"SAPPER SUMMIT"

RAE CORPS NEWSLETTER

VICTORIAN ENGINEERS

December 2002 *ISSN 1325 – 7676* *Number 40*

SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL OUR SAPPER FAMILY

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Printed by: Kwik Kopy, 6 Burwood Highway, Burwood

EDITORIAL

My 32 army years never took me to a war zone, but tourism has.

The most extreme was Northern Ireland, which I visited twice in the early seventies. I arrived by plane; as the airport bus drove off through hedgerowed countryside I looked in vain for camouflaged IRA positions and troop movements. Relaxing and entering town I noted numerous burnt-out buildings. 'Jeez, they've had a lot of house fires here!' I thought. Further in were whole cleared blocks amongst the familiar mural and graffiti-covered Belfast terraces. Then it hit me - this has been a battleground for years! One pub I drank in, bombed more than once, seemed to bulge - more like a piggy bank than a geometric shape. Ironically, Clint Eastwood was playing in 'Magnum Force' at a city cinema.

Walking through Belfast sharpened your instincts, brought back patrolling skills practised during nasho training. Check that roofline! That big bugger on the other side of the street looks tough, that is, psychopathic! What about that gang of kids on the corner? See anyone behind those windows? No rifles protruding! Here comes an Army vehicle - move well out of the way! What's that noise in the distance? And indeed I did hear a bomb explode, but from the safety of my middle-class Protestant suburb. In a café, to paraphrase Mae West, I looked at a male diner at another table: 'Are you just pleased to see me, or is that an IRA or Loyalist gun in your pocket?' And indeed the pistol butt eventually protruded.

My bus through Armagh suddenly took off across a brick-strewn vacant block -- the quick-witted driver had seen blue lights flashing down the road, where a bomb had just exploded. In Derry, with its amazing mediaeval wall - the glass café doors were locked, and a man and Alsatian checked

you out before letting you in to eat. Nevertheless, the Tommies in their armoured Land Rovers were courteous, professional, neutral - what a crap job they've had these last three decades!

Across the border in the Republic the farming town of Letterkenny was as quiet as Orbost; the police were unarmed; people smiled.

Other war zones in steeply lessening order of severity and tension have been the Turkish-Armenian border - the ancient Armenian capital of Ani on the Turkish side was open to tourists, but soldiers patrolled the ruins with you to ensure you didn't photograph the Soviet lines just over the river. I was in Nicosia along the Green Line with provocative Turkish slogans outlined hugely in rocks on nearby bare hillsides. There was my stroll between 125th and 40th Streets in New York; for a long while the only white Americans I saw were fire crews. Then that night in Auckland I made an after-dinner speech on landcare to a group of drunken Kiwis.

When you read this I will have been in a more troubled location than NZ. The Katmandu valley and Nepal have enchanted millions of tourists since the sixties nomads arrived in their Kombis. Over the last five years a Maoist resistance has built up. Ghurka fighting Ghurka! That's no joke!

Why am I going? For 15 years or so we used to have overseas students to dinner, as part of a rewarding hospitality program run by Foreign Affairs. It was inexplicably terminated; the thank you letter included the information that our last student was from Nepal, here to do his VCE. He proved a great bloke; we watched his academic successes unfold, and his passion for Australian Rules and politics develop. He worked as an electronics engineer in Singapore for two years and returned to complete his Masters. He'll marry in Katmandu on 14 December.

Finally, I want to say that the changing world - post-September 11, post-Bali - means that we have to renew our interest in Asia, learn its languages, appreciate its customs and faiths, increase our knowledge and networks - immerse ourselves. The process is well under way anyhow because of our love of travel, our business instincts and our multi-cultural community. And we have a lot to offer.

My first real exposure to Asia was through a five-week trip to Sumatra and West Java with my wife in 1985. We travelled on local buses, ferries, a coastal trader - fish-heads and rice for breakfast, the cab of a goods train, as well as passenger trains in Java. This was a fantastic adventure; the ease of finding a basic but comfy room, with nearby cheap, excellent food and beer, greatly lightened the challenge of day-long drives over rugged roads in buses packed with carsick or kretek-smoking passengers. (Kreteks are the distinctive and not unpleasant-smelling Indonesian clove cigarettes.)

Sumatra was superb, but even then felt crowded. Forest was becoming farmland. On the west coast, in a bus driven by a handsome youth who sang much of the way - I called him Frank Sumatra - we passed through recently fired jungle, studded with settlers' huts and vegetable patches. The bus dropped off cardboard packs containing new Stihl chain saws. Apart from the transportation and the clearing gear, the scene must have been very similar to that in which my father grew up. His family burnt and cleared steep mountain ash forest in the hills north of Foster in a vain attempt to establish a dairy farm.

Java was full of people, but I loved the friendly provincial cities, the pace, the Dutch connections, the volcanoes, Borobudur temple, the spectacular tropical storms, and surprise! Jakarta proved terrific. I'd love to go back.

One poignant item post-Bali: a female victim loved Bali and organised house-parties for big groups of her friends, at the same villa. Each time late in the holiday the guests would cook and serve the meal to the Balinese staff. I found that a very Australian gesture - indeed the ADF practises something very similar every Christmas.

Best wishes for your own Christmas, and for a superb New Year.

RECENT EVENTS

Visits to Light Horse & Artillery and Melbourne Tank Museums.

The visit to the 2 museums, organised jointly by RAE Historical & Heritage Committee and the RAA Association, on 15 September was thoroughly enjoyed by all attendees.

The tour group first visited the Light Horse & Field Artillery Museum at Nar Nar Goon, where the curator, Bernie Dingle conducted a tour of the exhibits. These included a large collection of WW1 horse drawn transports and weapons, plus uniforms and equipment used in both WW1 and WW2, as well as numerous photographs from Gallipoli and France.

Much of the display was devoted to items related to the use of artillery pack horses in WW1, a subject of passionate interest to Bernie, who spoke at length about the terrible casualty rate in the horse lines, due to exhaustion, lack of suitable fodder and poor harness, as well as battle casualties.

The display also included a Wiles cooker in working order and a captured Krupps 77mm gun.

At the conclusion of the tour Bernie served the visitors morning tea, including home made Anzac biscuits, after which the group moved on to the Tank Museum at Narre Warren, where they enjoyed a BBQ and picnic lunch.

The museum owner, John Bellfield then conducted a tour of the collection, which included tanks, scout cars, APCs, trucks, jeeps and approx 20 different guns. This was followed by a visit to his workshop and inspection of a tank presently being restored, as well as its fully restored 800hp radial engine, and finally a visit to the graveyard of vehicles still awaiting restoration.

Unfortunately John reported that the museum may move interstate in 2003, due to current insurance problems.

Merv Taggart, President of the RAA Association moved the concluding vote of thanks to Bernie and John for a most entertaining day.

RAE VIETNAM VETERANS AGM.

The RAE Vietnam Veterans Association held its Annual General Meeting at the Noble Park RSL on 20 October 2002.

Unfortunately there was only a small attendance but sufficient to fill all positions on Committee for the coming year.

As a result of the meeting ,
Col E J Wertheimer AM RFD will continue as Patron and the major office bearers elected for the coming year are:
President: Allan Brown
Vice President: Roger Herrod
Sec/Treas.: Max and Lorraine Livingston
Committee Members: H. Bromley, L. Cowell, J. Crosling, G. Hawkins, J. Muir, and A. Rantall.

The Association's next function will be Anzac Day 2003 with the normal meeting at the Turf Club Hotel, North Melbourne after the march.

16 CONSTRUCTION REGIMENT RAE (SR) 50th Birthday Celebration, Sunday 13 October 2002.

16 Construction Regiment RAE (SR) was the second Supplementary Reserve Engineer Regiment to be formed in Victoria. The Regiment, sponsored by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria was formed and attended its first Annual Camp at Site 17, Seymour, in 1952.

For those unfamiliar with the Regiment's history it is suggested that you consult the RAE publications Swan Street Sappers and RAE History Vol 4. Briefly, the Regiment initially expanded rapidly and in its early years included Construction, Quarrying, Electrical & Mechanical Squadrons and miscellaneous sub units, and at one stage 16 was the largest SR Regiment in Australia.

Achievements by its personnel included the provision of officers to work with the RAE in Vietnam in 1967 to design and supervise installation of the electrical distribution system at the Nui Dat base.

On a number of occasions 16 and 22 Regiments attended Annual Camps together and there was healthy competition between the two Regiments. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors including problems for middle level officers gaining time to complete promotion training courses, pressure from employment activities and finally reduction in the support from the sponsoring authority, particularly in the 1970s, the Regiment was finally wound up, although some sub units continued under A Res normal conditions.

It is good to see that many of the members continue their interest in their old Regiment and the History & Heritage Committee joins with the rest of the Sapper family in congratulating two of their retired officers, David Eakins and Bob Fitzwilliam on having organised a wonderful 50th birthday celebration for the Regiment. Details of the event follow.

During the celebrations Mike Meaney and Terry Olsen passed over 3 old movie films showing some of the Regiment's early activities. These are to be passed on to the RAE Historical & Heritage Committee for safe keeping.

Report on 16 Regiment 50th Birthday Celebration, by Lt Bob Fitzwilliam.

The above occasion was celebrated at the East Malvern RSL on Sunday 13 October 2002, attended by 36 members of the Regiment and with 29 apologies. The day started with greetings as people arrived, some had not seen each other for many years. It was great to see that the spirit of the Regiment lived on though many years have passed and long distances have separated the members. A warm welcome was given to our visitors, Maj Les Malseed, WO1 Norm Dodgson and Sgt Sam Bruton.

Following grace, an excellent three-course meal was enjoyed and during lunch many memories of the past were recalled.

Maj Mike Meaney acted as MC for the day and added some reminiscence of times and happenings in the field over years past, this was greeted with applause and laughter. A letter was received from our past CO, LtCol (Deadly) Ernst, sending his greetings and best wishes for the day. He was unable to attend during to a health setback. WO1 Jack Halket gave a resume of the years 1952 to 1962 and this was followed by Maj Pat Dunlievie on the years 1963 to 1972.

The day concluded with final drinks, coffee and cake.

Back: Mjr Roger Clark, Ted Kirchner, Ian Kincaid, Sgt Ron Merigan, John Goss, Alan Faith, Peter Everett, Bob Woodger.
3rd: Des Oldis, Bryan Kesby, Terry Olsen, Ivan Pellas, Glen Moir, Cpl Slim Somerville, Geoff Causon, N.Reynolds, Laurie Kempton.
2nd: Sgt Ken Olsen, Jack Halket, Cpt Ted Stokes, Bill Cook, Chas Simsen, Sam Bruton, Jack Hinshelwood, Alan Holmes.
Front: Mjr P.L. Dunlevie, W.L.Mottram, Mjr Mike Meany, Lt Bob Fitzwilliam, Cpt David Eakins, WO1 Norman Dodgson, WO2 Fred Milkins, Cpt Bob Scorse.

Roll Call At 16 Construction Regiment 50th Birthday Celebration

The Toast to the Regiment

Capt Ted Stokes

Mister President and Gentlemen: In proposing the toast to the Regiment, I am very conscious that to many in the ARA, 16 Construction Regiment CMF SR is just another element that has passed its use by date and is consigned to the dusty shelves of military history – a forgotten experiment, no longer relevant in this hi-tech world.

But for you and I, its history – which began some half a century ago, will live on in the lasting friendships which are renewed each time we meet again at reunions like today, and in the timeless recollections of the many shared adventures, some exciting, some comic, some frustrating, some tragic.

We will continue, no doubt, as long as there are any of us left, to look back fondly on the halcyon days of the 50's, 60's and 70's with a justified mixture of pride, amusement and nostalgia. Preparation for war was so much more fun then than it seems to be now.

Though my part in the Regiment was brief compared to many of you (I didn't join until 1960, and my service was interrupted), I took great pride in its traditions, its spirit and my fellow sappers. For some years it was a significant part of my life,

and I am therefore, both honored and humbled to be given the opportunity to propose this Toast, particularly, when there are so many others of you, who would have more claim to the privilege and would make a far better fist of it than I.

If I refer much to my notes, forgive me, but my memory is not quite as it used to be. I guess I am not alone in that.

That so many have gathered here today for this reunion, and some have come from considerable distances, shows that the Regiment lives on yet, at least in ***our*** *hearts and that we treasure the comradeship (or should I say mateship) of those years gone past, and especially the memory of those mates that are no longer with us and have gone to their eternal reward. I hope that as the years slip by, and its ranks grow slimmer, the recollections grow dimmer, that we will continue to gather to celebrate the Regiment and its Sappers.*

It is not without a deep feeling of nostalgia for the nobler things of the past, and a touch of sadness perhaps tinged with deep foreboding for the way things are in the world today, that I recall with you, that the Regiment was born out of that same spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice that marked both the ANZACs and the 2ND AIF. Indeed, most of its founding members had recently seen war service and would bring that invaluable experience into the Regiment to pass on to the coming generation. They were men of vision who saw a need and rose to the occasion.

The Regiment's purpose was preparedness for war, and in a world that yearned for peace, its genesis joined the experiences of war to the diverse engineering skills of the State Electricity Commission, and its success thrived on the enthusiasm, the generosity, the good natured humour and common sense, that characterized the SEC's workforce which made up the bulk of the Regiment's Sappers, and were its backbone for so many years.

Why then a sense of sadness? When I look back on those days, I see in the Regiment a reflection of the Sponsor, the State Electricity Commission in its heyday – optimistic of the future – embarking on the great developments at Morwell, at Eildon and Kiewa, the expansion at Yallourn, and the State Electrification. I see the great diversity of skills, the comradeship, the shared enthusiasm, that characterized much of the SEC workforce in those early days, carried over into the life of the Regiment.

Where in the Corporate World of today do we find a parallel – today we find business totally preoccupied with performance on the share market – their workforce seems no longer a priority, and national pride no longer part of company policy. That's why my sense of sadness -- the days of the SR Regiment seem gone for ever, together, it seems, with the men of vision who saw the need and rose to the occasion.

The Regiment from the very first, possessed in its sappers, fierce loyalties, pride in achievement, a healthy mistrust of officialdom, and an abiding sense of humour so essential to the morale of every army unit. Whatever needed to be done, there was always someone with the requisite contacts, the know-how, and the sheer arse to cut through the red tape and accomplish the task despite the odds.

If I hesitate to cite names or detail specific events, it is because there have been so many great characters in the Regiment, and there are so many stories to tell that it would be impossible to do justice to them in the time available.

But if I recall the frustration of a certain Captain who took more than two years to persuade higher echelons to write off several bent SLRs, or the conniving Sergeant's Mess that reduced a certain BM's cane to pocket sized pieces, it is to illustrate the sapper's abiding mistrust of Bullshit.

Or if I recall the way 39 E & M squadron, when roughing it on a bivouac, used a 62.5 KVA generator to power the OC's electric blanket, it is to illustrate the ingenuity and practical common sense of the Regiment's Sappers.

Or if I recall how 80 Quarrying Squadron lit up a certain Major's tent with a Verey Flare, it is to illustrate that element of surprise which is native to the Regiment's Sappers.

On a more serious note, one of the things that impressed me most about the Regiment was the concern of the senior ranks, both Officers and NCOs, for the men under their command. To me it was never better illustrated in that illustrious CO of the 60s, the late Colonel Reg Wheat. I know I said I would not cite names, but Reg was special. I can still see that bright smile, his floppy cap and hear his gentle rocking laugh.

To illustrate my point – when I was heading off for service in Vietnam, I was leaving a young family, four children, including twins only eighteen months old. I was full of typhoid A & B, smallpox, bubonic plague and a host of other needles. I had no idea what I had got myself into. I didn't want the family to see me off, and as I staggered under the weight of my DP gear, from the taxi at Spencer Street to the waiting Spirit of Protest, I was feeling pretty low and lonely, when suddenly there was Reg to see me off with that big beaming smile. He said simply "I thought you could do with a send-off". I have never forgotten that simple thoughtful consideration which marked the greatness of the man.

In the Vietnam conflict, the Army had somehow overlooked the engineering skills it needed to provide a reliable power supply, which had become indispensable to its logistics, and

16 Regiment was called on to meet the challenge, and did so. The Regiment had fulfilled its purpose.

I hope that in all the effort today to equip our modern Army with the very latest in hi-tech gear, they don't once again overlook the basics – but perhaps the native resourcefulness of the Sapper will yet be able to plug any gaps.

The clouds of war seem to be on the horizon once again. Should it be so, that Australia finds itself involved in a new global conflict, I fear that our shores will not remain inviolate as in the past, and I pray that self-same spirit which impelled the ANZACS, the 2ND AIF and the good men of the 16TH will be found yet again, so that our heritage may be well defended, and truth and justice prevail.

And so I ask you gentlemen to charge your glasses, be upstanding and drink with me to the Regiment: ***The Regiment!***

Letter of Apology from Past CO, Lt Col Tony Ernst.

To: 16 Const Regiment Reunion
From: Tony (Deadly) Ernst

I wish you all a very happy and memorable get together. Old friends are valuable and the best friends, and there are no friendships stronger than those created during time in the services, be it in peace or war.

I had a posting as an ARA Cadre Officer in Sydney, but that of course was more of a training and admin role and did not give much opportunity for close association with the A Res (then CMF) and Supplementary Reserve members of the units.

The change to serving in 29 Plant Squadron and later 16 Construction Regiment was challenging, but most rewarding and a memorable part of my army career. I thank all those who served during my period there -- commanding a construction regiment which had no construction squadrons and which was a mixture of normal conditions CMF and Supplementary Reserve sponsored units manned by personnel of such an extremely wide range of occupations, skills and backgrounds. It was a unique experience that few officers were lucky enough to have, and those that did not experience it, missed out on a great deal.

I had planned to visit the reunion before experiencing a bit of a health set-back and unfortunately for a while my travel range is a bit restricted. Fortunately it is expected that the situation will rapidly improve and I will be firing on all cylinders again soon. I am very disappointed I could not catch up with you all at the re-union. I still have friends and relatives in Victoria whom we try to visit occasionally, and on the next visit I will try to catch up with at least some of you.

In the meantime, should any of you be lucky enough to preview paradise by visiting the Sunshine Coast at any time (although from experience, I expect most of you will be going the other way!), please call in or at least give me a ring. Bob Fitzwilliam has my address and phone/fax number. (still computer ignorant, so no e-mail.)

All the best for a great day.
Kindest regards,
Tony Ernst, 10 July 2002

WOODYS AT DIMBOOLA

In excess of 30 members and partners, Woodpeckers RAE Association enjoyed fair dinkum country hospitality at Dimboola for the Melbourne Cup long weekend.

Saturday saw arrivals from Warragal, Colac, Ballarat, Nathalia, Tyers, Powelltown and Melbourne. The accommodation was dormitory style at the Girl Guides Camp, on the Wimmera River 5kms from town. Some "upper class" attendees opted for self-contained cabins across the paddock at the Host Farm.

The extended weekend was busy starting with fellowship Saturday arvo, a general committee meeting, followed by a lamb spit roast with ALL the trimmings and a fantastic semi-dry electrical storm. Fellowship continued well into Sunday morning.

At approximately 1000 hrs Sunday, a 22 seater hire bus was filled and departed for a day of raucous travel interrupted only by visits to Bests Winery, a country counter lunch at the Great Western Hotel and a tour and wine tasting at Seppelts Great Western.

On return to camp, a River Boat Cruise was waiting for us. Those that opted out of the cruise either wet a line in the river, fired up the barbie, satisfied a thirst, admired the Harley Davo or did at least 3 out of 4. In comparison to Saturday night the scene was tame, with fellowship finishing by the stroke of midnight.

Monday was the day 75% of attendees had opted to return home, but only after visiting, by four wheel drive through the Little Desert, Barneys Shack.

Seeing is believing!! A demonstration of our web site development followed and then the farewells. I have no record of Monday nights doings.

A great weekend, great hospitality provided by our local contingent. As with an end of a season footy trip, to protect the guilty, this report contains no names!

Mick Murray, The Pres

22 Construction Regiment Ex Members Annual Reunion

The annual reunion took place in Echuca on the weekend 8-9-10 November this year and was organised by Maurie Squirrel and Peter Bloor. Unfortunately Maurie was unable to attend as he was overseas, but his organisation was impeccable.

On Friday night we had an informal dinner and get together at the Moama Bowling Club. This was attended by 37 people. There was lots of animated conversations, poker machine playing and of course some beer and wine was consumed, it was a great night. Free day on Saturday but most people went to the craft market or the Echuca Show or both.

Saturday night at 6.30 saw us going aboard the Paddle Steamer 'Pride of the Murray" laden with overflowing eskies and lots of good humour. 52 people attended this night and it was great to see old/new faces at the dinner notably Warren Hardy and Dave Nicholson, Billy Fry attended after a couple of years absence. If I've forgotten any of the first time attendees please accept my apologies. There were the usual toasts and of course "Inverary Inn" led by Keith Bennett, Norm Dodgson and Tony Bourke, just like old times.

Sunday 10th, there was a late morning brunch on the banks of the Murray, thanks to the local Lions Club, some 40 people attended. At the Saturday dinner it was decided that next years annual reunion will take place at Myrtleford and will be hosted by the Old Soldier, Bob Eaton and Peter Bloor. This will occur on the last weekend in October, so please put a note in your diary for Friday 24th to Sunday 26th October 2003.

Tony Bourke

OLD SAPPERS ASSOCIATION INC. CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

THURSDAY 7 NOV.

Ten members and three ladies left Melbourne on the XPT train at 0830. We arrived at Campbelltown approx 1830 and travelled to our accommodation in Liverpool where our Secretary, another member and his wife plus two members of RAE Vietnam Association joined us. Thursday evening was "Tribal Night" at SME so the young at heart attended.

FRIDAY 8 NOV.

After morning Tea at the Officers Mess our group went on a reminiscence tour of SME. True to life "the only thing that is certain is change" and after 30 odd years for some of us the analogy held true. We also took the opportunity to visit the Museum and Corps Shop. Hot and dusty we had to visit both the OR's and Sergeant's Messes. That evening we attended the Beating Retreat Ceremony, which was executed with true military precision and culminated in a splendid fireworks display.

SATURDAY 9 NOV.

All members participated in the Freedom of the City of Liverpool March finishing in Bigge Park -- a truly historic site. That evening we attended the Sappers Centenary Ball. The Mobile Museum was on display plus other entertainment in addition to the ball.

SUMMARY

We are both proud and grateful to have participated in perhaps the most historical event of our Corps in our lifetime.

The serving members made the entire weekend truly memorable with exceptional hospitality and organization.

RAE OFFICERS GOLF DAY

The golf day was a success with 12 players taking part at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club. The winner was Col Glen Fenton, from Defence Materiel Organisation at Victoria Barracks.

Report on Sir Clive Steele Lecture

Lt Col Mark Shephard CSC, of 19 CE Works, gave the Sir Clive Steele Lecture at Oakleigh on 4 October. He spoke of the involvement of RAE in Assistance to Remote Aboriginal Communities.

He covered the wide range of aspects involved in the assistance over recent years. Enormous planning and negotiation is required in the initial stages of each year's program as significant dollars are involved, and the proposed works have to meet the requirements of the relevant Communities. The works usually require very large redeployments of RAE resources across Central or Northern Australia, plus significant civilian works contracts. As well as the obvious facilities improvements, there are additional spin-offs for the local communities with skills training of local workers, concentrated medical attendance during the works period and the benefits to both the Army and aboriginal communities of individual cooperative contact.

However, attendance at the lecture was the lowest ever and the Historical and Heritage Committee was disappointed, given the significant advertising for the event.

REPORTS FROM THE UNITS

22 CONSTRUCTION REGIMENT

As a busy year draws to a close, we reflect on the challenges and successes of the year and look forward to exciting new things to come.

Recruiting and retention remain one of our high priorities. Recruiting of technically trained staff continues to improve with more than twenty tradesmen enlisted this year, a remarkable achievement made possible through the efforts of the recruiting teams in Newborough and Oakleigh South. For 2003, we are looking forward to recruiting a further thirty tradesmen through the Army Reserve Trade Training Scheme and our partnership with Apprenticeships Victoria.

We are very proud of the efforts of SGT Craig Russell, Prince of Wales Award recipient for 2002. Craig will travel to England to spend a month working with the ppp Regiment and the UK Association of Osteopathy.

Unfortunately, rules and regulation force too many of our colleagues to end their service. This year is no different and we have bid farewell to MAJ Cliff Parfitt (31 years) LT Adam Bougton, WO2 Glyn Phillips (Leaving the ARA after 20 years service), SSGT John Morey (31 years), SPR Mick Murray (32 Years). A great deal of experienced lost.

Looking forward to 2003, we say congratulations to CAPT Mark Roberts posted, on promotion to MAJ, as OC 105 Construction. LT Jenny Bourke posted, on promotion to CAPT, to 39 Const Sqn, WO2 Neil Christie promoted to WOI Works Supervisor, 203 Works Sect. We say farewell to MAJ John Raike (OC 39 Const Sqn) posted to 2IC 4CER, MAJ Brent Rodgers (OC 105 Const Sqn) posted to HQ 4 Bde.

The Regiment will be off to annual camp in February. 105 Const Sqn will deploy to Puckapunyal to undertake much needed maintenance and development of the quarry site and access roads, and the Engineer Depot (more commonly known as the mill site). Most will remember the plans to expand the site to include a plant park and training area and improvements to working and living accommodation at the site. Well, we should see significant progress to the realisation of these grand plans. 39 Const Sqn will concentrate on works tasks in the Gippsland Region including works tasks on walking and riding tracks and construction of storage and working facilities at RAAF Base, East Sale. We intend to work our way through the ever more complex maze of administrative and risk management hoops and hurdles to construct a bridge for Parks Victoria at Stevenson's Falls, Forrest, Victoria.

Later in the year, we will have a combined troop deployment to Palm Island to support 17 Const Sqn on ATSIC Army Community Assistance Program (AACAP) 03. Our task, to construct one (possibly two) three-bedroom house for the community on Palm Island. The exercise will include activities that should test our ability to prepare a troop for operational deployment. We are looking forward to the challenge and the opportunity to prove that the regiment is alive-and-well, and capable of meeting its capability objectives.

As we finish up we would like to wish all the peace and happiness that the festive season should bring and hope that it carries on through the next year. We hope that you and your families remain safe and well and look forward to another exciting and event filled year for the regiment.

4 CER SITREP

In February this year CO 4 CER, LTCOL Greg Mirabella, directed that 2002 was to be a period for the Regiment to "reconstitute". The unit's main effort throughout the year has been on courses and qualification, and more lately, recruiting. This effort was given some added assistance when the annual 4 BDE Field Exercise, EX HAMEL was cancelled, allowing the unit to focus inwards.

This all meant that 2002 was never going to be the most exciting year for the Ringwood Sappers, but it was nonetheless a very important one. Training activities throughout the year have been fairly low-key.

Courses

Just about everybody in 4 CER who could or should do a course has done so this year. Of most importance has been promotion courses, particularly for SGT, and after some significant effort by some individuals, the Regiment next year should be able to kick a few Corporals upstairs, and improve the membership of the Combined Mess.

In February most of the Regiment will be deploying to SME for a courses-camp – something the Ringwood sappers have not done for many years. Officers and SNCOs will be completing Demolitions and Mine Warfare courses, and everyone else who's not involved in instructing will be doing Bridging (including FSB), and BBE courses. (It's likely there will be some vacancies on these courses for members from other units, and invitations are being extended).

Recruiting

The unit's recruiting effort shifted into high gear after June. It's been a hard road for the few recruiters, led by CAPT Dave Andrewartha and CPL Adrian Trigt. As is the case for most units across the reserve, lack of staff, hurdles imposed by the Defence Recruiting organizations, and the fight for resources, has meant that recruiting has been harder than ever before.

A key event in the recruiting calendar was 4 CER's effort at the Royal Melbourne Show in September. Drawing on some manpower support from other 4 BDE units, the Regiment set up a large compound at the Show with a range of displays, and staffed it with up to 70 people at a time. The aim was to engage prospects and get them to volunteer their contact details so that we could chase them up afterwards. The event was highly successful, and the unit's recruiters (and the rest of 4 BDE) are still working their way through the database. The Regiment also won the Royal Agricultural Society's top prize – "Best Overall Exhibit" (currently on display in the foyer at Ringwood, along with a few other awards).

Open Day

The Melbourne Show event was followed up immediately with an Open Day at Ringwood, on 6 Nov, with a number of the exhibits from the Showgrounds being simply re-located. It was a low key day, aimed primarily at attracting recruits rather than the general public, but it was quite successful. Around 1200 people visited, and feedback was generally good. The recruiting information sessions conducted on the day were all full, which was a pleasing outcome. Some of the stars of the show were: the new hydraulic power pack going through its paces, the planties working (very theatrically) on re-sheeting the back carpark, and the Night Vision tent.

Mess News

In May this year the Officers & Sergeants Combined Mess re-located back into the main building at Ringwood, after five years in "Scratchley House". It was decided that the necessary improvements to the old house were probably beyond the time resources of the membership in the foreseeable future, and so the upstairs room which originally housed the Sergeant's Mess is now being refitted. The move has been universally popular, and the new mess is already getting far more use than Scratchley House. Thanks for the implementation of this must go to the PMC, WO1 Joe Cochbain, who almost single-handedly has breathed new life into the Mess this year.

Note: LTCOL Mirabella will soon be deciding on the future use of the now vacant Scratchley House. Suggestions include: that it be given over to the various RAE ex-member organizations for use as clubrooms; or that it be converted into a museum. Anyone with any input, or bright ideas, should contact CO 4CER, 9870 7073 or greg.mirabella@defence.gov.au.

The Junior Ranks Club has recently re-commenced Friday night trading. The JRC will be opening one Friday night per month during the training year, and a number of these nights will include entertainment.

People

MAJ Mark Shanks (current 2IC) will be moving to the Inactive Reserve at the end of this year. Mark originally joined the Ringwood Engineers in 1969. MAJ Don Hogben (OC 38 Sqn) is moving across to 22 Const Regt as 2IC, and he will be replaced by MAJ Dave Herman.

The unit has been fortunate to have the services of WO1 Joe Cochbain as RSM (after a year without the position being filled). But unfortunately for 4 CER, Joe is heading back to Sydney to take up the position of RSM of the Incident Response Regiment. WO1 Barry Wade will be taking over the RSM reins in 2003.

The unit is very light-on for ARA staff. The OPSO will be a part-timer, CAPT Melissa Hay, recently transferred from the ARA. The senior full-time member will be the ADJT, CAPT Nick Dennington, who joins us from 1 CER.

Future Ops

After the courses camp in Feb, the unit will be embarking on a new training cycle. Part of the program will be sending a contingent to regular weekend exercises with other BDE units, as part of a Company-Group trial. The culmination of this will be participation in EX CROC 03, at Shoalwater Bay in Sep next year, and we are expecting to send a Troop.

VALE ALLAN HUNNAN

S/SGT ALAN HUNNAN
5 Oct 1938 – 23 Nov 2002

Alan joined 22 Const. Regt. From 15 Medium Regt. R.A.A. in about 1970 as a Sgt-Transport Supervisor. For the next 12 years Alan acted in this capacity, or as a Quartermaster in our "Q" system, but Alan is best remembered by all our drivers as a Senior Driving Instructor on all our driving courses during this period. If it had wheels or tracks Alan could drive it and I suspect if it had wings he would have tried. Alan leaves his wife Irene, 2 daughters and seven grandchildren.

R.I.P.

PERSONALITIES

WO 1 C.J.McKENNA

WO1 Chris McKenna is one of the longest serving soldiers at the Oakleigh Barracks and has proved himself one of the most knowledgeable and helpful senior NCOs ever to have been based at Oakleigh. We members of the H & H Committee are in the habit of going to Chris if we need to know something, or find something, and have always found him extremely helpful - he has almost become an historic institution.

The following brief extract of Chris's military career has been provided by 22 Regt HQ.

46819 WO1 Christopher John McKenna

WO1 Chris McKenna enlisted in the Australian Army on 6 Feb 73. His first posting was to 3 Field Engineer Regiment in Townsville QLD as a Storeman. He had various postings throughout his career, however was posted to 3 FER (later 3 CER) twice and to 22 Construction Regiment three times (as a SGT Storeman, and RQMS on two occasions). He has also had three overseas tours of duty, those encompassing short terms in the United Kingdom and Solomon Islands with a two year term in Papua New Guinea.

Chris was promoted to WO1 in 1994 and was posted to 22 Const Regt that year. He has been employed in his current posting as the Unit Resource Manager, filling that role since being posted back to the unit in 1998. Chris is married to Bev and has 4 children.

Maj CLIFF PARFITT.

Maj Cliff Parfitt has enjoyed an unusual military career, having served through the ranks. including all NCO ranks up to WO1, before finally being commissioned in RAE and serving in a wide range of postings in 22 Construction Regt. His postings in recent years have included OC 105 Const. Sqn., 2ic 22 Const Regt, and Admin Comd. 22 Const. Regt.

Maj Parfitt is shortly due to retire and the members of the RAE H & H Committee congratulate him on his excellent service, thank him for his contributions to our activities and wish him well in his retirement.

3178575 Major Clifford John Parfitt

MAJ Cliff Parfitt enlisted into the CMF on 14 August 1971. MAJ Parfitt has spent the majority of his military career with 6 Engr Gp and 22 Const Regt, with stints at 7 ESR as a Sqn Comd and APA Melbourne as a Career Manager. Cliff went through the ranks following the Plant stream, being promoted to WO1 in 1989. He elected to become an officer in 1991 and was posted as a CAPT to 22 Const Regt. He was subsequently promoted to MAJ in 1995. MAJ Parfitt has been posted as the 2IC of 22 Const Regt since Apr 2001, establishing himself as a pro-active administrator and providing invaluable assistance in the area of human resources. Additionally, he has recently performed the duties of Admin Commander in the absence of the CO. Cliff is married to Christine and has 3 children. He departs the Army on 31 Dec 2002 after 31 years of service, and was appropriately dined out at a Regimental Dinner in Oakleigh Barracks on 30 Nov 2002.

NEWS ITEMS

54TH AUST FIELD PARK COY RAE.

54th Aust Fd Pk Coy was originally a CMF unit, being derived from the WW1 unit 4 Fd Pk Coy RAE. The unit acquired AIF status during 1942-43, after it qualified under the criteria of 75% of unit strength volunteering for acceptance in the AIF.

John Bohan, who in civil life was employed as a survey draughtsman with the survey practice conducted by Mr Thoms in Geelong, prepared the following article which was published in an edition of the Darwin Defenders' Newsheet. Both Bill Goodall, an original and still serving member of the RAE Historical & Heritage Committee and John Bohan served in the 54th. John's article, slightly abbreviated, is reproduced here with his kind permission:

HISTORY OF THE 54TH AUST FIELD PARK COY RAE.

The unit was raised in Geelong in September 1940 for 3 months training for 132 personnel, nearly all of whom came from the area and served as a Militia unit with 4th Division. The first pay sheets show that $962 was signed for at the end of the fortnight's service by those 132 men.

In November 1941 reinforcements were brought in because of attrition due to members in protected industries being claimed as exempt from military service. These reinforcements blended in well with the originals although being in the 18 and 19 year group, as most were apprentice artisans with various technical skills.

The unit was divided into 4 Sections, being Headquarters, Workshops, Bridging and Field Stores. The members of the sections were also conversant with the requirements of each of the other Sections, so that they could combine as a cohesive unit when necessary, eg for bridge construction works. The Workshop Section personnel were highly skilled in fitting, turning,

mechanics, plumbing, electrical works and heavy repairs such as repairing dozer tracks.

The first camp at Mount Martha provided ample opportunities for the Field Stores Section to demonstrate their capabilities as they operated throughout the Red Hill, Merricks, Baxter and Flinders areas as well as at North Geelong.

In February 1942, after the first Japanese air raid on Darwin the unit was assembled and prepared for the move "somewhere up North", which commenced on 1 June 1942. After many weeks and much confusion, with many personnel being separated from the main body, the bulk of the unit settled at Adelaide River, just north of the river, with its low level road crossing and elevated rail bridge.

The 54th was then committed to provide support to units from Pine Creek to Darwin, the main requirements being water supply, cladding, framing, nuts and bolts, and cement to establish water proof huts for cooks and meals. At the same time camouflaged tents under trees, with antnest earth floors were the domicile of both officers and ORs, with the luxury of water supply provided from a 44 gal drum, complete with its ubiquitous croaking frog.

The Bridging Section with its folding boats and bailey bridging trained in competitive teams, to be able to rapidly construct bridging over water or across a deeply bogged section of roadway.

Prior to moving on to Darwin the huge shed at Adelaide River was a hive of activity for the Workshops section, who carried on their work here as well as with their mobile lathes mounted in 3 ton trucks, carrying out work for both the army and RAAF units.

The Field Stores sections became known as "dumps" with the Darwin dump rivaling the size of the one at Adelaide River and supplying anything for anybody, with the only requirement being a requisition, hence the signing note and "it's yours mate, take it away".

The big workshops shed could not be easily camouflaged, so to draw fire from potential attacking aircraft, bogus anti aircraft guns were constructed of bush timber and pipes pointing skywards.

Bridging Section truck drivers were in the main called on to assist the Civil Construction Corp in forming the north-south road and the creek crossings prior to sealing the surface, and these men were often unaware of air raids in their vicinity, and would continue working until hailed from the roadside and told to head for the bush.

Even the unit's first Xmas was not observed as all hands were required to turn around a train loaded with 600 tons of cement as soon as possible and stack it in a shed away from an impending rain storm. The writer remembers a traumatic truck journey when he had to deliver a ton of boxed gelignite, with the necessary detonators in his cabin along a road which was a complete quagmire. A young RAAF hitchhiker sharing the journey became strangely subdued on learning of the cargo he was sitting on, even though his fellow airmen flew continuously with equally dangerous cargo.

1943 was endured and also enjoyed with the occasional game of football or cricket where Test and State players were almost anonymous in their service shirts and shorts.

As the war in the Darwin area decreased and a greater emphasis shifted to the islands N.E. of Australia the 54th moved first south, to go on leave in January 1944, prior to the next assignment, that of retraining and toughening up at RAE Kapooka, N.S.W. The unit then moved up to undertake servicing requirements on the Atherton Tablelands.

Subsequently the unit with its transport, stores and equipment concentrated at Townsville for the relief of 53 Aust Field Park Coy RAE, but this was not to be. Following a delay of several weeks there, culminating in a wharfies strike and then the declaration of VJ Day the movement overseas was cancelled and the unit was quickly disbanded and members drafted to their home States for re-allocation.

During 2003 the 54th Association will hold its 57th Annual Re-Union at Geelong, with ever decreasing numbers, but ably supported by widows, other relations, carers and drivers, many of whom can record 62 years of regular mateship.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2003.

Subscriptions for Sapper Summit will remain at $8.00 for the four issues anticipated during 2003. This is despite the postage increase announced recently by Australia Post.
Next year we will issue an invoice to each subscriber with the March issue, requesting payment of the $8 subscription. People who do not pay up will be taken off the subscriber list. In this current year, there are over 50 people who have received the March, May and September issues, but have not responded to requests for payment.

CONTACT POINT

If you have articles for Sapper Summit, or just comments, just contact Bruce Campbell on Tel (03) 9568 0320, or email: bandbcampbell@optusnet.com.au or Austin Byrne on tel (03) 9803 1061, or email: austbyrne@bigpond.com

MERRY CHRISTMAS