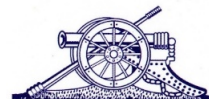


CASCABEL



*Newsletter
of the
Royal Australian Artillery
Association (Vic) Inc*

July 2020

Number 10

President: COL Jason Cooke

president@artilleryvic.org.au

Secretary: CAPT David Edwards

secretary@artilleryvic.org.au

newsletter@artilleryvic.org.au

Website: <http://artilleryvic.org.au>

Facebook: Artillery Assoc Victoria



*2020 RAA Luncheon
Michael Womack Steve Venn Jason Cooke Peter Rowley*



From the President

Fellow Gunners,

Hope you are all safe staying warm and isolated at home striving winter and the recent COVID 19 outbreaks. At least the football is back providing some relief from the endless movie and Netflixes binging that has gripped the country. Hasn't this been a strange year and going to get stranger if you believe everything you hear from the media.

I am very pleased to report that your committee has been extremely active during this lockdown period with regular committee meetings via video-conferencing and generally just getting on with business. Admittedly there are no social activities that we can conduct but we are responding to online questions and strengthening our communication channels via social media platforms.

If you haven't been online lately, I would encourage you to visit our renewed look website which I know you will appreciate. I'd like to congratulate the committee on these improvements as the changes have had a positive impact with increased numbers visiting our website for information. As always, happy to receive feedback or suggestions so don't be shy in contacting us – www.artilleryvic.org.au.

Another project we have undertaken is to refresh our membership and the way we attract new members introducing new ways to maintain a regular communication between us all. The membership subcommittee has been extremely active in this area and again is something I am extremely proud to highlight in this Newsletter.

The committee is looking forward to announcing social events when we can finally get together and interact with each other. Hopefully soon we will be able to hold another "Reunion Lunch" at the Cranbourne RSL and have a social drink with presentation at the next Gunner Symposium. Recent conversations with the Bty have been extremely positive with planned joint social events scheduled for later in the year.

Until then, take care, enjoy the Newsletter and contact us via email, website or Facebook.

Ubique,
Jason



A Word From the Editor

As expected, the 10 MDM REGT Assoc function that was to be held on the 25th July has been cancelled. Another unfortunate by-product of the Covid 19 virus.

To assist the people who would like to be reminded about our electronic availability, the article from Issue 9 by CAPT David Edwards has been included again on page 4.

On a brighter note, it is very pleasing to see that the response to the request for items has been well received. Please keep them coming

From The Secretary

This is my first newsletter item as the Secretary.

For those that don't know me, I joined 2/15 Fd Regt as a baby-faced 2LT in 1986 after graduation from MonUR. I spent most of my early years at Chapel St (as a trainee under RSM Peter Bruce attached to the last dregs of 3 Bty) and 23 Bty (Baxter) as Bty Ldr, Recon Offr and GPO (best job in the Artillery). With the amalgamation of 2 & 23 Bty into 22 Bty, I was sent to RHQ to be the Svy Offr (and play with all the kit we'd inherited from 132 Div Loc). After my Subj 1 for Capt (well, that's what I called it) I returned to 2/10 Mdm as FO, then BK of 22 Bty. I was then pensioned off to MUR as an instructor for a few years and went on the inactive list in 1997.

And now to the routine items as secretary of this austere association; correspondence, membership, electronic media and social activities.

Most of the **correspondence** is sadly vale or funeral notices of gunners passing from Peter Bruce of the RAAHC. Unless the gunner is a member of the association, I hold notices for a monthly email. I encourage you to get on facebook and join the *Australian Artillery Association* group

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/346818566245872>, you will need to ask to join) as they re-post

the vale/funeral notices. If there is any significant correspondence I add it to the monthly email. I also publish important information on the Association website; <https://artilleryvic.org.au>.

Paul Heron is doing a great job managing the **membership**. He's managed to contact many of the members, particularly those who we haven't had any contact with in a while. Craig Batten did an excellent job rationalising the membership database earlier this year; we're encouraging the use of online forms and EFT, and the membership management is working well.

You may have noticed a significant focus on use of **electronic media** by the committee over the last few years. Paper and snail-mail is slow and expensive, whereas the myriad of electronic mechanisms means we can use faster and more cost-effective communication. In the last newsletter I wrote a guide to getting online and accessing the website and facebook page. I encourage those "yet to get online" to have a look. Our website, <https://artilleryvic.org.au> is where we post articles, photos and other information. We have also updated the membership and contact forms (which go directly to me via email). We encourage the use of EFT over chq's (or sending cash in the mail). Also, there are some great Facebook resources, such as our own page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ArtilleryAssocVictoria>), the "*2/10 Mdm Regt RAA, Southern Gunners, Steerers, Walla's & Friends*" private page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2217053721918662>) and the above-mentioned *Australian Artillery Association* group.

Finally, there's not much **social** activity with the current COVID-19 restrictions. Recent events have been cancelled and the committee is getting used to meetings held over Webex. There are activities we could help organise depending on easing of restrictions, some ideas floated include:

- An association day down to the Paynseville RSL to support the work of passed-member Peter Wertheimer (good excuse for a drive/motorbike ride down there)
- A visit to the National Vietnam Veterans Museum on Philip Island (perhaps another drive/motorcycle trip)

- Depending on if/what the Bty does for St. Barbara's Day, maybe do an RSL event
- Another 2/10 Mdm Regt event at Cranbourne RSL like we did last year (perhaps St. Barbara's Day)

As always, feel free to contact the committee via the website, facebook page, email (secretary@artilleryvic.org.au) or snail mail (as a last resort).

CAPT David Edwards

Membership Report

Hi to all members.

You may have noticed a slight increase in the emails you have been receiving, without over loading you. David Edwards has been updating you as the information arrives. He does this on our web site and Face Book page. I have noticed a few names appear in the comments section on Face Book, it would be great if they would consider joining the Association. In the last 5 years we have lost some 50 members due to being archived, resigned or sadly passing. In January this year, MAJ Don Shields joined the Association. Thank you Don.

Our current members are:

185 paid members

38 affiliate members.

Unfortunately this trend may well continue, this is one curve we would like to point north. So if you are aware of someone who might consider joining, please encourage them. All the best for now.

Ubique

Paul Heron

RAA Luncheon 2021

Reg Morrell has requested that you be sure to plan ahead to attend the next RAA Luncheon to be held on the 3rd March 2021.

Some IT Help from CAPT David Edwards

RAA Association (Vic) via Electronic Means – A Guide to New Users

Over the past few years the Association has been modernising its communications, from a manual paper-based set of systems to electronic including multi-media. This article is intended to give those new to electronic media a quick start guide.

If you're stuck at home (as we all should be) you can certainly while away some time on the internet. If you're looking for some help with this, or just want to have a chat, feel free to contact Paul Heron (pajami@bigpond.com, 0414 279 219).

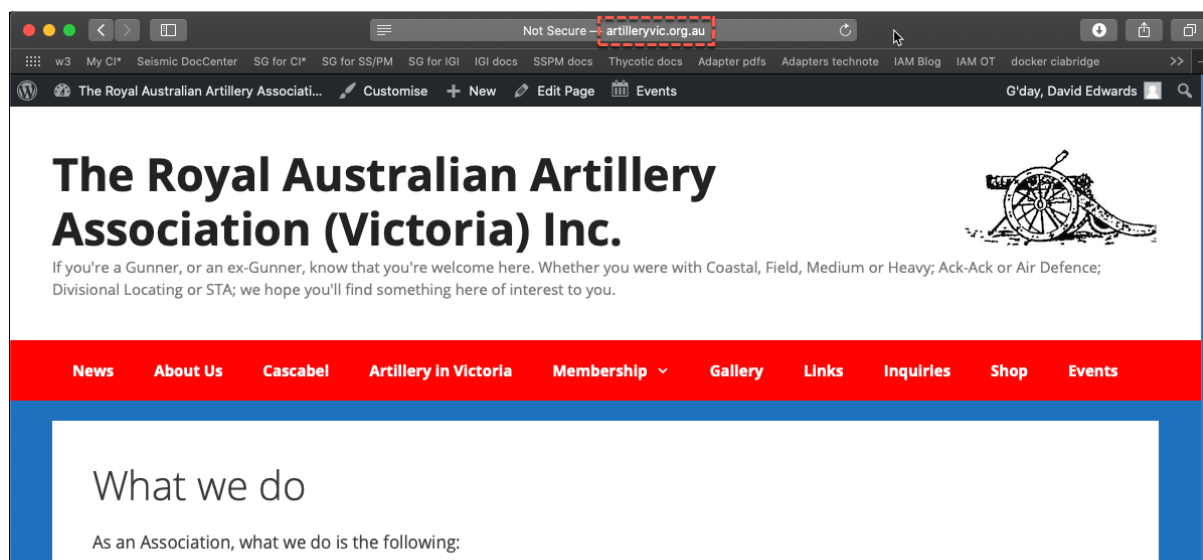
For members there are three primary electronic communication mechanisms:

- Email – we often share updates, upcoming events, and the newsletter via email. If you have access to email and you want to receive communication via it, contact Paul Heron (pajami@bigpond.com). If you got this newsletter via email – we've already got you on the system.
- Website – the Association has its own website – see details below.
- Facebook – we also have a group on Facebook – see details below.

The RAA Association (Vic) Website

The Association has a website where we post information for members: <https://artilleryvic.org.au>. As it's a website you can get to it via the internet from your computer, someone else's computer (like the library), your smart phone or tablet.

If you have a computer and have connected to the internet, you will be familiar with using internet browsers. If not, you'll need to use one of the browsers on your computer or phone (like Safari on Macs and iPhone/iPad, Internet Explorer/Edge on Windows, Chrome/Firefox on many devices). In the search bar of the browser, type <https://artilleryvic.org.au> and hit enter.



The default page has some information about the Association.

Clicking the menu items in the red bar will take you different pages. These include latest news, old copies of Cascabel to read, photographs from events and a calendar of events.

If you have any questions about the website, please contact the secretary at secretary@artilleryvic.org.

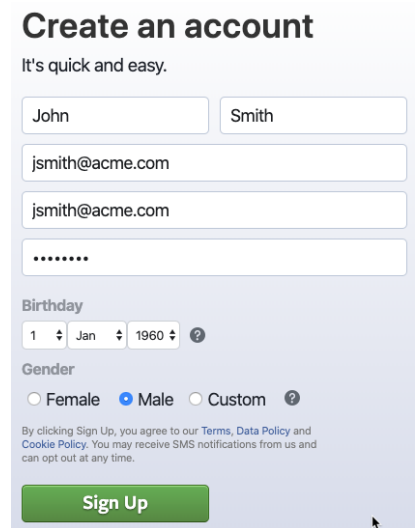
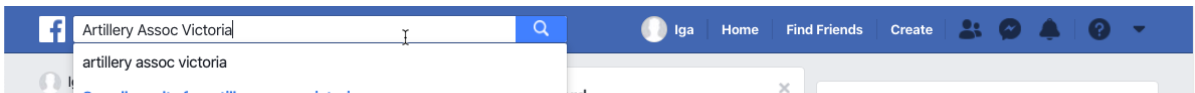
The Association on Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media website on the internet. The Association has a presence there in the form of a group where we can share and discuss Association matters.

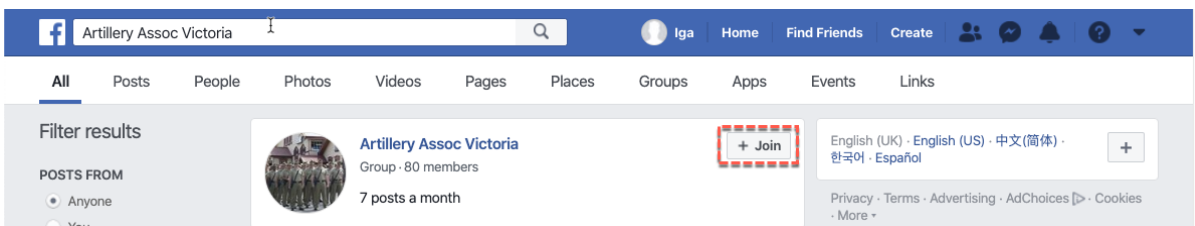
If you haven't accessed Facebook, you will need to create an account. Open an internet browser and go to <https://facebook.com>. On the page you will have the option to create an account. Enter your firstname, surname, your email address (it will add another field to re-enter it to make sure it's valid), give it a password you want to use, enter your birthday and gender, and click the **Sign Up** button. It will prompt you to enter the code sent in an email.

Next, you need to go to your email client as there will be a verification email there. Open the email from Facebook, get the numeric code and type it into the field on Facebook and click the **Continue** button. You should now be in Facebook and ready to access the Association group.

To find our group, go to the search bar at the top of the Facebook page, enter *Artillery Assoc Victoria* and hit enter.

A screenshot of the Facebook 'Create an account' form. The title is 'Create an account' with the subtitle 'It's quick and easy.' Below this are input fields for 'First name' (containing 'John') and 'Last name' (containing 'Smith'). There are two rows for 'Email' (both containing 'jsmith@acme.com') and a 'Password' field (containing '.....'). Below these is a 'Birthday' section with dropdowns for month (1) and year (1960), and a 'Gender' section with radio buttons for 'Female', 'Male' (selected), and 'Custom'. At the bottom, there is a green 'Sign Up' button and a small disclaimer: 'By clicking Sign Up, you agree to our Terms, Data Policy and Cookie Policy. You may receive SMS notifications from us and can opt out at any time.'

The Association group is shown. Click the **+Join** button.



You will see the button change to Request Sent.

You can now access the group. Either click on the group name (Artillery Assoc Victoria) to the left of the button, or hover over the button and click the View Group option. You should see the group page and can view the items posted there.

Your membership will be pending until approved. Then you can also post to the page.

From Reg Morrell



Back	Sgt R.M.Scott	Sgt J.G.Perkins	Sgt L.E.Milne	Sgt J.B.Howson	Sgt K.J.Phyland	Sgt B.C.Cornell	Sgt D.I.Perry	Sgt B.L.Sturges	Sgt J.R.Hawking
						Sgt B.H.Hallman	Sgt G.Stening	Sgt P.H.Tidd	Sgt B.D.Joyce
4 Row	S/Sgt K.Johnson[LAD	Sgt. R.C.Ibbott	Sgt B.J.O'Loughlin	Sgt L.S.Baum	Sgt A.H.Robinson	Sgt R. Hampton	Sgt B.B.Green	Sgt J.H.R.Splatt	Sgt F.J.Fahey
3 Row	S/Sgt G.N.Cross	Sgt J.F.Kelly	WO2 R.F.Woodward BEN	WO2 J.D.O'Brien	WO2 D.W.O'Toole	WO2 B.R.Harris	S/Sgt F.G.Moulin	Sgt J.Gray[LAD]	Sgt P.C.Harrisor
Seated	WO2 B.M.Cave	WO2 B.Bolger	WO2 B.V.Upton	WO1 D Reid[RSM]	tCol L.M.Cutcliffe ED[CO	WO2 N.G.B.Haines	WO2 R.E.A.Mathew	WO2 D.L.Malcolm	WO2 G.S.Cecil
Front		Sgt J.P.Olney	Sgt P.Q. Foa	Sgt R.I.McLachlan	Sgt L.P.Nugent	Sgt B.G.Smith	Sgt W.I.Brookes	Sgt H.A.Bates	igt B.W.Cleema
				Known to be alive 1 May 20					
				Known to be deceased					

Reg is trying to establish if any of the people in the above photograph are still about. There are only two members shown who have been Association Members.

They are:
SGT Roy Hampton
PO Box 720
PINJARRA WA 6208
Unfinancial 2013/2014
Archived

and

WO2 (not SGT) Geoffrey Cross
7/1 Holmes Street
NORTHCOTE VIC 3070
Unfinancial 2003
Archived

Could you forward the following list of Senior NCOs from 2 Field Regiment Sergeants' Mess, 1964 to our Association Members to ascertain if these Members are still alive.

Sgt. Ralph M. Scott	Sgt. L.E. Milne	Sgt. Jeff. B. Howson	Sgt. Bernie L. Sturges
Sgt. Jack R. Hawking	Sgt. Bruce H. Hallman	Sgt. Graham Stening	Sgt. A.H. Robinson
Sgt. R Hampton	Ssgt. Frank G. Moulin	Sgt. J. Gray (LAD)	Sgt. P.C. Harrison
Sgt. Geoff Cross	WO 2 B.R. Harris	WO 2 W. Smith (LAD)	Sgt. G.R. Hanley
Sgt. B. Griffin	WO 2 B. Bolger	WO 2 N.G. Haines	Sgt. R. Mc Lachlan
Sgt. L.P. Nugent	Sgt. B. Smith		

Please despatch any information to Brigadier Doug I. Perry OAM RFD ED via email to dperry@planet.net.au



When Jock Macdonald (who is up in Queensland) got the last newsletter, he saw your request for info. He sent down this photo thinking you might use it next time. As Reg is in it he has added some words to go with it. If you need more, I suggest you contact Reg. This is what Reg said:

The attachment is a photograph of the Brighton Depot Sergeants' Mess which combined 132 Div. Loc Bty and 3 Battery Senior NCOs. Sgt Swindells has a N in it. The WO 2 sitting on the left of Phil Baines is not D. Perry but I can't recall his name. The photo was taken sometime around

1970. I'm not sure why there was only 3 X 3 Battery personnel present.

Four of 132 members are deceased (Zibbell, Nicholls, Breeze & Gercovich).

***M777 Prints for Sale
From MAJ Gary Down (SO2 HOR)***



As some of you may be aware, in May 2017 the Australian Artillery Association very kindly presented the RAA with a large oil painting of an M777 and detachment painted by Mr Phillip Pomroy. The painting now hangs in the School of Artillery.

A proposal was discussed at the Regimental Committee Meeting in Feb this year regarding prints of the painting, and it was agreed that there would be a run of 200 prints of which 50 would be numbered and signed by the artist.

The prints have now been produced and a low-resolution image is attached FYI. The only difference between the attached image and the hard-copy prints is that the prints have a 40mm white border for framing purposes.

The overall dimensions of the print are 672mm x 415mm.

The signed prints will be sold for \$100 each, and the unsigned prints for \$35 each. Additional unsigned copies can be printed if there is the demand.

Individual prints will be available for purchase in November and I would therefore be grateful if you would give this matter the widest distribution and place any orders through me

gary.down@defence.gov.au

03 5735 6267.

MAJ Gary Down (SO2 HOR)

Some Interesting Links

ADF Drone Used in Bushfire Recovery Effort in Victoria.

BDR Dawson 2/10 BTY 9 REGT.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1AbAxkdde0>

Report on Battle Group BG Jacka

MAJ James Eling BC 2/10 BTY

<https://cove.army.gov.au/article/preparing-the-reinforcing-battle-group>

Website

The website at <http://artilleryvic.org.au> is up-dated frequently as new items become available.

RECOLLECTIONS OF 2/10'S FIRST CULTANA CAMP

CAPT David Edwards

Soon after 2/15 Fd Regt and 10 Mdm Regt amalgamated into 2/10 Mdm Regt under LtCol David Forster, we held an annual camp at Cultana in SA. It would have been mid- or late-1992. This was the first time many of the Victorian gunners had experienced this type of terrain and it was quite a learning experience. The following is a collection of a few random memories of that camp, with me as a FO in 22 Bty.

I don't recall much of the trip over other than stopping at the Murray Bridge (SA) range before continuing on through Adelaide and up to Port Augusta and Cultana. There may have been some issue with us driving on the newly laid GP circuit, but I don't remember it.

The Cultana Training Area (El Alamein) encampment was somewhat underwhelming. A bunch of small buildings spread out amongst the red dirt and sparse scrub with an imposing hill behind it.

We had little appreciation of the size of the range until we drove the 60-odd kilometres down to the bottom of the range (just short of Whyalla). Our FO party consisted of Bdr Andrew Eccles (FO Ack), Gnr Peter Haysom (Sig) and myself. The other party was Capt Jim Pearson, Bdr John Moodie, and Gnr "Johnno" Johnson. Our driver was Ray Chachia – sporting the coolest 70's wrap-around shades.

My first observation of the terrain close-up was that over the millennia all the topsoil had washed down off the hills onto the plain leaving incredibly sharp rocks underfoot. Good thing I was looking

down on this occasion as I nearly stepped on a baby tiger snake sunning itself. The place was hot, dry and dusty.

The range itself seemed like a huge bowl with a steep ridge running down the west side and a few smaller hills to the SE where we started our observer activities. After shooting at Pucka, Singleton and Holsworthy, the large featureless plain was challenging for adjusting.

My first adjustment went something like; add 400, add 400, (what the...) add 800, drop 400 ...

On another day we were in a similar position with all FO parties, with BC (Maj Steve Venn) and CO (LtCol Forster) on the hill. The first adjusting round from the other battery went whizzing overhead and the CO jumped on the radio to call 'Check firing'. Apparently, the GPO (who will remain nameless) hadn't done his crest clearance drills. I reckon I could have held up my highlighter and put a nice spiral pattern on the round. Well, it's funny now.

The middle weekend it was back to the camp. First thing in the morning we did the CFT with the forced march (15ks?) followed by a wind-down afternoon of cleaning and BBQ. Then the heavens opened up. It had been hot, dry and dusty all week - the rain turned everything to mud.

The following morning was the CO's Direct Shoot. We were given a time and location. 22 Bty made it, 38 Bty didn't. They got bogged, up to the axles with the Macks and M198s. They managed to dig themselves out and get there by "another

route". But by this time, it was too late for the shoot. The CO was not happy!

At some point we migrated the FO parties to the ridge to the west. It was steep. One night I slept in my sleeping bag wedged in the bottom of a tree to stop sliding down the hill. Then there was the day the BC party went missing. We found out later they had got bogged on the plain. Sgt Don Errey (BC Ack) was driving, so the BC had to do the pushing. When they eventually turned up to the hill, he was covered head to foot in mud. It's probably not appropriate to fall about laughing at your boss, but we did it anyway.

On another day the two 22 Bty FO parties were bunkered down in their little holes with their little cam nets over them, mine on the left, the other on the right. Working away we hear this scream of "SNAKE" and we looked around to see three blokes bolt out from under there cam nets in all directions. Apparently, a little fella had slithered between them and continued on its way without a care in the world. It wasn't the only snake story of the week, apparently a few folks had them cross their paths (or boots).

The last day on the range was a combined regimental shoot. Up to this point we'd only shot our own batteries, so this was a good chance to fire both 105 (22 Bty) and 155 (38 Bty). Whilst it was interesting to see the effect of both, the "crump" and impact of the 155s is very impressive.

For some reason it took two days to get to Cultana, but three days to get home.

We stopped at P&EE Port Wakefield for the first night on the way home. Two things I remember from that night – really bad beer (West End? – the boys couldn't stop complaining) and the white chopped Land Rovers the locals used to recover rounds from the flats at low tide. The second night was at the Transport depot in Horsham down the street from where I lived as a kid. Other than that, it was a long and uneventful trip.

I've heard other stories of goings on at camp or on the gun lines, but I'll leave them for others to tell. It was an interesting camp, and very different to the usual two weeks at Pucka where we were constantly deploying to the same places and firing on the same hills.

Keith's Strike Teams 2019 – 2020 ***LTCOL Keith Bunnett (Now a Firey)***

I retired from the Ares in 1990 after commanding 12/16th Hunter River Lancers in Armidale, Tamworth and Muswellbrook – definitely a bit different to Artillery. It did confirm to me that the Army needs every part to undertake its' tasks successfully.

I had a 20 year break then in 2009 after the tragic fires in Victoria when we lost nearly 200 people in one afternoon I decided to see what fire fighting was like. Well I found out – its' bloody hard work!
!

I went along to our local CFA station at Bayswater and, like a lamb to the slaughter. I signed up (I was 69 at the time). What I didn't realize at the time was that Bayswater is actually an Urban brigade. Training took the better part of a year, then I was given a pager and allowed to jump on the trucks. Bayswater has 4 vehicles - a pumper which we use most of the time for local jobs, a

tanker which is mainly for bush fires, a Breathing Apparatus (BA) van which we take everywhere up to about 100 kms all around Melbourne (we fill the breathing apparatus cylinders at fires so they can be used again straight away. If it's a long job we will probably fill the same ones 3 or 4 times), and a slip on which is a small Toyota with a small water tank and pump on which we use for bike trail fires and the like.

Over the last 10 years I have attended over 1500 house fires, car fires, car accidents, and lots of false alarms.

I have also attended around 30 – 35 bush fires as a member of a strike team – a strike team is 5 tankers with a command vehicle. It is based very much on a convoy system and operates much the same way. These vary from one day to 7 days away – most usual ones are 3 days.



**Country Fire Authority Vehicle
Deployed In NSW**

Some years we have no bush fires, some years we are really busy. 2019 was very busy. In March I went to the Bunyip fires on the first day, then again on the 3rd day. Two days later I went to Yinnar. These were all one day strike teams as we were so close to our homes.

Then in October, I was flown up to Grafton with the first strike team to go from Victoria to the NSW fires. We stayed at the Grafton Soccer Club and operated to the North West of Grafton out from a little town called Rapville which had a disastrous fire go through it 2 days earlier. That was a 5 day strike team.

A month later – in mid November I was sent with another strike team to Singleton. We actually stayed at the Army Base.

I reckon I slept in the same room that I used at times when I took my Regiment there for training in the 1980's.



**Keith's Strike Team
Keith Is The One In Thongs**

Our first day we were sent urgently to a little town called North Rothbury – just South of Singleton.

We had two Victorian strike teams and a NSW one. We arrived just as the fires hit the town. We had a really good save – no buildings or lives lost.

Next day we were sent on up to Grafton again – same Soccer Club. This time we operated to the South East, between Grafton and Coffs Harbour.

On New Years Day I was sent to Murrumbidgee. It actually took us two days to get into the town as the only road in was closed because of fires. So we went in on three Fisheries Inspection vessels – very uncomfortable but really fast about 35 knots. The major fires there occurred on New Years Eve. The strike teams there on that day did a top job saving the most important parts of the infrastructure for the town.

As we arrived the Navy was starting to evacuate the 3,000 tourists still trapped in town. We had some spotfires to clear up but nothing really serious, except on our second day the fires turned back to the town. By midafternoon – 2pm – it was a pitch black moonless night. But, although the wind howled around everywhere, and we had lots of spotfires, and very little sleep for 2 days the town was not in much further danger. That was a 7 day strike team.



Cooling a Stump to Prevent Later Flare-Up

So, it's been quite peaceful after that with just the usual house and factory fires since then. Corona Virus has slowed me down a little as the CFA has asked people in the high age risk area to restrict their turn outs. So I am waiting now for eased conditions. I have enclosed a couple of photos of the NSW fires for you.

Regards Keith

Museum Visit By Paul Heron

The 3 attached photos were taken when I visited the WW2 museum in Noumea

The photos here are from the WW2 museum in Noumea, New Caledonia. The building is one of many built by the Americans on the island. The roof is curved practically down to the ground and is well maintained as is the others they built. There are quite a few displays and very interesting to see the equipment that was used in the conflict. The museum itself is in the city of Noumea and not far from the ship dock. The gun is south east of the city about 7kms by road and on the coast on that peninsula and also on a reasonable hill, well it was for me. If you are familiar with Google Earth search "Canons de Ouémo". Maybe the members might know its size and model. As you can see, French graffiti is no different to Aussie graffiti, still couldn't read it. Worth a visit when travel is allowed if you trust ships



FINDING GUNNER NORRIS

Story: Catherine McGregor

Submitted by WO2 Alan Halbish

Part One of Three

The young soldier was long dead, his mates thought. Then came the truth.

In the small hours of August 17, 1966, Gunner Allan Stewart awoke with a start. It was probably the explosion of the first mortar round inside the Australian base in South Vietnam that woke him. Even in the relative security of Nui Dat soldiers slept with their weapons and webbing close by and dozed fitfully, alert to the constant danger of random shelling by local Viet Cong Forces.

It was still early in the war and the Viet Cong were probing the Australians, trying to gauge their tactics, battlecraft and standard operating procedures. In turn, the Australians were conducting constant patrols to familiarise themselves with the terrain and villages in their area of operations.

Many of those at the Nui Dat base that night — the night before all hell broke loose in the battle of Long Tan — were young national servicemen who had never seen war or even left Australia before. Others were career soldiers who had already fought in Malaya and Borneo. They excelled at small unit operations in close terrain and were employing these tactics in Phuoc Tuy Province.

Stewart was a regular soldier who had enlisted in Melbourne at 17. He had arrived at Nui Dat three months earlier with his mates from the 1st Field Regiment of the Royal Australian Artillery. The gunners had been added to the Australian taskforce to provide

dedicated fire support to two infantry battalions. As he tumbled out of his tent that night, Stewart had no idea that his unit was about to write its own

chapter of Australian war history. His primary focus was on survival.

“At that stage of the war we used to sleep starkers,” he tells Inquirer. “It was hot, so we slept in our jocks under the mozzie nets with our weapons beside us. “I dived straight into my pit in my jocks with my weapon and webbing. Straight into the bloody red mud, as it had been raining. I called out to one of the blokes back in the tent, “Mate, grab those toffees, this might take a while.” He was referring to a tin of toffees provided in a Salvation Army care package.

The memories of the men interviewed for this story by Inquirer vary, but they all agree the preliminary attack on the eve of Long Tan was a substantial barrage in which several Australians were wounded. As the shock of the shelling dissipated, the Australians quickly assessed the damage. Several of the 1 Field Regiment gunners had shrapnel wounds and were taken to the underground regimental aid post where they were triaged by unit doctor John Taske.

In forward bases such as Nui Dat, strict blackouts were enforced to avoid offering the enemy targets, so Taske worked by torchlight. He suspected some men in forward positions might not have been discovered, so he checked with the medics attached to the various batteries of 1st Field Regiment.

“I spoke to Lofty Mortimer who was the 103 Battery medic and asked him if he had accounted for all his blokes,” recalls Taske. “He told me they were all fine except for one fellow with a bit of a boil on his head. That didn’t sound right to me. Boils on the head are actually quite rare. So I asked him if he’d had it that morning. He told me, ‘No, he got it tonight.’ So I decided I’d better have a look at him and told him to bring him to me.”

Mortimer remembers taking that call from Taske on the field telephone in the machinegun pit, where he was on sentry duty during the attack. “I had a look at him and it looked like a boil and he could speak. But later, in proper light, I saw he was losing cerebral fluid.”

The young soldier, Phil Norris, was badly dazed but conscious. He was a young postman from Granville in western Sydney. Norris had been called up in the first draft of the National Service Scheme. After training at Puckapunyal, he had been “warned for service” in Vietnam.

The newly uniformed Norris left for Vietnam on May 20, 1966, two weeks after marrying his 17-year-old sweetheart, Maryanne Matthews. The pair had the sort of whirlwind courtship that so often precedes the departure of young men to war. Stewart did not know Norris particularly well, though as members of the same battery they would exchange banter. “I knew him a bit, but you spent most of your time with the blokes from your own tent who served your gun,” Stewart tells Inquirer. Now Norris’s life was in Stewart’s hands. He, Mortimer and Bill Cross, a seasoned non-commissioned officer with tours of Borneo and Malaya behind him, carried Norris to a Land Rover for the urgent dash to the aid post. Cross’s impression was that Norris was critically wounded. “He was in pain and mumbling and there was a bit of blood,” he recalls.

When Taske examined Norris, he noticed a lesion near his right temple. “Phil was conscious when I saw him but I could tell immediately that the bump on his head was not a blister or a boil. He was not lucid, though he could converse. It was a bit like someone who had been concussed playing sport. There was a trace of blood where a tiny sliver of metal was protruding from his head. “He needed to have his skull opened urgently and to have the shrapnel removed. I directed he be placed on the next chopper back to Vung Tau (in southern South Vietnam).” Stewart and Cross carried their now unconscious mate to the landing zone, where he was taken by an Iroquois dust-off chopper. They never saw him again.

The next day the battle of Long Tan erupted and the men of 1 Field Regiment were caught up in a frenzied barrage in which they fired more than 3000 rounds. They not only saved a company of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment from annihilation, but in all likelihood foiled a deliberate assault by 2000 Vietnamese intent on storming the Australian base.

Long Tan, 50 years ago next Thursday, became the most acclaimed Australian victory of the Vietnam War (see historian Ashley Ekins’s story of the battle). Mid the chaos and terror, the gunners of Norris’s battery had little time to ponder his fate.

However, when the smoke and monsoonal rain cleared over Nui Dat the men of the regiment were informed that Norris had died of his wounds at Vung Tau and his remains would be repatriated to Australia.

The mortar attack overnight on August 16-17 was widely viewed as a preliminary operation to induce a response from the Australians. By that measure, Norris was arguably the first man killed in the Battle of Long Tan and the first Australian artillery soldier killed in Vietnam.

Despite the bravery and sacrifice on display in this fierce, against the odds battle, it would take another 2½ decades for the soldiers of Long Tan to receive recognition. Seventeen Australians died in the conflict and one later from his wounds, making it Australia’s bloodiest single day of the war.

The opening of the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial in Canberra on the morning of October 3, 1992, was possibly the first moment those who fought at Long Tan had come together. This was a chance to mourn their fallen comrades and to savour the acknowledgment that had been so long coming to those who fought in this unpopular war.

Part Two will be in Newsletter Number 11

Maybe the “Bill Cross” mentioned on Page 14 is the same Bill Cross who came to 2/15 as RSM, was PSO to Captain and later to Major and became BC of 3 BTY.

PROGRAM OF EVENTS
JULY 2020 – APRIL 2021

ALL Subject to Covid-19 Restrictions

July 7 Tuesday

Cascabel Issue Due

July 9 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Virtual

August 13 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Location to be decided

September 10 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Location to be decided

September 29 Tuesday

Final Day for Cascabel Items

October 6 Tuesday

Cascabel Issue Due

October 8 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Location to be decided

November 12 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Location to be decided

December 4 Friday

St Barbara's Day

December 6 Sunday

Annual General Meeting

2021

January 5 Tuesday

Final Day for Cascabel Items

January 12 Tuesday

Cascabel Issue Due

March 3 Wednesday

RAA Luncheon

March 25 Thursday

Final Day for Cascabel Items

April 1 Thursday

Cascabel Issue Due

April 8 Thursday

Committee Meeting

1800 hr.Location to be decided

SPONSORS' PAGE

Anyone who wishes can become a SPONSOR OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION (VIC) INC. Cascabel Newsletter may do so. A list of Sponsors will be placed on this page. Colour advertisements are welcome.



**Geelong Insurance Brokers provide
Advice & arrange all types of insurance.
We also assist with claims
& any changes required during the year.
www.geelonginsurancebrokers.com.au**

**Call MAJ Don Shields (Retd) on 419 390 303
Email don@gibvic.com.au**
