hour of death of Lae in a matter of a few hours. The fact that this did not happen was, for our troops, a piece of good luck in the midst of misfortune.

Although the base group was unable to understand the reason [for not pressing the attack from Nadzab] it meant they had time to concentrate at Lae and also change direction at Kiria. In the beginning the enemy with small numbers of troops tried to check the crossing of the Buso at the rear of Lae but they were scattered by units of 51st Division [Japanese] and were unable to carry out their plan.

But what of the situation of the Lae garrison who easily carried out their difficult concentration, in opposition to the great numbers of the enemy's Ninth Division of Australians who were increasing their violent attack from Buso River area?

Originally air force land units [the Japanese] they had no land warfare training. In addition, their equipment was inadequate. The units had for their firepower machine cannon which were firing at the sky but which pointed towards the earth: in addition they had to take part in night fighting, which is extremely difficult. Their losses grew in the fierce land and air attacks of the enemy. Their CO was killed and his deputy took over command. In this desperate, psychological moment in the fighting they were not permitted to fall back one pace, and eventually the soldiers were killed and it became a position of dead bodies.

When the [Japanese] Division left Lae it carried as many provisions as it could to make itself self-reliant. The supplies, which had been for Salamaua, were now joyfully taken as provisions for the retreat. Healthy people like the naval units were able to take enough for 14 or 15 days but the army units, in an extreme state of exhaustion were only able to carry enough for about a week. With these meager supplies they set off for Sarawaged Peak, to make the crossing of the 10,000 feet altitude, with a mileage of 250 miles.

Particularly sad was the plight of the sick. Being unable to retreat, there was nothing left for them but an extreme measure. Of their own accord, with their grenades or rifles they committed suicide.

For a Japanese soldier the greatest disgrace is to fall into the hands of the enemy. This is a tradition of old Japan; it is a firmly rooted conviction about which there is no room for argument. Our fellow soldiers died with peaceful minds and we must pray for their souls.

[Yoshihara related several incidents, which occurred in the crossing and spoke of obtaining co-operation of the mountain natives during the difficult forced march. Although the Division ordered mountain gun to be abandoned, Colonel Watanabe (Japanese 14th Field Regiment) encouraged his men to attempt to transport the gun and some shells].

Soldiers who were carrying insufficient food for themselves should not have had to carry 50 kg of mountain gun bits and pieces. Officers and men took it in turns and several at a time carried these as they climbed up the steep slopes. The Divisional commander came to know about it and could not overlook their suffering and he ordered that they should cease this. On the Sarawaged mountain, the Regimental commander and his subordinates, with tears in their eyes, bade a formal farewell to the last of the Regiment's guns.

The Sarawaged crossing took far longer than had been expected and its difficulties were beyond discussion. Near the mountain summits the cold was intense and sleep was quite impossible all the cold night; they could only doze beside a fire. Squalls came, the ice spread and they advanced through snow under this tropical sky. Gradually the road became a descending slope, the inclination was so steep that if they missed their footing they would fall thousands of feet - and how many men lost their lives like that!

About 4 out of 10 died of sickness or starvation in this crossing.



Scarlett Beach 22 September 1943

Chapter XIV: The Attack and Defence of Finschhafen.

With Lae fallen the defence of Finschhafen began immediately... The main strengths of 20th {Japanese} Division were hurriedly to be sent to Finschhafen.

However, although this was easy to plan it was difficult to accomplish.

The 80th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Miyake, which had been ordered to advance hurriedly, was now advancing from Hansaon half rations, scorched by tropical sun and drenched by squalls, they continued their march along trackless beaches and arrived at Finschhafen.

At the same time as the transfer to Finschhafen of the main strength of 20th Division, the Sorashira, the main strength of the garrison near Madang, and the 239th Infantry Regiment were called up and concealed. The greater part of the Japanese army seemed to be on the move.

The Finschhafen units were convinced they would be the focus of the next attack and were all prepared to defend Finschhafen. On the evening of September 22, 1943, the Australian Ninth Division [actually 20th Brigade only] made a sudden attack and began landing in the vicinity of Finschhafen airfield. [At the time of the attack Report of Operations of the Japanese Army states that there were 4,000 Japanese troops at Finschhafen].

The garrison at Anto Point [Arndt Point] the Sawamura Unit were brushed aside by this vast enemy who occupied the aerodrome and began constructing positions on the hill line west of it.....Colonel Miyake occupied Sattelberg hill on the western side of Finschhafen and prepared to launch an attack he had three infantry companies at his disposal and violently attacked the enemy position. They were not able to rout the enemy but inflicted heavy losses on him.

It was decided to make a daring counter-landing, thus making a great disturbance, then seizing the opportunity to make a thorough attack. While the units carried out the counter-landing Sugino Unit was to infiltrate into the enemy positions on the coast of Songu. They embarked on three barges and at midnight reached their objective shore. But unfortunately, enemy sentries spotted the first and second crafts.

They concentrated their fire on Sugino Company and many casualties occurred. The third barge landed safely in the rear. Immediately all the troops divided into two groups, one engaged the enemy lookouts and the other penetrated deeply into the enemy position. They created great havoc by putting out of action two field guns [fib!] and four AA guns [another fib] in this position and were very successful in the engagement.

However all this time they were losing one man and then two, so that in the end virtually all the force was wiped out. It was an example of supreme grandeur.

The Australian broadcasts also praised the bravery of this action. It can be conjectured that the Australian Brigade commander was frightened by this attack, thinking its objective was Brigade H.Q.

At 20th Division H. Q. the troops were short of food and ammunition - they were so hungry they were eating banana and paw-paw roots. They fought exposed to the enemy shells [A12] committing their bodies to trenches in which the rain of days after days had accumulated.

Equipment makes all the difference in the world; in addition we had numerous casualties and sick people, who in addition had empty stomachs. The enemy covered the grassland area along the coast from the airfield and with tanks and made assaults from the coast on to their flanks. Faced with the immense material strength of the enemy, our primitive pressing attacks were a poor reply.

Vale RD (Bob) Phillips , OBE, MA, BA (Hons), Dip Pub Admin (VX44404, 8 Battery)

Born on 19 September 1917, Robert Davison Phillips tried (unsuccessfully) to enlist in the RAAF in Canberra when war was declared.

Bob took leave from his job in early 1940 to enlist in the AIF on 8 July 1940, and joined the newly formed 2nd/3rd Australian LAA Regiment. He remained with the Regiment until his discharge (because of injury) on 11 October 1943. Bob passed away on 28 June 2013.

In a talk to his Combined Noosa Probus Club in May 2010, Bob summarised his war and life experiences as follows:

"In December 1940, my Battery joined the 6th Division in the advance against the Italians from Mersa Matruh to Benghazi and beyond.

We had 37 .303 rifles for 200 men, but during the advance we captured Italian 20mm anti aircraft guns, four heavy ack-ack guns and a predictor.

When the 6th Division withdrew to Greece we stayed at Benghazi until Rommel's Afrika Korps drove us across the desert, in the famous Benghazi-Tobruk Derby. Rommel's troops captured half of my gun crew, south of Derna, and they remained POW for the best part of five years.

During the Tobruk siege our lifestyle consisted of a hole in the ground half-covered by planks of wood, iron, dirt and bricks - 6 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet. Our bed in the slit trench comprised a ground sheet, a couple of blankets and a kit bag for a pillow, and was shared with numerous sand fleas, occasional scorpions and inches of desert sand on the blanket.

Each man had his own slit trench, but shared the gun pit during the day. During a dust storm one could scarcely recognize one's mates, and it was impossible to eat one's tin of bully beef. Water was delivered by the water truck and was strictly rationed. It was a dry argument. Once a month we were driven to the sea for a wash, only to be harassed by dive bombers and ME 109's.

Noise was a constant companion, caused in part by aircraft engines, including Stuka dive bombers (at times 100 or so overhead), high level bombers and fighter cover by ME 109's and ME 110's and an occasional Hurricane. Added to this was the scream and explosion of shells, bombs and flack.

Following relief from Tobruk, we joined AIF forces in the Middle East awaiting resolution of differences between Prime Ministers Churchill and Curtin, on

whether we were to be transferred to Burma.

Troops who left Port Trewfik a day ahead of us were taken prisoners by the Japanese.

Our ship had entered the Indian Ocean, presumably for the same destination, when we were turned back to Aden and then returned to Australia.

We were posted to the defense of airports in Western Australia when the Japanese bombed Darwin and Broome. I was then medically unfit for active service due to injuries in both legs suffered during dive bombing attacks in the Tobruk siege, and was transferred to Military Intelligence.

In October, 1943 I managed to enlist in the RAAF, but due to the injury to my right leg, I failed to drive a Wirraway in a straight line, and was re-mustered to train as a Navigator in Winnipeg in Canada.

After graduation from Melbourne University, I became an Industrial Arbitration Court Advocate and specialized in Civil Aviation cases. As a result of this experience, together with academic qualifications, war service and membership of an aircrew, I was appointed Assistant Director General (Admin) in 1956 - I was later appointed Deputy Director General, and subsequently as the Director General of Civil Aviation.

The position of Director General and the Department of Civil Aviation were abolished by the Whitlam Government."



Bob and wife Phyllis in front of the classic Mercedes 300 SEL provided for them by the Noosa Beach Classic Car Club for Anzac Day in 2012..

Editor's Note: Bob's wife Phyllis served with the Army General Hospital on Morotai Island whilst it was still partly occupied by the Japanese.

Vale Sergeant CJE (Cec) Rae (VX48132, 9 Battery), Secretary 1969—1996, President 1996 – 1999



Cec writing home from the Western Desert in 1941

Cecil John Eric Rae was born in Stawell, Victoria on 20 January 1919.

He grew up on the family farming property at War-racknabeal until the Great Depression when the family moved to Melbourne.

In 1937 Cec joined an Army Service Corps Militia unit, and enlisted with his best mate Jim Paton (VX48145) in the AIF on 7 August 1940 after the surrender of France. Both were assigned to the 9th Battery of the newly formed 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, established to counter the very effective German low flying aircraft and dive-bombers.

Following basic training at the Werribee Race Course, Cec and Jim embarked for the Middle East on 30 December 1940.

Following active service in the Western Desert and Syria, Cec was engaged in Operation Battleaxe in the Western Desert when an attempt was made to relieve Tobruk, then moved with the Battery to Beirut, later serving in the Suez Canal area until assigned to a crew whose gun was mounted on the foredeck of a freighter for return to Australia.

After arrival in Australia, the Battery was posted to Townsville from where it moved to Port Moresby by the MV Macdhui and MV Karsik.

Two troops of the Battery then moved to Milne Bay where they assisted in the defeat of the Japanese. This was the first clear defeat of Japanese land troops in the war.

After 17 months the Battery moved to Lae and then subsequently to Labuan Island, North West Borneo.

During 1944, Cec also instructed at Seymour, Greta and Canungra.

On his discharge from the AIF on 7 December 1945, Cec returned to his pre-war position as a clerk with

the Union Bank of Australia (later ANZ) and later became the Accountant with Maddock, Lonie and Chisholm, solicitors and later again was the Accountant and Company Secretary with Arthur Robinson & Co.

Cec married Betty, the love of his life, and together they raised four children.

Following election to the Regiment Association Committee in 1949, Cec went on to become the Association Secretary from 1969 to 1996 and the Association President from 1996 to 1999. He was awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Association in 1987. As Secretary, Cec was involved in regular correspondence with members and their widows, and in assisting members and widows to obtain their entitlements through DVA.

With Les Harris, 7 Battery (VX27594) and Ron Bryant, 8 Battery (VX32563), Cec was one of the co-authors of *On Target*, the history of the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Cec strongly believed that the Regiment Association should continue after the last of the old soldiers had gone.

To this end, Cec, Ron Bryant, John Campbell (VX38276) and the Committee initiated and presided over the transfer of the Association management and safe keeping to the next generation in order that the history be kept alive.



Cec Rae is presented with a souvenir 40mm Bofors shell by Captain Michael Squire, RAA, on the occasion of the Air Defence Luncheon in May 2012

Candid Camera at the 2013 AGM and 2013 Anzac Day March



Across A Crowded Room — a view across the dining room after the completion of formalities.



The late Cec Rae (9th), and Frank Hands (8th) share experiences with Rob Bennett (son of Max Bennett, 8th).



Diane Schubert (daughter of Ern Cope, 8th), John Marshall (7th) and Charles Bennett (grandson of Max Bennett, 8th).



Alan Donelly (grandson of Cec Donelly, 9th), Dorothy Donelly, Lyne Chitts (daughter of Les Chitts, 9th), Mark Harse (grandson-in-law, Earle Webster, 7th).



Russell Luckock (son of Charles Luckock, 8th) makes a point to Doreen Bryant, wife of former late President Ron Bryant, 8th).



Cec Rae (9th), John Marshall (7th), Earle Webster (7th), Frank Hands (8th) and John Campbell (8th).



Graeme Heddle (son of Charles Heddle, 9th) with David McDonald (son of Robert McDonald, Signals) examining some of the memorabilia on display.



Banner carriers Ben Pope (great grandson of George Pope, 8th) and Matthew Heddle (grandson of Charles Heddle, 9th).