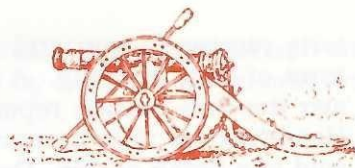


# CASCABEL

Newsletter of

The ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY  
ASSOCIATION (Victoria) INCORPORATED

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Number 26

October 1990

## **The President Writes:**

At the Annual General Meeting on 23rd. August I was able to report to a good muster of members that the Association had completed yet another successful year, while the Committee had already completed the planning of activities that would ensure that year 1990/91 was equally exciting.

Our Colonel Commandant, Major General John Stevenson gave a lively talk about his visit to the UK, particularly his audience with the Queen our Captain-General, and the proposal to move the Artillery Museum to the Royal School of Artillery at Larkhill. The CO, 2/15 Fd Regt, LtCol Mike Buckridge advised the meeting on the state of the Regiment in Victoria, informing us about the exercises carried out by members of his Unit in the Northern Territory to familiarise them with their assigned war-time task.

While enjoying supper after the meeting, members were able to view the BBC TV film "The Gunners", a visual history of the Regiment which was enhanced by screened shots of Australian Gunners in action in both

of the World Wars.

For supper and refreshments we are indebted to Mrs Maris Sloan, the "Battery Mother" of 2 Fd Bty, Dandenong and to Sgt George Beale, whose assistance has continued for more than 30 years, earning him a well-deserved Certificate of Commendation from the Commander Land Forces.

Your Committee remains unchanged except for the loss of Captain John Traill, whose new home, near Heyfield, is out of reach of the Regiment and the Association. Thank you John for your considerable contribution to the Regiment and for your work on behalf of the Association. The new committee member is Major Brian Jackson a long time member of 10 Medium Regiment who has the knowledge and enthusiasm needed for the task. All in all, a successful meeting.

The story that follows reinforces the truth of the adage "one person's rubbish is another person's treasure". Following the replacement of the 25pdr with 105<sup>mm</sup> ordnance in the 1960's, the Federal Government offered the 25pdr's to RSL Sub-Branches, free of charge. A Sub-Branch in Western Vic-

toria received a gun and placed it in front of their building. A few months ago the Sub-Branch reported to RSL Headquarters that the gun had been sold to a Scrap dealer. Consternation reigned at Anzac House and the State Executive issued an edict that no gun or similar memorabilia was to be disposed of by a Sub-branch without the approval of the said State Executive. The Chairman of the RSL Historical Committee (aka President RAA Association) was instructed to investigate. Without any investigation at all, but purely by chance, he discovered that the "scrap dealer" was in fact a collector who, like most collectors, deals. The collector is restoring the gun to its original condition, having sold it to a museum. Which museum - The RA Museum, at the Rotunda in London. They want it because like almost all 25pdr's in Australia, it has no muzzle brake. So, the 25pdr that was discarded by the Army, then scrapped by an RSL Sub-Branch, will spend the next century or so as arguably the best known Australian Field piece on Earth.

With this issue of CASCABEL is the Programme of Events card. Please read it and join in the activities listed. The visit to Point Nepean will be a day full of interest, while the St. Barbara's Day parade and BBQ never fails to please.

Cheers

**Keith Rossi**

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*Articles in this issue are about the Australian Siege Artillery and the capture of the Nadzab airfield New Guinea 1943.*

## **ANOTHER 75th ANNIVERSARY IN 1990.**

*The Sailing From Melbourne Of The Australian Siege Artillery Brigade in July 1915.*

By Major Warren Perry MBE ED RL

When reading the President's interesting comments in the April 1990 issue of CASCABEL on the 75th Anniversary of the landing of the AIF at Gallipoli on Sunday 25th April 1915, I was reminded of another 75th Anniversary that is of interest to Australian Gunners today and it will be coming up soon.

It is the 75th Anniversary of the sailing of the Australian Siege Artillery Brigade, AIF from Melbourne on Saturday 17th July 1915 for active service in Europe in the War of 1914-18.

Although a history of this Brigade exists in manuscript form in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra it has not been published in book form. It was written by the late Brigadier G.E. Manchester (1885-1957) who was one of the Brigades later Battery Commanders. I remember him in the post-war era as a good instructor. He had too a granite-like exterior which concealed a "heart of gold".

The Brigade's original establishment provided for a Brigade Headquarters and two Siege Batteries. The Brigade was raised officially on or

about 21st May 1915; it was recruited from officers and other ranks of the RAGA which was then the Permanent branch of Australia's Garrison Artillery. From the outset the members of the Brigade were concentrated in Melbourne.

The first CO of the Brigade was LtCol W.A. Coxen (1870-1949) who had already established a reputation as the CI of the School of Gunnery which was then located at South Head in Sydney. The 2IC of the Brigade was the senior Battery Commander - Major F.W. Osbourne (1869-1953). Later, he became the second and last CO of the Brigade.

When writing Unit histories it is rarely recognised that the principal officers in an Artillery unit are the Commanding Officer, the Second in Command, the Adjutant and the Quartermaster whilst the principal Warrent Officer is the Regimental Sergeant Major. Without them the organisation of a unit could collapse in time of great stress.

The original Adjutant of the Australian Siege Artillery Brigade was Captain (later Major) G.St.J.F. McDonald (1882-1918). The original Quartermaster, according to my research, was Lt (later Major) Charles Morris (1862-1935). He had been a Warrent Officer in the RAGA and in 1915 was 53 years of age.

Much mental labour has also been expended by me in determining who the original RSM of the Brigade was. I believe him to have been WO1, and later LtCol James Daniel Jones (1881-1953).

A farewell march of the Brigade through the City of Melbourne took place on Thursday afternoon 15th July 1915. Two days later the CO, LtCol Coxen and his Brigade embarked in Melbourne and sailed for the United Kingdom. There the Brigade completed its mobilisation before proceeding to the Westwern Front in Europe for Active Service.

The Brigades last two months in the UK were spent at Taunton in Somerset where the members of the Brigade established good and cordial relations with the local residents of Taunton. On a recent visit to Taunton, in May 1990, in search of any trace of the Brigades presence there 75 years ago, I found none. Time may have obliterated any that may have existed. In February 1916 the Brigade began to march out from Taunton to proceed to France.

Space does not permit the remainder of the Brigades interesting history to be examined here. It was a distinguished history and four of its original officers became in later years General Officers. They were MajGen W.A. Coxen, MajGen B.M. Morris, LtGen E.K. Smart and MajGen W.W. Whittle.

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## **CAPTURE OF NADZAB AIR- FIELD**

*An abbreviated version of the role played by Australian Paratroop Artillerymen in the Capture of NADZAB Airfield New Guinea 5th September 1943.*

During August 1943 the combined American and Australian Staff Officers were planning a major attack on the strategic town of Lae, northern New Guinea. The 9th Australian Division was to launch a naval assault from the east, whilst the 7th Australian Division (of which, we, the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment were part, would make an airlifted assault from the west. To enable this to be achieved it was first necessary that the old overgrown civilian airstrip at 'NADZAB', some thirty odd miles west of Lae should be captured.

The task of capturing and putting this old strip into some sort of working order, in readiness for the airlift of hundreds of Australian infantry and artillerymen plus stores and equipment needed for an all-out attack on Lae from the west, was assigned to the American 503 Parachute Regiment consisting of three infantry battalions.

During the planning stages, the CO of the 2/4th Field Regiment, LtCol Allan Blyth, learned that the American paratroops would be landing without artillery support. He suggested his gunners could and would provide that support. The plan was put to our GOC, Major General Geo. Vasey, who agreed to go along with the idea, providing the Americans could train us in approximately a fortnight; this they

agreed to do and two officers, Lieutenants Armstrong and Blake were given the task of moulding an Australian gunner contingent into a workable group of paratroops.

The selection process of the personnel required for this operation was unique by any standards. We were interviewed separately by one of our officers. It was explained to us that a highly secret mission was being planned. I was asked would I care to be one of the selected group. I agreed to be part of the team, (but deep in my mind I wondered what sort of mission it would turn out to be). I was given to understand that the nature of the mission would not be divulged until a later occasion and was told under no circumstances to breathe a word to anyone of the preceeding conversation. Later I was told to present myself at RHQ, not knowing who was to make up the rest of the party.

Imagine our surprise one morning, when troops seemed to be coming 'out of the woodwork', to be paraded as a body for the first time, and quietly put out of our suspense - we were to be trained as paratroops, to give artillery support to an American Parachute Regiment. It was explained, that if anyone saw fit to withdraw from his selection, he was given the opportunity of taking one step forward, and leave the group without any questions asked. It was hardly what you call volunteering, but we all decided to give it our best shot.

Our move to the American Paratroop company was immediate; where we were welcomed by the Commanding Officer Colonel Kinsler, who congratulated us on the step we had

taken, wished us well and hoped that someday we would be invested with the American Parachute Badge!!

We were superbly fit and coped with the training programme without any major hitch. I think we more than surprised our American friends, just how adaptable we were. After approximately one week's training on the ground, we were given one practice jump from 1,000 feet; unfortunately one officer, Lt. A. Evans and gunners Coutts and Stewart were injured on landing and took no further part in the operations. We were now down to 30 officers and men. At the last moment another officer, Lt. Allan Clayton joined the party and to his great credit, his first jump was straight into action; a very commendable effort. Our final count was 31 officers and men, ably led by a brilliant young officer Lieutenant John Pearson M.C. Two years later he was KIA. in Borneo, a very sad loss of a most popular officer. After a fortnight's training our instructors deemed us good enough and ready for action. This was not a bad effort from a standing start, but more was to come.

Our two 25 pounder short barrel guns were broken down into approximately six parts, each with coloured parachutes attached; different colours for different parts of the gun for easy identification, when it came to re-assembly. Stores of various nature were enclosed in canvas panniers with chutes attached; we were now ready for the greatest adventure of our lives.

On the eve of 'D Day' our Regimental Chaplain paid us a visit, and in the quiet shadows of a valley near our camp, invited us to participate in a

religious service for the repose of our souls if the worst should happen. A large tree stump was the 'altar'. Padre Corrigan, a dedicated man provided a service with great dignity. It was a very private affair, each man alone with his own thoughts of what the morrow might bring forth.

5th September 1943 'D Day' had arrived; this would be the ultimate test of our 'resolve'. Would we have the intestinal fortitude to go through with it, of this we had no doubt; one's greatest fear is not the fear of the unknown - but the fear that one may not perform as well as one's peers.

Quite early in the morning we were taken by truck to an airfield at Moresby, where the entire field was filled with DC3 aircraft followed by Liberator bombers; what an electric atmosphere prevailed. We very quickly loaded onto our assigned aircraft. Shortly after 'take off' we became part of a great aerial 'armada' consisting of 302 aircraft which had taken off from eight different airfields in the Moresby and Dobodura areas. Each group made rendezvous right on target over the mountains, and proceeded on their flight path to the Watut and Markham Valleys. Ninety six DC3 aircraft carried American paratroops, supplies and 31 gunners of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment. The balance of this air fleet was made up of bombers of various calibre, each with a specific job to do, whilst around and above was the fighter groups providing cover from enemy attack if it should eventuate. Five weather aircraft were deployed along the route to keep this massive air fleet on target and to see that its precious cargo of paratroops

were deposited right on the drop zones assigned to them. This great exercise in logistics was achieved with no major mishap.

The three battalions of American paratroops proceeded direct to their respective drop zones, whilst the five aircraft containing the 2/4th gunners and their cargoes of guns etc., landed at Tsili Tsili, a small emergency airfield at the head of the Markham Valley and waited for approximately an hour, whilst the Americans made their landings secure. Shortly we were in the air again and proceeding to our designated drop zone. We flew in over the Markham River with the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion who had marched over the mountains, laying in wait below us. As we neared our target area, our American jump master called us to attention with the order to STAND UP AND HOOK UP (this we did by hooking a snap locked canvas line to a cable running down the centre of the aircraft above our heads). We checked our parachute assembly. With the pilot banking our aircraft to line up with the DZ it was impossible to get a balanced view of what lay below. Suddenly the RED light was ON, and above the roar of the plane's engines and wind, the jump master called out STAND IN THE DOOR. Almost immediately he shouted his words of wisdom "JUMP YOU BASTARDS, JUMP". This we did - belly to back, emptying that aircraft in eight seconds flat. In retrospect it was an exceptional man who did not get a sinking feeling in the stomach at the order to JUMP.

A twenty m.p.h. cross wind made landing a hazardous exercise; a few fellows landing in trees. Bill Lidgerwood

was probably our worst casualty sustaining a broken shoulder blade when he collided with a large tree trunk.

The real heroes were 'Staker' Braddock, Bill Lidgerwood, Don Laurie, Allan Donnelly, Col Kennedy, Jack Stannard, Crief Wilson, John Boal, who had been given the job of pushing the 'gun parts' and all items of heavy equipment out the wide cargo doors of the aircraft and not fall out themselves. It must have been a hair-raising experience. After this exercise they then had to jump into space through a very wide door; they all deserved some tangible recognition.

With the benefit of hindsight all of our equipment was far too heavy, cumbersome and outmoded for this type of operation. The American radios with which we were equipped were pre-historic to say the least. The collection and assembly of the various gun parts; some weighing up to 600 pounds, spread out over a large area in kunai grass up to five feet high, with blistering heat, made the job herculean. But despite the difficulties, we had one gun ready for action the first evening. That night we slept like the dead in silken parachutes. It would be fair to say we were lucky to have survived this operation, because we jumped into enemy held territory without our small arms, not even a grenade. Our American instructors had deemed us far too inexperienced to jump with all sorts of bits and pieces such as rifles and Owen guns hung all over us. Consequently all small arms were encased in a canvas pannier, with chute attached. This was the first item out the door of the leading aircraft, closely followed by Lt. John Pearson. If we had met stiff op-

position on landing, we may well have been history, before we had time to accomplish anything, but we did find our small arms and we did survive!!

It could quite truthfully be said that our contribution did not shorten the war by one day, but we were part of a combined force that secured the NADZAB airstrip, that enabled our own 7th Division to be safely airlifted and deposited right on the doorstep of a major battle zone.

We were looking forward to our own troops coming in. The real push would then start for Lae. We were all looking forward to some good solid Aussie rations.

The American paratroops had no doubt learned a lot in this, their first action; they had set far too many booby traps for their own good and indiscriminate bursts of machine gun fire at 'night noises' had been unnerving. I think we all had a renewed feeling of confidence seeing our own infantry casually walking past to take over the fighting role that was about to begin in earnest.

We had been given a difficult assignment and we like to think that we had done all that was humanly possible to fulfil our obligations to the best interests of the Regiment we were so proud of. We deemed it both an honour and a privilege to be part of the first Australian group of soldiers ever to parachute into action.

In the final analysis, I believe that all ranks acquitted themselves well and I guess we would be less than human if we did not consider ourselves something a 'bit special'.

*Compiled by Ian G. Robertson and submitted by both Lou Longworth and Arch Paige.*

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## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

With this issue of CASCABEL, all annual members should receive a renewal form. At the AGM held in August, the subscription rates were set at \$8.00 per annum or \$80.00 for life membership. These are unchanged from last year. Please help me with the admin and return the form and your cheque as soon as possible.

It is with pleasure that we welcome the following new members:

Sgt W. Hawker  
Capt W.J. Smith  
LtCol R.G. Waters  
Gnr J.F. Langlands  
Sgt M.L. Mellington  
Maj F.B. Jackson  
Gnr W.P. Hamilton

It is with regret that I report the death, on 2nd June, of Lt F.G. Weller.

Our present membership stands at 377.

Should any member need to contact me, telephone 781 2633 at work or 787 7852 at home. Any written communication can be sent to P.O. Box 309 Frankston 3199.

David Osborne

Membership Secretary

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

We would like congratulate on their promotions the following committee members: WO2 Garry Rolfe & Sgt Steven Draper of 2/15 Fd Regt.

I have included as an insert to this issue a photocopy of the Land Commanders commendation to Sgt George Beale which was presented to George by the Comd 3 Div. Those of you who know George will agree it is well and truly earned - congratulations George.

Did you know - The most famous of heavy siege guns of early times is the bronze cannon of 12 palms (25 inches) calibre made by Mahomet II for the siege of Constantinople in 1453. It weighed nearly 19 tons and was 17 feet long. It required a frame or carriage of 30 wagons to move it and it was drawn by a team of 60 oxen; in addition 200 men had to march beside it to support the weight, while 250 workmen went ahead to smooth the roads and strengthen the bridges. It took two months to move it 150 miles. Its stone pellet weighed over 600 pounds with a range of one mile and the fastest rate of fire achieved was seven times in one day. Though ridiculously cumbersome it showed an ambitious spirit in the desire for really heavy artillery.

and also:

In France and England (13th century) the word artillery meant bows and arrows. Henry VIII in 1537 granted a charter to the "*Guyld of St. George*", later to become the Honourable Artillery Company, a fraternity "to be overseers of the science of artillery, that is to witt, long bowes, cross bowes and hand-gonnes

for the better encrease of the defence of our realme" and a chronicler in 1571 says "Artillerie nowadays is taken for two things, gunnes and bowes".

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## FROM THE EDITORS DESK

Once again I would like to thank all who have submitted articles for publication. I have a few that fall into the category of "Ben Hur" productions that I will need to serialise. A couple of short articles sent in about the Korean War will be printed soon.

Please note my new Business Hours phone number: 284 4606. Facsimile number 284 4702. Postal address is 2 Milan Street WANTIRNA 3152.

Ross A. Peterken.  
Editor



RAA ASSOCIATION (VICTORIA) INCORPORATED

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30TH JUNE, 1990

MEMBERS FUNDS

GENERAL FUND

Balance brought forward	7394.41	
Add Surplus for year	1429.23	
	<u>8823.64</u>	
Donation - Maj P Whitelaw	1000.00	
		9823.64

RAA SOCIAL FUND

Balance brought forward	6961.18	
Add Surplus for year	3155.11	
		10116.29

MUSEUM & MEMORABILIA FUND

Balance brought forward	720.88	
Add Surplus for year	227.02	
		947.90
		<u>\$20887.83</u>

Represented by:

ASSETS

Stock on Hand - RAA Association Shop Items	953.35	
- Presentation Plaques	382.60	
Cash at Bank - Commonwealth Savings Bank Ltd	7201.88	
Term Deposits - Commonwealth Trading Bank Ltd	18000.00	
Prepayments - Artillery Ball	500.00	
	<u>27037.83</u>	

LESS LIABILITIES

Subscriptions Received in Advance	6150.00	
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NET ASSETS:

\$20887.83

RAA ASSOCIATION (VICTORIA) INCORPORATEDSTATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE FOR YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE, 1990GENERAL FUNDINCOMEEXPENDITURE

Subscriptions	2490.00	AGM - Supper & Entertainment	183.76
Interest - Current Accounts	137.09	Supper - Happy Hours	300.00
Interest - Term Deposits	1246.89	Bar Snacks Anzac Day	200.00
Sale - Membership Badges	165.00	Donation - St Bartholomews	50.00
Profit RAA Assoc (Vic) Shop	54.23	- R.H.A.	99.34
Surplus - Back to the Regt	108.75	Postage	1029.30
		Printing & Stationery	410.12
		Insurance	117.70
		Registration Fee "Cascabel"	50.00
		Lodgment Annual Return	24.10
		Gifts & Presentations	174.74
		Glass Printer - Artwork	90.00
		Bank Charges	43.67
		Surplus for year	1429.23
	<u>\$4201.96</u>		<u>\$4201.96</u>

RAA SOCIAL FUNDINCOMEEXPENDITURE

Interest - Current Accounts	117.17	Deficit - Gnr Dinner (1990)	21.03
- Term Deposits	1065.75	Surplus for year	3155.11
Surplus - Arty Ball (1989)	1715.83		
Surplus - Gnr Dinner (1989)	277.39		
	<u>\$3176.14</u>		<u>\$3176.14</u>

MUSEUM AND MEMORABILIA FUNDINCOMEEXPENDITURE

Interest - Current Accounts	10.40	Surplus for year	227.02
- Term Deposits	94.62		
Donations	122.00		
	<u>\$227.02</u>		<u>\$227.02</u>

RAA ASSOCIATION (VICTORIA) INCORPORATED

FUNDS STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 1990

SOURCE OF FUNDS

Surplus for year - General Fund	1429.23
- RAA Social Fund	3155.11
- Museum Fund	227.02
Increase in - Subscriptions in Advance	1419.00
Decrease in - Prepayments - Back to the Regt.	104.52
- Keycard Account	2271.79
- Sundry Debtors	42.50
- Stock on Hand	595.55
	<u>\$9244.72</u>
	=====

APPLICATION OF FUNDS

Increase in - Cash at Bank	3964.72
- Term Deposits	5000.00
Decrease in - Payments Received in Advance	
Back to the Regiment Night	280.00
	<u>\$9244.72</u>
	=====

AUDIT REPORT

I have audited the accounts of the Association for the year ended 30 June 1990 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards.

In my opinion, the accompanying Statements of Income and Expenditure and Funds Statement for the year ended 30 June 1990 and Balance Sheet as at that date represent a true and fair view of the result of the Association's activities for the year then ended and of the state of its affairs at the 30 June 1990.

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T.O. Hopkins W02  
B.Bus. C.P.A.  
Honorary Auditor  
August 1990

AUSTRALIAN ARMY



# Commendation

3147655 Sergeant William George Beale  
Australian Army Catering Corps

*Your Commanding Officer has brought to my attention your distinguished performance of duty as the Battery Cook, 23rd Field Battery.*

*In particular, I commend you for your dedication and tireless effort in assisting with catering arrangements for an extensive range of Divisional and Brigade sub-unit exercises, mess occasions and community social functions.*

*By your diligence and professionalism, you have gained the respect and admiration of your subordinates, peers and superiors alike.*

*Your efforts bring much credit to you, your unit and the Army Reserve and I commend you for your outstanding achievements which are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Australian Army.*

M.P. BLAKE  
Major General  
Land Commander Australia

3 July, 1990