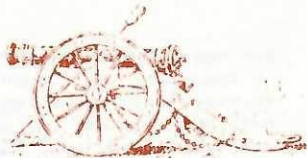


CASCABEL

Newsletter of the Royal Australian Artillery
Association (Victoria) Incorporated



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APRIL 1988

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

Dear Member,

Here we are, once more, at that time of the year when our nation commemorates the deeds of those who fought in our wars, by many hundreds of assemblies on ANZAC Day. Whereas I am writing this prior to that day you will receive your copy of Cascabel after that event. We are now 43 years along the line since the end of World War II and during that period there have been other conflicts in which Australians have been involved. If the aging process of the ex-servicemen of WWII has not been apparent prior to this date it surely will be so this year. If a person enlisted at, say, 18 in 1945 he is into his sixties today and there are so many veterans well into their 70s and 80s. Numbers are, naturally dwindling and your committee is very aware of this fact and has been discussing ways and means of maintaining the interest and contact with old gunners. Our approach has been to bring together, Presidents and Secretaries of unit associations as we have no alternative method of getting our message, regarding our aims to the grass root members. It is then up to these people, and hopefully they will communicate our ideas, downward, to their members.

To help achieve that end we held a meeting at the Training Depot, Batman Avenue, to which we invited representatives of all gunner unit associations. I was very gratified, elated even, that twenty nine people representing nineteen unit associations, accepted and attended that evening. It was an opening gambit during which we at least met the people who hold the reins in the gunner associations. "Time is of the essence" so a legal saying goes. In another eight to ten years or so many associations may not be in being. So it is time to close ranks in a common interest. In the main, our meeting achieved this aim of at least "getting together". We did discuss ways and means of mutually helping one another - and also discussed the placing in trust of unit memorabilia. These subjects will be developed as soon as it can be arranged to do so. The pooling of ideas is of assistance to ensure that we start on the right track.

In a few words what has happened and what is to happen.

Our annual Church Service took place at St Bartholomews Church at Burnley and was held on a beautiful day that Melbourne usually produces for us. We were again assisted by members of the band who always add colour to the service. The Rev Barry Browne conducted his usual interesting service which was very appropriate to our attendance and afterwards joined us at lunch at the training depot. There was a good turn up and it is pleasing to

see our numbers increase each year.

The Fort at Queenscliff was re-visited by 30-40 members on a beautiful autumn day. After an initial hiccup, our members were treated to a very interesting tour of the Fort.

I wish to record in this issue of Cascabel, the handing over of the post of Colonel Commandant, of the Royal Regiment in Victoria by Brigadier Keith Rossi OBE, ED. BRIG Rossi has been a familiar figure at special parades, annual camps and other events on the gunner calendar. He has been a very busy man and among other duties he is Chief Marshall of the ANZAC Day March through Melbourne. By stepping down, it does not mean that he will vanish from our sight but he leaves us having established for himself a considerable respect among both young and old gunners.

We now, in a few sincere words, welcome Major General John Stevenson AO, CBE as the new Colonel Commandant. A professional soldier he is a man steeped in gunner tradition and lore. We look forward to meeting him on the gunner scene and, from a personal point of view, I know we will often.

Events in the pipe-line. Happy Hour at Dandenong Drill Hall 20 May 88. A happy gathering of gunners - do try to be there.

The Artillery Ball 5 Aug 88. For the past three the attendance has increased each year. We must keep this progression of momentum. Put that date in your diary NOW - please!

Organised events of interest are a little thin on the ground for the latter part of this year. However, we have just heard that a visit by our members to HMAS Cerberus (Flinders Naval Base) has been approved. We are proposing that the visit take place at the end of October - details later.

The Annual General Meeting of this Association takes place at Balman Avenue, on 28th July at 8pm. The usual refreshments will be served.

Please remember to wear your association badge!

My best wishes to all.

Norman Whitelaw

VIETNAM VETERANS
DAWN SERVICE ADDRESS
BRIGADIER COLIN KHAN, DSO
CENOTAPH MARTIN PLACE
3 OCTOBER 1987

"One day last week, I wanted to think about our near 500 dead and the so many other seriously wounded, so I went, at this same time of day, to the cliffs at NORTH HEAD.

Whilst there, three separate incidents occurred which vividly brought back to me images, representative of what these men did in earning their so very rightful place in our Nations memory alongside that of their Grandfathers who fell in WWI and Fathers from WWII. For a moment, share these images with me.

A submarine sailed through the Heads but what I saw was HMAS HOBART with the US 6th Fleet providing gunfire support to Australian and South Vietnamese troops in the South and US Marines near QUANG TRI. I saw our Navy clearance diving teams, and Navy helicopters operating so far away from the sea at BLACKHORSE, involved in heavy ground combat operations.

Then, in the sky I heard the unmistakable THUD, THUD, THUD, of a sound that was to become indelibly our sound - as a helicopter flew over. And I saw 9 Sqn RAAF coming out of a dawn sky to pick up an Infantry Battalion waiting on the strip at NUI DAT. I saw those same helicopters smashing their way through jungle canopies or landing in minefields to evacuate hundreds of our wounded diggers, back to the unequalled care of our doctors and nurses at the Australian Field Hospital.

And I saw lumbering Caribous of 35 Sqn flying through enemy fire into isolated outposts such as DUC CO to re-supply Vietnamese and US Advisers. And the Canberra Bombers of 2 Sqn were taking off from PHAN RANG on yet another mission in the DELTA.

Then, with the sound of a bugle from the Artillery Barracks, I was overwhelmed with images of the Army.

I saw our Gunners in 100

different Fire Support Bases, stripped to the waist pouring tens of thousands of shells in support of the Infantry and Armour and I saw our Armour, those incredible Tanks and Personnel Carriers operating in places few of us thought possible and there were the Engineers, clearing enemy tunnels and minefields and helping to rebuild and logistics and support units tirelessly performing their critically important and frequently dangerous tasks.

But then I saw "the man who walked out front" the Infantry so many of whom are the men we honour today. I saw a rain and sweat drenched man in green, laden like a pack mule, age 21 going on 50, cutting his way through jungle by day to find and attack the enemy, then laying all night in paddi fields or on trails in ambush.

I saw him as the Special Air Service Soldier deep in enemy territory. I saw him in 1965 in War Zone D, and at LONG TAN repelling a day long massive attack. I saw him standing so justifiably tall after battles like BALMORAL, CORAL, BINH BA, BAKIA and the continuous patrol battle of mine infested PHUOC TUY.

Finally, I saw an image which I believe epitomises what this ceremony is about and perhaps above all what Vietnam meant to we veterans. I saw TRA HONG VALLEY in 1965 and two isolated Australian Infantry Warrant Officers from our famous Training Team. They are under attack - one is dying from his wounds but the other will not leave his mate to the enemy. They are later found dead together.

I conclude with the thought, that Services at this place, at this time of the day, are synonymous with an event which forged Australia's nationhood over 72 years ago, at Gallipoli. There are a number of worth remembering similarities between that 8 months campaign and our ten years war in Vietnam.

a. Both were fought by men, supported by women, who were the cream of the Nation.

b. Both groups were volunteers.

c. Both were fought in a foreign

land that few had ever heard of or cared about, in wars that many said were not ours and in which we should have no part.

d. Both times we fought alongside many foreign Allied Armies - at Gallipoli - the British, NZ, Gurkhas, Palestinians, French and Algerians. In Vietnam we were with the South Vietnamese, US, NZ, South Koreans, Thailand and Philippines.

e. And at Gallipoli, in 1915 some 60,000 Australians were sent to carry out the directions of an elected Australian Government. In the 1960's, 50,000 other Australians did the same.

While there is no comparison in the numbers killed - on this, the dawning of a great day of reunion, we pay homage to our particular 500 colleagues who will not be marching with us today.

While there may have been a lack of complete support for the war, we assure the loved ones of our dead and wounded that there is no lack of appreciation and gratitude for the sacrifice of these men. They know it abounds in the hearts of we their colleagues. I believe today, those relatives will see and hear the same expression of appreciation from the people in Sydney, for a job that was not just well done but superbly done."

Article submitted by:

Major Warren Barnard

"PUCKA REVISITED"

What were you doing on Saturday 16 Apr 88? A fair chance that you cannot even remember but I figure about twenty of our members can. They spent a most enjoyable day bringing back all those memories of days spent exercising on the Puckapunyal Range. All those things we gunners have come to love, windy OPs, long hold ups, the smell of cordite, lack of communications, bouncing around in the back of a truck and that which we miss most of all - heaps of Pucka dust. Somehow we missed out on our second favourite - Pucka mud but still you cannot have everything in just one day!

As we arrived in small groups at

the Pizza Shop Corner the locals weren't quite sure what this goggle of mainly old soldiers were up to. Maybe a coup? A game of golf? Probably a keg on somewhere. All wrong; clearly the RAA Assoc (Vic) on field exercise.

So off we went led by David Osborne, proud to be back in the lead of a Reserve Battery sized convoy of vehicles. For all the world an Israeli Battery off to the Six Day War. David found with ease the new Range Control where our vehicles went into a hide.

Right on schedule a Unimog 1700 arrived captured by Major Ross Peterken who took us all under command. Rosco, for an officer, isn't a bad driver and even managed to find the OP. The CO of 2/15 Fd Regt, Mike Buckridge, greeted us on arrival wondering if we were really up to a relief in place and I think was relieved when we stated firmly that we were just visiting. He had enough problems of his own at that stage. They were having trouble with the message sticks. The distance guns/OP was a bit much for the runners to cope with but eventually they got through and the Fire Plan was adjusted.

Roar roar and into the valley of death charged the APCs. Boy can a troop of tracks stir up the Pucka dust. Believe they call it Fog of War. What with HE shells, Smoke shells, a fire or two, a troop of APCs and all those grunts, thank goodness for gunners to bring about a little calm.

All of this was too much for we old and bold so we retreated to the comforts of Arty Tac. There over looking the range we proved Napoleon right again and we suitably reclad our marching gear with steaks, sausages and salad. Washed down of course with that dual purpose liquid. Is it Tea or Coffee? Yes.

Then off to shake down lunch. We achieved that aim as we trundled across the range to Hidden Valley where we managed to find the guns even though they were under full cam nets. BK Captain David Allen met us and we were soon under those cam nets and with our Colours. There's no doubt gunners young

and old, we love our guns. We watched several missions being fired and then another highlight of the day.

CO, Mike Buckridge, announced through the tannoy system that the Regiment would fire a salute to honour the passing of Colin McLean, a gunner well known to so many and a former Vice-President of our Association. The gun crews knelt in position as the Regiment fired one round Regiment Right at thirty second intervals. It was a touching and most appropriate way to farewell a gunner.

2 Bly undertook a Time HE mission and then it was time for us to mount up again and return to our hide, bid farewells and with a pang of regret head back to Melbourne.

Some of the smiling faces who seemed to enjoy the day were Max Armstrong, Perc Cooper, Frank Mullins, Dave Green, Brian Cleeman, Robin Smith, Terry Diggins and Alan Jenkins.

Our thanks go to the CO, officers and soldiers of 2/15 Fd Regt for a most enjoyable day.

Major Peter Hemingway

GUNNER PORTRAITS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL C.N. McLEAN ED

Colin McLean was well known in gunner circles having enlisted in 4 Field Brigade on 1 Jun 39. War broke out soon after and he was commissioned at the end of May 1940 and transferred to 2 Field Brigade in which unit he served for just over two years. Upon the reorganisation of the artillery units in Australia, they were put onto the regimental system and a battery was added to each. Colin returned to 4 Field Regiment and was posted to the newly formed 12 Field Battery. His regiment went on to see action in New Guinea during what are now famous operations - Lae, The Ramu Valley and the hard fought Shaggy Ridge. Later the regiment ranged over the whole island of Bougainville. After the war he re-entered the army and as a captain was appointed to 10 Field Regiment and from that posting was transferred to the Reserve.

Colin McLean undertook two tours of service with the United Nations in India on the Kashmir frontier with Pakistan. He was an official observer over a period of time when there was great instability following the partition of India and Pakistan.

He served the artillery well in other respects. He had filled the post of treasurer on the committee of 4 Field Regiment Association for a period, long in any terms, of 37 years.

He was a foundation member of the Committee of the RAA Association of Victoria and Vice President for a period.

LTCOL Colin McLean died on 4 April 1983. His life revolved around the artillery and we have a debt of gratitude to him for his long and faithful service to our Regiment and he will be missed by many.

ROTTNEST ISLAND COAST DEFENCE BATTERY

A few notes on a piece of RAA history in Western Australia.

About 1935 Rottnest Island was planned as the site for a 9.2 inch coast defence battery comprising two guns, the installation of which was completed in 1937. Actually, the first practice took place in January 1938.

It is curious now, that these guns, which were stored in the UK for many years subsequent to their manufacture, were stamped on the breech as having been made in 1901 and 1902. Upon reflection, it would appear that the artillery piece as such, had almost reached its most developed state by that date. The 9.2 inch gun was by no means the largest to be made but never the less it is a very large item of equipment. However, having been in store for thirty years these guns were refurbished at the Royal Gun Factory in England and modifications made to the firing mechanism, which became electrical rather than mechanical. Also, the method of fire control and sights were brought up to date.

A very interesting, intricate

system of tunnels, magazines and engine rooms were constructed within the sandy base of Rottnest Island, by removing the hill, (Olivers), concreting the chambers and tunnel systems, then reburying.

The guns were operated by hydraulic and electric power. The power was delivered from an engine room common to both gun sites and was supplied by two 130HP Ruston Hornby engines coupled to two 120 KVA electric generators. Beneath each gun an electrically driven hydraulic pump provided power for the gun operation. Air compressors were installed for filling air bottles, which provided air to "blow through" the bore after the discharge of each round. This was followed by a short burst of high pressure water to ensure that no burning matter remained to ignite the following charge. The guns could be manually controlled in case of power failure.

The battery cost approximately 130,000 pounds in those days to install, a very far cry from what it would cost today but never the less, a massive cost then.

The total revolving weight of each gun is approximately 140 tons. The weight piece, together with the breech mechanism is 28 tons and the projectile weighed in at 330 pounds. The total length of barrel is 36.3 feet and effective range was taken to be 25,000 yards (and maximum range 31,400 yards) with a muzzle velocity of (max) 2700 pr/sec. The charges were mechanically loaded at the same time as the projectile. Each was enclosed within a hollow rammer and were deposited behind the round when the rammer was withdrawn.

The battery consisted of 162 all ranks, who were quartered in brick barracks built about 2 or 3 Kms to the rear of the guns, and they lived in quite comfortable circumstances. The battery was manned for the entire period of the 1939 45 war but it was recognised, before its end that the need of such coast defence systems had become obsolete. The battery was "mothballed" for quite a few years after the war.

It is a sad reflection on past

happenings that, eventually when the military authorities had no further use for the guns, the machinery was removed by a salvage company tendering to do so. All ammunition had been taken away previously, and the army moved out. According to a former gunner officer, who served in the battery from 1937 and who still visits in the capacity as consultant restorer, (CAPT A.D. Holder RAA), the guns were in perfect condition even the firing lanyards were hanging from the breech blocks. Over a period of time, the lack of care, the effect of weather and vandals took their toll. Now at this stage the battery has been handed over to the Rottnest Island Board which realises it has something of real value in its care. Thankfully, with the enthusiasm of the manager and using army assistance and grants totalling \$80,000 provided by the Heritage and Bicentenary Commissions, work has commenced in an endeavour to put the guns back into a state of respectability. It is planned to incorporate the whole battery into one of the islands specified "walks" which visitors to Rottnest may undertake. Walking and bicycling are the only means of mobility on the island, no cars being permitted, unless a tour of the island by bus is made.

It will be of great interest to see how this piece of RAA heritage is restored and maintained in the future and a visit to the island by any gunner tourist to the state, is recommended.

Major Norman Whitehaw

RECOLLECTIONS THE GUNNER YEARS 1937 - 1946

It was on my sixteenth birthday that I became a Senior Cadet of the 15th Field Brigade, stationed at the Batman Avenue Drill Hall, and so my Army career commenced with me learning about 4.5 inch Howitzers. In those days, a Brigade of Artillery consisted of three 18 pounder Batteries and one Howitzer Battery.

I was introduced to the Army by a workmate who was already a member. I cannot remember the number that I had in those days.

Unfortunately, Senior Cadets did not get to the annual camps, so all I had in these first two years were the training nights and the occasional Sunday Bivouacs. Still, it was a good life, and it gave me an interest in something apart from work. On my eighteenth birthday in May 1939, I became a fully fledged Gunner of the Battery. Our peaceful life was not to last, as in September of that year, Germany decided to take on the rest of the world, and so, Australia found itself at war, and with my unit I did a months training at Mount Martha Camp.

This was followed by a further three months camp in 1940 at the same Camp, and whilst at this camp, recruiting officers from Fort Queenscliff came around looking for suitable men, and so, following this camp and a further medical at the Moore Street Drill Hall in South Melbourne, I with a group of other men were accepted into the 2nd Heavy Brigade. (At this point I would like to say that my father would not give me permission to join the ALF).

And so, in the July of 1940, we travelled by train to Geelong and then by bus to Fort Queenscliff and on our arrival there, we were greeted by "You'll be sorry", but this was in good part. After settling in and getting kitted out, and being allocated beds, I found myself in a squad to be trained by Sergeant White and Bombardier J. Dench, and also became acquainted with WO Steel of the AIC. Then followed three very solid months of bull-ring training and as I think back I am sure that I became a very good soldier. I was very impressed with the three 6 inch Mark VII Guns that protected the Fort. And so, following our training I opted to be trained as a Gun layer, and that meant an extra one shilling (ten cents) a day.

During 1941, I was transferred to the other side at Nepean, and there we had a further four guns, two at Nepean and two at Fort

Pearce, which had been manned by the 6th Heavy Brigade since the start of the war. It was during this time that I came to know the old tug boat Mars, which carried all the men and stores from one side to the other, and the only time it did not sail was when the sea was too rough. This "dear old tug boat" was also used to tow our "targets" when we had gunnery practise, and I remember very vividly when one of our 6 inch shells (practise, of course) just missed the Bridge. The Captain was not very impressed or polite.

Over at Nepean, we conducted a continuous watch over the ships that came in and went out of the Port Phillip Heads, and this was in conjunction with the Pilot Service. During the day this was by a series of flags. We usually had three letters - generally X.Y.Z., and a fairly long word with an odd number of letters. Each ship coming in had to make contact with the Pilot Boat, and would receive a letter and two letters from the word of the day, and our OP was in constant touch with each ship as they steamed through the Rip. During the hours of darkness, this system continued with a series of lights --Red and White--.

Our gun crews worked on a three watch system: 8 hours on, 8 hours off, and 8 hours in reserve, and in this way our life was completely mapped out.

Sometime during 1941, I was promoted to Lance Bombardier and placed in charge of my hut. It was also during 1941 that a lot of movement took place, when a call came for volunteers to make up "L", "M", and the 2/1st Heavy Battery.

"L" Battery went to Rabaul, "M" Battery went to Darwin and 2/1st Heavy Battery went to Ambon Island. I submitted my name for all of these, but it was not to be. After Japan entered the war, more volunteers were called for and from the Permanent Ports around Australia, small groups became composite Batteries, and were known by letters "A,B,C" etc.

Once again I submitted my name and this time I was accepted for "B" Heavy Battery. Also, at this

time I received my promotion to Bombardier. The day finally came and we set off for Royal Park via the Mars and then bus and train to Geelong and Melbourne where we met up with others from West and South Australia.

After a short "final leave", we entrained for the northern parts of Australia, and finally arrived at Townsville, and Fort Kissing Point.

This is where we first met up with the new guns in our life, and we saw our 155mm guns for the first time. More training, and then a spell over on Magnetic Island, helping to place two 155mm guns in position.

Meanwhile, "A" Battery was posted to Milne Bay, where they were in action against the Japanese Forces trying to make a landing. "B" became "C" and we were sent to the Port Moresby area, and we sailed on the "Taroon", and our first position was out near Pyramid Point, and later near Bootless Inlet, with our 155mm guns on a concrete base. Port Moresby also had a 6 inch Battery just near the town.

Fortunately, we defeated the Japanese Forces at Milne Bay and over the Kokoda Track. We stayed in our position until early 1944, when we were relieved by fresh Batteries. Meanwhile, I had done some moving around: first, to a Radar Unit, second, to a fresh 6 pounder Battery on the other side of Port Moresby Harbour, and then finally to "A" Heavy Battery, who, after Milne Bay, had to come up to the Port Moresby area. During April, we shipped out for some home leave, and following this leave returned to Brisbane, and finished up at the Fort down on the Brisbane River. We heard that these Heavy Batteries were to be broken up, and so a group of us put in for a transfer to the 2/6th Field Regiment, and for me a cycle was complete. I had started off in the Field Artillery in 1937, and now I had returned. With the 2/6th Field Regiment, I was stationed in the beautiful area around Toowoomba, then on the Tablelands, and then we became a part of the force sent to Balikpapan, and I was finally dis-

charged in Melbourne (Royal Park) in January 1946.

My first Army number at Fort Queenscliff was 7266, and later this was prefixed by VP, and so I became VP7266. Whilst in the Port Moresby area, I transferred to the AIF and was given the number VX119792.

Some years later, at an ANZAC Day reunion at the Batman Avenue Drill Hall, I became a member of the RAA Association, and I am still very proud of my continuing contact with the "Gunnery".

"Once a Gunner, always a Gunner!"

Ralph Henshaw

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

As reported in the last edition of Cascabel, Major Warren Barnard resigned from the committee in November 1987. This vacancy has been filled by the appointment of Major Peter Veretennikoff (authorised abbreviation "V12") to the committee.

Peter is currently posted as BMRA on the CDAs staff and will continue the committee's long established link with the serving units.

We welcome Peter to the Association and trust that he will enjoy his time with us.

MEMORABILIA

As the years slip past one realises that, more and more, the value of gunner memorabilia is becoming less and less - it is becoming lost. Homes of gunner ex-servicemen do contain valuable and sometimes, one-off items which can be of great interest to all artillerymen. The next generation is very likely to lose them for want of information and interest in them. NOW is the time for all old gunners to seek out and sort out possible memorabilia from odd corners. If handed to the care of this Association such items stand a very good chance of survival forever.

Each piece, to ensure its proper

value, should be tagged, before presentation to the Association. Required information is its circumstance of collection, from which area, the date, and the name of the person who saved it.

Added to the above, we are calling for articles which can be immediately put to use by the young gunners of today. Brass cap and lapel badges (bursting bombs) for example, which in today's army are made of plastic material. Gunners of today will wear with pride honest to goodness brass badges which have a history and will not break. Look for that old button box!

Also - think too of this: Sam Browne belts and Artillery Swords. We are making a plea for these, which will remain the property of this Association after their donation. Each shall be affixed with a small brass plate recording the name of the donor. Belts and swords will be loaned to aspiring young gunner officers for use on ceremonial occasions. (2/15 Fd Regts' Freedom of the City of Dandenong, for instance, later this year).

Maps, drill books on all artillery ordnance, hand books for the ordnance of 18PR MKII and MKIV, 60PR, 4.5HOW, 25PR or any other like publication. All have value and we would appreciate having yours.

I ask you to have a real search for these items, they can, in this day and age, be easily thrown out and we wish to preserve them for the edification of future gunners - thanking you in advance.

Major Norman Whitelaw

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions for the next issue of Cascabel are requested to reach the Editor not later than FRI 17JUN88.

Please forward your article to:
"CASCABEL"

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