"SAPPER SUMMIT"
RAE CORPS NEWSLETTER
VICTORIAN ENGINEERS

JANUARY 1996 *Number 15*

The Committee joins together to wish the Sapper Corps a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year for 1996 and further progress in Corps matters.

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EDITORIAL

' We Can't Defend Ourselves" sez the General sez 'The Australian'

by Lt Col R.F Eastwick MBE

My weekend reading got a jolt with the above heading. General John Grey in the article said "funding shortfalls and varying priorities" were undermining Australia's effort at self defence. While I can not add to his contentions I can add a few thoughts of my own.

I sympathise with his struggles with the "bean counters" but I think that with their allies, the politicians, they will be a tough nut to crack.

However the thought of another "Brisbane Line" impels me to put pen to paper.

In my present dealings with the Army - below General John Grey's level - I am occasionally depressed with its thinking in general. When a suggestion is made to them their first reaction is sometimes to put forward reasons why it can't be done:- The power of negative Thinking.

In suggesting some remedies to General John Grey's problems I fall back on some principles of war viz. "Maintenance of the Aim"

General John Grey does not spell it out but he surely implies defence of our northern lands with it's broad brown vistas.

To maintain that aim poses some logistical problems beyond the capacities of the "bean counters".

To fill those broad brown lands "shoulder to shoulder" required men, equipment and allies. The equipment can respond to funds but "men" requires a special effort to produce the numbers and to persuade our allies that we are playing our part. Whether our politicians are prepared to act in good time - and General John Grey's despairing cry doubts that - is another matter. In the last analysis the politician is interested in votes which mean that we, the voter, must get into the act and demand they act NOW.

C.E.W Bean in "ANZAC TO AMIENS" describes the recruitment marches of the Great War. Then we were reinforcing the protagonists. We no longer have the luxury. Our early role in a future war should be like a nest of angry ants with OFFENSIVE ACTION.

Our small population makes ECONOMY OF ACTION imperative. We need to act smarter with a maximum and efficient use of manpower. The Institution of Engineers once sponsored a Supplementary Reserve - of which I was an enthusiastic member - but it seems to have died on the vine. In its youth it was a quick source, in time of war, of military trained technicians.

The concept of the Supplementary Reserve as proposed in 1948 was brilliant and it continued to serve its purpose for the following several decades. In fact over the period from its formation in 1950 until at least well into the 1980's it provided at least 50% of the RAE Reserve forces in the Australian Army. Much as it now hurts to admit it, the existing policies of both Government Departments and private companies, with the emphasis on "user pays" and all activities being conducted with final profit margins always in the forefront prohibits the success of such a concept in the foreseeable future. Only if we return to the days when Department's and Companies' financial policies allow them to sponsor and subsidise such units can we hope t o see them re-emerge in viable form.

The challenge for today's Army, particularly the RAE, must be to find some similarly effective replacement for the Supplementary Reserve.

The various Unit Associations and correspondents to Sapper Summit, as well as serving members have individually exercised their minds with this problem, without success, for some time. Let us meet this challenge by working on it until we find a solution, submit our proposals through both our local Parliamentarians and our Corp Committee, and aim to reverse the situation that now so much concerns our General John Grey as well as ourselves.

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N.Z. DIV. FAIRY

By Sapper W.M. Miller.

A story with a lot of sensitivity and a very caring human touch.

Scenario.

While building the Po River barge for this river crossing one night during W.W. II. for the advance towards Trieste, in Italy, the writer lost a valuable and sentimental photo wallet with pictures of his wife and four year old daughter, dressed as a fairy for a fancy dress party. As she was 17 months old when I left for overseas, this wallet was of very sentimental value.

The wallet was always carried in the top left battle dress breast pocket.

In the excitement and pressure to get that pontoon barge operating, the wallet fell out of my pocket, unnoticed.

I was devastated by the loss for any soldier will appreciate just what these close images of one's loved ones, left back home, mean.

Eureka !

The next issue of the Eighth News (I think that was the title), was distributed shortly afterwards and there, lo and behold, on one of the main pages, was a photo of daughter Diana, dressed as a fairy !!

A suitable caption read:
"Found on the banks of the River Po, (date given).
The owner may claim by writing to the editor !
Of course, I re-possessed my wallet pronto.

Appreciation.

It is good for the soul to analyse how the actions of others brought its return.
Firstly, the soldier who found it was emotionally moved to realise that it was a valuable possession and had the decency to forward it to the editor. Probably he too, had left a wife or girlfriend back home. He was a very caring person, thank-you who ever you are.
Secondly the editor too, had a high degree of love and care in his character for he saw fit to give priority to valuable space in his newspaper.

These two actions reinforce ones faith in human nature and demonstrate there are many marvellous people in this world; people who care, really care about others.

Yes the war brought out the best in people.

Postscript.

Mrs. Diana Pope is now the mother of three adult children and she and her husband Jeremy, live in Berlin.

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A ZERO HOUR QUOTE IN THE N.Z.E.F. TIMES IN ITALY.

ZERO HOUR

I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire.

The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that , if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour".

V - DAY

The German war is at an end. After years of intense preparation Germany hurled herself on Poland at the beginning of September, 1939, and in pursuance of our guarantee to Poland and in common with the French Republic, Great Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth of Nations declared war upon this foul aggression.

After gallant France had been struck down we from this island and from the United Empire, maintained the struggle single handed for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia and, later, by the overwhelming power and resources of the United States of America. Finally almost the whole world was combined against the evil powers who are now prostrate before us.

Our gratitude to our splendid Allies goes forth from all our hearts in this island and throughout the British Empire.

Winston Spencer Churchill.

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FROM STATEHOOD TO NATIONHOOD.

The History and Heritage Committee by its nature tends to focus on the Early stages of Victoria's defences so it is timely that we listen to C.E.W. Bean in his book "ANZACS TO AMIENS", and I quote accordingly:-

Ever since the Australian colonies had been assured of future control of their own revenue, just before the Crimean War, they had accepted some responsibility for land and harbour defence, a task previously borne for them with growing unwillingness by Great Britain, which in addition to her ubiquitous navy had to maintain regular garrisons.

Only in war scares had Australians felt how empty and defenceless their big island was. In the Crimean War the chief colonies raised small citizen forces, and some forts were built.

The effort soon flagged, but received another impulse in the second Maori War (1860), when an appeal for troops was received and some of the regular garrison as well as volunteers were sent. The final withdrawal of the British garrisons form Australia in 1870 led to requests to Great Britain for advice,

and by 1884, largely on the careful recommendations of a British Commission, the colonies adopted a co-ordinated scheme of local defence; certain harbour or coastal defence ships were obtained, and naval reservists trained to man them, and small military forces were raised, generally comprising a permanent nucleus backed by paid and unpaid volunteers.

At that stage the military effort of Australia really began to take shape. In January 1885 the shock of the news of British reverses in the Sudan and of General Gordon's death caused the people and government of one State, New South Wales, to create what, even at the time, was realised as being a most important precedent in Empire defence, by offering a force of 750 infantry and artillery, who were raised shipped and disembarked in the Sudan within two months. A scare of war with Russia suddenly closed the Sudan Campaign, and the contingent, after an experience far more interesting than is generally realised, was back within five months of Gordon's death. But the Russian scare caused another spurt in Australian defence and by March 1901, when they were absorbed in a single Federal force, the military forces - militia and volunteers - of the six colonies were nearly 30,000 strong.

The federation of Australia occurred in the midst of the South African War, for which all the colonies enthusiastically offered contingents; 16,632 Australians were sent, some 12,000 before Federation and 4,000 after it. Nearly all belonged to the typical Australian arm, mounted infantry; and the few infantry, sent on suggestion from the War Office, were also mounted soon after arrival. Campaigning in country very similar to their own, the colonial mounted troops were, to the surprise of the British authorities, found more suitable than regular cavalry. Their casualties including deaths through action (251) and disease (267) were 1400. The Australians returned by 1902 with a wide reputation for dash and skill in action and for some wildness when unengaged. Except for patriotic funds there was little public effort to rehabilitate them, and a proportion found it most difficult to settle down in civil life.

The development of the Australian naval forces was much slower. The almost absolute protection afforded by the British Navy had, as already mentioned, generally helped to prevent the realisation of danger. In the scares of war with Russia, however, the colonists were always sensitive as to their coastal cities. In 1886 Admiral Tryon advised the Admiralty that the right solution was personal service by the colonists in ships controlled by them in peace time, but he was ahead of his time. Until Federation in 1901 the naval effort of the Australian colonies - apart from pure harbour defence - consisted in subsidising the British Navy to keep some small cruisers on the coast for local defence and for training the local reserves which helped to man them.

But when Australians federated there was alive in a great part of the people a spirit which these efforts did not satisfy. The younger nationalists of the kind that supported the then active Australian Natives' Association desired to see their nation equipped with fighting services manned and controlled by Australians, enabling the country to pull its full weight in an emergency, though it was generally realised that the nation would not be able to stand by itself. Among this section there was keen dissatisfaction when the imperial conference of 1902 merely adopted a scheme for subsidising the British Navy to provide a bigger squadron for the local defence of Australia and New Zealand. But the British Admiralty (supported in this by conservative opinion in Australia), was against any individual naval effort by the colonies, and steadily opposed the project for an Australian navy.

In 1907, however the Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, managed to secure Admiralty approval for a flotilla of torpedo-boats and submarines. This was a whittling down of a cherised scheme of Australia's Director of Naval Forces, Captain W. R. Creswell - the real founder of the Australian Navy - and the Australian naval advisers wisely objected to the class of vessel now proposed. The Deakin government accordingly decided to provide destroyers, and the Labour government under Andrew Fisher, which followed it in 1908-9, ordered three of them to be built in England.

Just then, in 1909, the whole Empire was swept by a war scare following the sudden realisation that the German Emperor's programme of naval expansion was on a scale to challenge Britain's one real defence - her command of the sea. From most parts of the Empire there flowed offers of naval help. Canada, which in fact was largely protected by the Monroe doctrine of the United States and had therefore been less interested than Australia in naval projects, was now ready to form its own navy. In the other Dominions there were proposals to present battleships to the British Navy. Australia was keenly divided on the question of method, but was all eager to help. A special Imperial Defence Conference was accordingly held in London in order to thrash out the most useful and practicable action.

This conference approved of a scheme for a strong "Eastern Fleet" to be maintained by the Empire in the Pacific. It would comprise three "fleet-units", two to be maintained by Great Britain (in place of her old East Indies and China Squadrons), and one by Australia (in place of the old British squadron in Australian waters).

Each fleet unit would comprise a battle-cruiser, three light cruisers, six destroyers and three submarines. Canada, being interested in the Atlantic also, decided to provide in the Pacific for the time being only light cruisers and destroyers.

New Zealand had already offered Great Britain the money for a battleship or battle-cruiser, the Admiralty now promised that this ship should be allotted as one of the three battle-cruisers for the Pacific Fleet. Arrangements were also made for training New Zealand seamen to serve in British ships.

During this period the Australian government was constantly changed, but all governments, Liberal and Labour, were determined on these projects; and, as happened in the case of many big national plans of that generation, it was a Labour government, coming into power in 1910 under Andrew Fisher and William Morris Hughes, that took most of the steps actually finalising the scheme.

The final adoption of this plan for the first considerable Dominion navy had been due to Australia's insistence. The real basis of the Admiralty's agreement to it was the condition that ships, officers and men must be trained and maintained at the standards of the British Navy. The fact that the Admiralty, with its conservative tradition, now trusted the Dominion's undertaking to do this - a trust which Admiral Tryon had shown in 1887 - and, that on the basis of that pledge Dominion ships were permitted to fly the famous White Ensign, marks an immense step in co-operation between the Mother Country and the Dominions.

The Australian naval effort thus planned was not, it is true, proportionate to the naval effort of the British people; but it was a solid, considerable factor in the British Empire's naval defence. Even many of those Australians who had opposed Deakin's plan for a "tin-pot navy" (as they called it), and had wanted instead to present the Mother Country with a Dreadnought, became hearty supporters of this scheme.

Australia's new army which, as it happened, was finally shaped in the same year, 1910, was planned with equal vigour but with a different object. The sea, and therefore the Navy, had no boundaries. But, to many Australians of that time, to contemplate the operations of an army on any soil except Australia's smacked of "aggression". Their political leaders, therefore, feared to plan or prepare, even provisionally, for joining in the Empire's land wars. It was not enough that, if such war came, the Dominion's relation to the Mother Country left Australians entirely free to keep both their army and navy out of the war. (The moral basis for that apparently one-sided arrangement was that the British government then alone had the responsibility for conducting foreign relations and the power of declaring war).

Australian political leaders felt that, though their peoples would doubtless help the Motherland in emergency, as they had done in the South African war, the provision for this must be left until the emergency arose: Hitler had not then proved that almost any nation which limits itself to defending its own doorstep has already voluntarily abandoned its defence.

Accordingly, not only did the other Dominions at the conference in 1909 reject a proposal by New Zealand for the maintenance of special army reserves in the Dominions in case they were again required as in South Africa, but the Australian government would not allow its staff even to prepare plans against the possibility that such a force might be required.

To one proposal, however, put forward with admirable tact and restraint by the British general staff, all the Dominions agreed. Since the South African War fierce publicity; and intelligent criticism by some military leaders, had brought about in the British Army many reforms, among which the establishment of a general staff and of a staff college was perhaps the chief. Though the War Office was still the butt of newspaper critics, some exceedingly able men, civil and military, were met there by Australians who subsequently had dealings with them in 1914-18. On this occasion in 1909 the British general staff, accepting the lesson of past rebuffs, most wisely limited its proposals for co-operation to one by which the several forces of the Empire should be, as far as possible, armed, organised and trained in the same way, so tas to be interchangeable; that officers should be exchanged; and that the British General Staff should be in some measure combined with those of the Dominions into an Imperial General Staff, to study problems, exchange information, and tender advice. This proposal was enthusiastically adopted - and the value of the step, when the British and oversea forces eventually co-operated in the two World Wars, was beyond estimation.

As a result of the feeling above described, the Australian Army was enlisted for home service only; but after the 1907 Conference the danger of Australia's isolated position was sufficiently understood to result in the Federal government's using its power of forcing the citizens to train for home defence. Service was made "universal" - or, more accurately, compulsory for all fit citizens in the more closely settled regions - and a military college was to be set up. This scheme, mainly the work of Colonel J.G. Legge, was expanded in 1910 when, at Australia's request, Lord Kitchener, then retiring from command of the Indian Army, inspected the Australian defences, and recommended that the settled regions be divided not merely into the six military districts (practically the six States) but into 215 military areas, each with an "area officer" - ultimately to be drawn from the 350 highly trained military college graduates.

Successive Federal governments - Deakin-Cook (Liberal) and Fisher (Labour) - keenly supported these schemes, but Fisher went farthest and laid it down that the training at Australian Military and Naval Colleges should be free of expense for any of the youngsters chosen for future officers. The two colleges were hard at work - though their first classes had not yet graduated - when the First World War broke out.

By then the main part of the Australian "fleet-unit" was in Australian waters - battle cruiser Australia, light cruisers Sydney and Melbourne, destroyers Parramatta, Yarra, Warrego, and submarines AE1 and AE2, in addition to the light cruiser Encounter and small cruiser Pioneer (the first lent, the second given, by the Admiralty).

The crews were about half Australian, half British, under an arrangement by which the Admiralty helped until Australia (in her college at Jervis Bay and the training ship Tingira and elsewhere) had produced her full crews. The army was only half-way to its new stage, but comprised 45,000 men, mainly youngsters of nineteen to twenty-one years but with a remnant of the old militia. They were trained for sixteen to twenty-five days each year and partly organised in brigades. For future recruits they were backed by an excellent reservoir in the mass of Australian boys, of whom some 150,000 of twelve to seventeen years were trained for an hour or more weekly in the junior and senior cadets.

There were also 35,000, mainly older, men enrolled in rifle clubs. Most Australians had some of the soldier's skills, in shooting, camping, foraging or finding their way. A government factory was just beginning to turn out rifles at Lithgow in the Blue Mountains; government cordite, harness, clothing and woollen factories were already at work in Victoria; the old naval yards and depots at Sydney, Melbourne and elsewhere - by then under Australian control - were operating, and others were under construction at Fremantle and near Western Port. The first Australian military flying school was about to start at Point Cook. Such was the military side of preparation that Australians were busily making for their nation's future.

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WHILE THE "BALLARAT" WAS SINKING.
(ANZAC DAY, APRIL 25, 1917)

Overhead we hear commotion,
Footsteps clattering down the stair,
We know at once there's something doing,
There is danger in the air.

One lad shouts: "Torpedo's coming !"
Crash ! "My God, she's got us too !"
And we quickly don our lifebelts,
There's grim work ahead to do.

"To boat stations" sounds the bugle,
Quickly to our posts we go.
With not the slightest sign of flurry,
That, at least, I'd have you know.

When all are ready to go over,
And the water's looking chill,
Comes an order from the Colonel,
Through each man it sends a thrill:

"Ship won't sink, lads, for two hours,
To his post each man stand fast !"
Soon is heard a hearty cheering,
O'erhead seaplanes are flying past.

All around us in the distance,
Rescue boats are coming too,
Round their bows the foam is leaping,
As they part the waters blue.

At last one fastens up beside us,
Destroyer "Lookout" on the game.
While another on the port side
Is quickly doing much the same.

As each one is fully loaded,
Pulling out, makes way for more,
And the decks are quickly clearing
Till all that's left is eighty four.

These go off aboard a trawler,
Then destroyer "75"
Takes all of them she can carry
While the seaplanes whirl and dive.

At six p.m. we're heading homewards,
With our greatest danger past,
Ten o'clock sees all hands happy;
We are safe on land at last.

One thing makes the boys all cheerful,
"Tis the last I have to say:
Though the ship went down soon after,
Not one life was lost that day !

Sapper Stewart T. Knight.
Rly. Unit. A.I.F.

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GUNSITE EXCURSION - HOBSONS BAY
28 October 1995

Colonial Military History combined with strolls among the in-line skaters of St Kilda and the "Yuppie" lunch crowd of Williamstown, on a splendid bayside Spring day. Such was another of the series jointly organised by Bill Atkins, RAE and Reg Morell, RAA. This excursion maintained the standard of the May trip to RAN West Head, reported in the June Newsletter.

A major contribution to the success of the day and to the knowledge of those attending came from our tame military historian and fortification expert, Jim Newlands.

Jim opened proceedings at Oakleigh Barracks with a display of old plans of Colonial fortifications of Hobsons Bay, particularly Fort Gellibrand, and a briefing on the general history of them - some that were never built, some built but soon removed, and some still standing.

Collecting handouts and armed with binoculars, cameras, sun-hats and the like, seventeen of us then boarded the bus supplied by the RAAF, if you please ! Such is today's ADF !

First stop was Point Ormond, where after carefully avoiding stepping on a young couple blissfully asleep under their rugs after what must have been an active night on the grass, the party was able to appreciate the problems which faced our forebears in the Colonial Forces in planning the defence of the ports of Williamstown and the Yarra mouth from Russians, French and privateers who might have had ideas about the gold-laden ships so often at anchor there.

Point Ormond was the site of one battery, others were placed along the Military Reserve, now Beaconsfield parade, but their range was such that the whole width of Hobsons Bay could not be covered, so pile forts were planned - initially platforms to hold a total of 70 guns. Later Captain P. Scratchley proposed an alternative scheme - see accompanying plan. These were the ones which in the end were never built.

En route to the next stop, Jim pointed out the approximate site of another battery, near the present Kerferd Road beach - how the gunners would have liked that station if the topless ladies of these days were about then !

Next to Scienceworks Museum which we were privileged to enter without charge to see a World War II air raid shelter. A concrete tunnel set into the side of the excavation for the old steam sewer pumping station, it had been built to protect the staff of this priority target for raids that never came. Those who made the scramble up a step ladder and through the steel studded door found a claustrophobic and spider infested refuge, seemingly solid enough to handle anything the enemy might have dropped.

And so to Williamstown, the first stop being Morley Reserve, on The Strand, where two 9 inch, 12 ton, RML Armstrong guns, mounted on wheeled carriages, are said by some to be trained on Spring Street. A debate developed about the purpose of a set of six numbered steel strips mounted under each piece, below and parallel to the barrel. Subsequent advice supports the view (or guess) of some that these were part of the recoil-damping mechanism.

Lunch followed at the Yacht Club Hotel at the vast expense of $2.50 or $3.50, plus drinks, after which there was time to walk among the colourful Saturday crowd to Gem Pier for a quick look at HMAS 'Castlemaine' - museum ship, and sail-training topsail schooner 'Alma Doepel' - appropriate in regard to the latter, which had served with RAE Water Transport in New Guinea.

After a short stop at the Time Ball Tower, we moved to the final location, Fort Gellibrand, courtesy of 2 Company, 1 Commando Regiment. Here two more guns of the type seen at The Strand are emplaced. An article about the fort and the work being done on its restoration can be found in the December 1994 issue of this Newsletter, Vol 3, Issue 4.

Bringing history more up-to-date, the party heard an impromptu but most informative talk by one of the gunners, ex-S/Sgt Brian Cleeman on the 25 pounder field gun, its characteristics and operation, taking advantage of the presence of one such gun placed in the Commando Regiment's area.

The day concluded with afternoon tea, provided by our fearless Sapper/Gunner leaders, in the lunch room made available by our Commando hosts.

Full marks are due to Bill and Reg for their excellent organisation of the day, and to Jim Newlands, not only for his informative commentaries, but also for a very comprehensive handout, including plans, of the early defences of Port Phillip Bay.

A splendid ten dollars (plus lunch) worth of tour !

John E. Slee.

Inspecting the Ball Tower.
L. to R. J. Newlands, Reg Morrell, Unknown

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FUTURE MILITARY EXCURSIONS

1. BEAT RETREAT
Fort Queenscliff
16 March 1996.
For further details contact
WO Marthy Gowling
at Fort Queenscliff early Feb. 1996
on 052) 580 705

2. TOUR NARRE WARREN TANK MUSEUM
456 Belgrave - Hallam Rd, Narre Warren North Melway ref. 108 G2.
Saturday 30 March 1996.
A host of Armoured and soft skin vehicles and guns.
A combined BBQ and tour : BYO BBQ (1200hrs),
Guided tour commences at 1400hrs;
Admission - Adults $4, Children $3.
Use own transport to venue.
RSVP 27 March 1996 :
Gunners R. Morrell on 03) 9562 9552
Sappers W. Atkins on 059) 961 013

3. POINT NEPEAN TOUR
Nov - Dec 1996

4. SOUTH CHANNEL FORT AND FORT FRANKLIN
1996/1997

THE PERSONNEL PAGE

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KEY RAE APPOINTMENTS FOR 1996.

(The following are from the best information available in late 1995 and the Editor gives no guarantee for the accuracy of this information).

Col Commandant	Col J Wertheimer RFD
COMD LSF Engineers	Colonel H.R. Ellis RFD
SO1 OPS	LTCOL I. Campbell
CO 4 CER	LTCOL A. Murdoch
CO 22 Const. Rgt.	LTCOL G. Burnham
SO2 OPS	Maj. A. Smeaton
2IC 22 Const. Rgt.	Maj. J. Young
OC 39 E&M Sqn.	Maj. J. Hunt
OC 10 Fd. Sqn.	Maj. S. Bell
OC 38 Spt. Sqn.	Maj. J. Twyford
OC 203 WKS.	Maj. P. Zambory
Chief Engineer Southern Victoria	Maj. D. C. Hughes

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NEW ASSOCIATIONS

With the departure of the late Colonel J. Riley, Lt Col C. Bowater has agreed to fill the position of the chairman of the subcommittee that fosters these associations. We wish him well for the future.

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VALE

Leonard Charles (Len) French
27 November 1995

A NEW FEATURE TOGETHER WITH A NEW SUBEDITOR

This newsletter is proposing a new feature dedicated to the serving sapper and his activities. Contributions to this column are invited from all and sundry. A new subeditor, Lt Col J. Slee has been dragooned to deal with the avalanche that we anticipate receiving. Happy editing John !

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OLD SAPPERS' ASSOCIATION

The Association was established in 1934 when the Engineers moved from Alexander Avenue to Swan Street and after 6I years are continuing their activities at Oakleigh Barracks.

Its original members came from 3 Fortress Company RAE, 34 Fortress Company AE (militia) and returned WWI sappers. The Association originally met in the Sergeants' Mess at Swan Street and in the early 1950's was able to establish its own mess in an unused building there.

Membership grew with the influx of sappers who served in WWII, together with serving members from units based at Swan Street. The Association became part of the establishment and enjoyed great success.

With the relocation to Oakleigh the Association was given the opportunity to continue its ties with the Swan Street sappers and employed most of its funds in the establishment of a small facility of its own within the complex.

Using the Barracks' facilities, the Association meets on the second Sunday of most months for a social lunch, drink, chat and meeting. Various units use our room to meet through the year, continuing traditions begun at Swan Street.

With an aging membership we are pleased to see the continuation of traditions being encouraged by a small number of younger members who understand that the "Old" in Old Sappers' has nothing to do with age.

We welcome all those who have served or are still serving with the Corps to join us.

Any enquires regarding the Association can be directed to Jim Crosling (Secretary) on 03) 9438 2273.

OBITUARIES

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MAJOR T. F. D. THOMASON ED
Born 22/12/1915 Died 20/8/1995

Thomas Frank Daniel Thomason was born in England, the second eldest in a family of three sons and a daughter. The family migrated to Australia around 1924 to take up farming and in due course settled on a new farm near Merrinee, west of Mildura. The 'farm' in fact was a square mile of Mallee scrub and the first residence was a tent in a small clearing. This was a truly pioneering family.

At the age of 14, Tom went droving to earn a living and soon excelled as a horseman, plying throughout New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory as stockrider, horse breaker and overlander; seen through his family's eyes today, he was the original 'wild colonial boy' graduating from 'Pom' to 'Great Aussie'.

Following the outbreak of World War Two, Tom travelled from central Queensland to Melbourne to enlist. He joined the army along with his two brothers, and became a trooper in the 9th Division Cavalry Regiment. He served for five years with this unit in the Middle East and the South West Pacific Area and later for a time with Military Intelligence.

By virtue of his living in the army came relatively easily to him. Tom served his country with quiet but immense pride.

After demobilisation, Tom decided that his future no longer lay with the land and in 1946 undertook engineering studies at the Swinburne Technical College with the aid of a war service scholarship. A 28 year professional career as a civil engineer with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works followed (1949 - 1977) where he was engaged with a team in the development to world standard of Melbourne's water supply, sewerage and drainage systems. Over the years Tom gained the respect of his colleagues for his high standards and wise counsel.

However he did not forsake the army. In 1950, the first RAE Supplementary Reserve unit, 22 Construction Regiment, was raised in Victoria. Many war-experienced believers in the need to foster Australia's defence capability, like Tom Thomason, were now members of government authorities sponsoring SR units and so took the opportunity to 'soldier on' and contribute to the establishment and development of the SR system.

Tom enlisted in 106 Construction Squadron, the sub-unit of 22 Construction Regiment sponsored by the MMBW and, as a foundation member, participated in the first regimental camp in 1950 as a corporal. Thus began a 16 year CMF career parallelling his professional engineering career. He was commissioned in 1951, qualified progressively for promotion, and was appointed OC 106 Construction Squadron in 1960.

Major Thomason was a practical and much respected squadron commander. He was a natural leader and gained tremendous satisfaction from passing on his hard-won military, as well as, professional engineering knowledge and experience to unit members of all ranks. He retired from the army in this posting in 1966, regarding it as his most enjoyable appointment.

In 1965 and 1966, Major Thomason served as PMC of the RAE Corps Officers Mess at Swan Street Engineer Depot.

Tom had a penchant for story-telling (with embellishment). He loved a joke and in fact was seen by his family as something of an actor. He was a physically active and energetic man until the late 1970s when arthritis intruded and eventually became a serious burden to him.

On retiring from the MMBW in 1977, Tom took to art for which he had a natural talent. He had private tuition for four years and for 14 years was a member of the Mentone Mordialloc Art Group.

He painted portraits, landscapes, sailing ships and horses, mostly in oils, and was adept at pencil and charcoal sketching. He went about his painting with a passion but with increasing difficulty in later years as arthritis took over.

Despite declining health Tom maintained a very positive outlook and focussed on the things he enjoyed most - his family and his painting. He was extremely proud of his children and grandchildren and looked forward to family gatherings. He left behind several unfinished paintings.

Tom is survived by his wife Joan, whom he married in 1944 during a period back in Australia from the 9th Division, daughters Gail and Moira, and son Martin. Martin is a member of the Army Reserve - following his father's example - and as Major Martin Thomason, is currently OC 203 Works Section RAE.

Tom Thomason was a man of talent and conscience, of high ideals and firm beliefs. He will be remembered for his accomplishments and many fine attributes : horseman, soldier, engineer, painter, raconteur, family man and mentor.

OBITUARY

Leonard Charles (Len) French.

Len French's old friends in 22 Construction Regiment were saddened to hear of his death, on 27 November 1995, after a long illness.

Len, who was born on 29 July 1934, served two periods in the Australian Army. Details of his service are:

In The Infantry:

He first attempted unsuccessfully to join as a 16 year old in 1950, but was rejected because of age.

He then enlisted in 1951, at age 17, with the Service No 3-73486, and attended the Officer Cadet School at Portsea.

He later transferred to 4 RAR at Ingleburn and from there was posted to 2nd Battalion at Canungra. On completion of his training at Canungra he served in Malaya as a Corporal.

On completion of his tour of duty in Malaya, he accepted discharge.

In RAE:

As an MMBW employee Len enlisted in 106 Construction Sqn, 22 Const Regt in 1958, retaining his rank of Corporal from his previous service, but with a new Reg No 3-137953.

He served continuously with 106 Sqn until 1974, being promoted through the ranks of Sergeant, Staff Sergeant and finally WO2, when he was appointed SSM of 106.

He will be remembered with affection by his many friends in 106 for his fine leadership as SSM as well as his assistance and friendly attitude to all who served with him.

Throughout his 16 years service Len attended all Annual Camps as well as many promotional courses, first as a student and then as an instructor.

Shortly before retirement in 1974 Len was promoted WO1 and appointed RSM of 22 Construction Regiment, but did not attend a camp as such.

Len's awards include the British General Service Medal and the Efficiency Medal.

Following cremation, Len's ashes will rest in the Memorial Wall at the Moe cemetery.

Our sympathies are extended to Len's wife Gwen and their children Lenny, Cheryl, Ken and Ray and their families.

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His military career was spent almost exclusively with the Royal Australian Engineers.

After enlistment in 1949 in 3 Field Engineer Regiment there was a short period of service with Melbourne University Regiment in 1950/51.

On return to 3 Field Engineer Regiment his Army record shows that he then served continuously with engineer units until 1966, the Command and Staff Training Group 1966-67, then back to engineers in 1967. Between 1971 and 1976 there were appointments at senior level to Training Groups and to Headquarters RAE 3 Division. His service finished in 1976.

After enlistment as a sapper in 1949 he was commissioned in 1952. His first command appointment was as OC 15 Field Park Squadron, then a sub-unit of 3 Field Engineer Regiment.

He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in February 1965 and subsequently held a number of senior appointments including Assistant Commander RAE 3 Division Commander to Construction Regiment. He was promoted to Colonel in June 1974.

His early service in 3 Field Engineer Regiment coincided with a period of national service and the "Road Camps" in the Puckapunyal Training Area. For those who served in the period mention of a road running westerly from Murphy's Well - Rob Riley Road - will recall memories of Jim.

In mid 1968 he was attached as an observer to 17 Construction Squadron RAE in Vietnam. He established a record of some standing in the number and extent of visits to various units in that country with transport courtesy of the United States Army Air Force. Subsequent observers travelled less using Australian aircraft.

Jim served in the citizen forces at their peak in the immediate post war period and in the post Vietnam period when public support for matters military had waned. His contributions at these times reflected the underlying purpose of his service period - that he had a responsibility to be of service to his country. His contribution to the activities of the corps was significant.

After retiring he maintained his interest in RAE matters.

He was a strong supporter of the Swan Street Mess and was a frequent participant, with his wife Jan, at the social functions conducted by the Mess.

Subsequent to the relocation of the Mess to the Oakleigh Depot he played an active role in generating and maintaining the interest of members in the Mess at its new location.

His pleasant and generous nature was of great assistance to the Mess in this reestablishment period.

In parallel with his military career and in periods prior to and after that service he served the various communities in Victoria as an officer of State and Local Government.

After studies at the then Gordon Institute of Technology in Geelong in 1946 he joined the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and as an Assistant Engineer worked on the Upper Yarra Dam Project.

He subsequently joined the Country Roads Board of Victoria and between 1949 and 1958 served in the Bridge and Geelong Division. In 1958 he left the CRB to enter Local Government and served in that field until his retirement in 1988.

His service as Shire Engineer with the Shire of Tambo extended from 1958 to 1961 when he was appointed Shire Engineer to the recently created Shire of Hastings where he remained until his retirement.

In the 1950's the Shire of Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula was at the beginning of an expansionary phase.

Heavy industry was being established at Westernport and support industries were being expanded. Population, both permanent and seasonal, was growing. All this demanded an infrastructure which would provide for the significant change from a basically rural area.

Jim was the implementor of the aspirations of the Community reflected in the decisions and directions of the Council. The depth of his commitment to this responsibility is apparent from the length of his service with the Council - some 27 years.

His activities extended into the social and community life of the Municipality. Particular mention should be made of his long association with the Council of Hastings High School from 1976 to 1988, his community service with the Lions Club and his membership of various social clubs connected with golfing, cricket and football.

The success of the council policies and Jim's contribution in providing for this expanding community are evident today for all to see.

In 1958 at the same time as he made a change in his professional career Jim was married to Jan.

Their temperament matched ideally and provided the basis for a long and fruitful union. Their two daughters Diana and Anita reflect the attributes accruing from a happy family life.

In retirement Jim Continued the active life which he enjoyed.

Golf featured to marked degree, some have referred to it as a passion, and has been evident from his membership of Devil Bend Golf Club on the Peninsula. He has also been known to visit racecourses with varying degrees of success - such as the day at Mornington when his selected runner dropped dead in the barrier stalls.

Jim was a good soldier, a fine engineer and a loving husband and father. Those who were associated with him in military service and civil life will miss his charm, his humour and not least his administrative and technical skills.

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DEDICATION OF WAR MEMORIAL

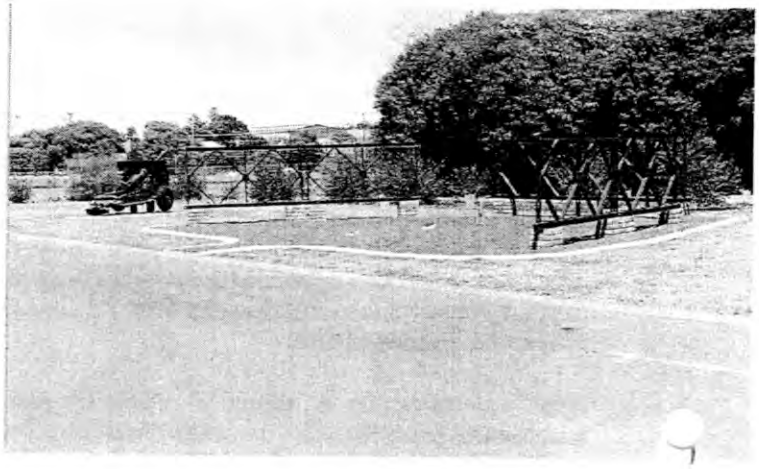
Oakleigh Barracks Memorial Service 11/11/1995

On this day the joint memorial was dedicated by Comd. H. D. Ellis after the Corps Commandant of RAEME, Brigadier Ermet, had unveiled the structure. This memorial comprised of grouped Bailey Panels flanked by two 25pr guns. The enclosed area included an Alleppo Pine and two eucalypts with suitable plaques.

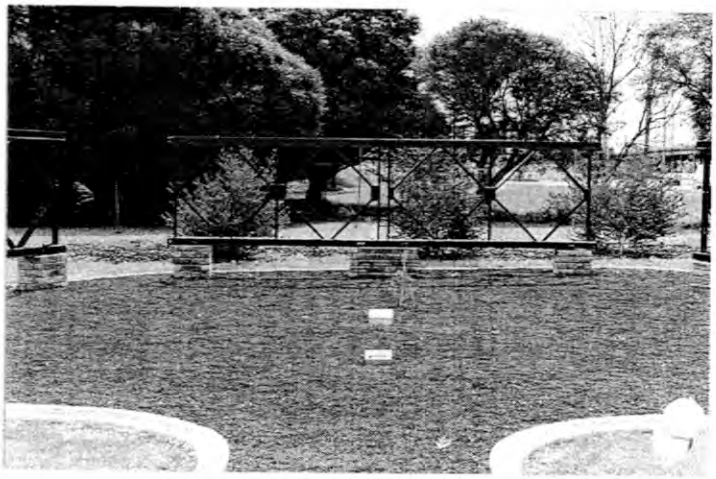
The Brigadier lead the wreath laying by Depot units and associations and the service continued with "The Ode", the Last Post and silent tribute by all and concluded with Reveille.

Memorial Photos:

Bailey Panels with flanking guns.



Memorial with plaques and pine.



Lone Pine tree plaque.

22 CONSTRUCTION REGIMENT EX - MEMBERS SUCCESSFUL "GET TOGETHER" BENALLA, NOVEMBER 1995

The reunion of retired members of 22 Construction Regiment, held at Benalla on the weekend of 17 - 19th November 1995, was a great success.

Activities proceeded as planned, commencing with a BBQ at the Benalla Demon's Clubrooms on the evening of Friday 17th, attended by 29 ex-members and their families.

Attendance built up on the Saturday, with 30 attending the luncheon at Brown Brothers Milawa Winery, and close to 70 attending the dinner at the Dragon Gate Restaurant on the Saturday evening. Attendees at the Dragon Gate included ex-ARA Instructor WO1 Harry Coles and his wife. Harry was well remembered by members who served in 22 in the 50's and his attendance inspired the retelling of many tales from the early days of 22.

The weekend concluded with a BBQ at John Ronke's home attended by 52 members and families, including Keith Bennett, SSM of 106 Const Sqn in the 1950-60's.

Attendance included all ranks from Major Chirgwin, a number of ex - RSMs and SSMs and extended to ex - Sappers and junior NCOs. As well a number of apologies were recorded, including one from Col Bob Handley, one time CO of 22 Regt.

Sincere thanks are extended to John Ronke and Peter Bloor for their enthusiasm and work in organising this excellent weekend.

The 1995 reunion at Benalla was even more successful than the 1994 event held at Horsham and based on that success, those attending decided to repeat the event in 1996.

The 1996 reunion will be held in the Bairnsdale / Paynesville area with the responsibility for local organisation resting with WO1 Mike Flemming. Mike is well remembered for his sterling service including periods as SSM of 105 and later RSM of 22 Regt. The reunion will be held on 15 - 17th November 1996 and further details will be published in the "Summit" as they become available.

We will hope for an even bigger attendance in 1996.

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4 CER REPORTS : -

Lt. Col. A. Murdoch
Commanding Officer - 4 CER

Last weekend, the regiment was busy. 10 Fd Sqn returned to Duston range and destroyed the route obstacle created last month, conducting a demolitions range practice and a small arms shoot at the same time.

38 Spt Sqn continued winning hearts and minds down at Cerberus continuing a range of plant and services works.

The Regimental HQ deployed to the Brigade Command Post Exercise, where the 2IC's tailor made Command Post wowed them.

Finally, 2LT Parsons and CPL Moore received a full complement of recruits from Ringwood and Newborough and bussed them off to Pucka on Saturday morning (yes all 59 of them !).

These are all significant achievements, and the weekend proves that we can do rewarding training at more than one level. In particular, the recruiting drive shows we can deliver when we set ambitious goals for ourselves. Of course, the next challenge is to welcome the newcomers and train them. To this end, some of the older hands are going to find themselves carrying new responsibilities ..... some of you are going to be promoted. I find many sappers very willing to complain when things aren't right. Quite right too; don't stop. For those promoted, and those already carrying the responsibility of rank, realise that we are there to plan things well and then fix them when they go wrong. If this business was easy, the Iraqis would have creamed the Yanks, not the other way round.

Getting it right is bloody hard. We have a great deal yet to get right. Those taking on new rank have a chance to help.

Finally, Christmas sees the inevitable range of changes in key appointments. Welcome to the new Operations Officer, Major George. Congratulations to Major John Twyford for his appointment as the OC 38 Spt Sqn.

Farewell to Captain Byrnes and WO2 Jones. These two in particular have done us all a great service. Dan Byrnes has been a first class 2IC 10 Fd Sqn and Adjt/Trg Offr 4 CER. His enthusiasm and professionalism will be sadly missed. Dan is off to schooling and we hope to see him whenever the young people at uni get a little boring.

Graeme Jones has carried this Regiment's Q function almost alone. 10 Fd Sqn, then 4 CER have rarely suffered from a lack of any stores or equipment. This is not normal: it's the result of hard work and talent from the RQMS. SME are lucky to get him.

2LT Williams will be leaving us to join the regs. Good choice ! Good luck !

2LT Stevens will also join the regs as a pilot trainee in April next year. Until then, he's with us full time and will be spending much of it down at Newborough. For those of you down there that think we've forgotten, remember what I said about getting it right being hard. If Newborough were not important, we wouldn't have recruited 24 new soldiers there, and I wouldn't have turned Canberra over to get your Tp Comd on full time. Make use of him ! Have a whinge to him (that's part of what he's for). Get involved and help him help us get it right !

Welcomes to Captain Ian Watson, our new Adjutant, who took up duties a few weeks back. We'll have a fuller list of hails and farewells in the February edition.

See you at the Sappers Day / Christmas Party / Parade and refreshment on Saturday. Bring the family. Have a great break, or if you're working, best wishes for the short break.

Captain Ian Watson

Ian came from a Non Corps posting in HQ Log Comd where he was working with Commercial Support Program projects. Other postings have included 17, 21 and 22 Construction Squadrons.

Originally from Tassie, Ian feels quite at home in Melbourne and is looking forward to being part of the Regt over the next two years. Ian is currently working as the Adjutant.

Warrant Officer Roger Hyde

Not another one I hear you say, Roger joined the Defence Force in 1980 after completing 4 years as apprentice Painter and Decorator here in Victoria (which by the way is his home state). After the holiday at 1(RTB) Kapooka, he moved to SME where he conducted 14 weeks of Sapper training and then moved on to 3 Fd Sqn Townsville.

In 1982 he moved back to SME where he held the position of an Explosive Detection Dog Handler. From there he was posted to 7 Fd Sqn in Brisbane and during this time was fortunate enough to travel OS on Exercise Long Look.

On return from OS he was posted back to SME as the Sgt Instructor EOD Search Wing.

In 1992 he was posted to 17 Construction Squadron and travelled OS to Cambodia, where he assisted in the eradication of land mines laid by the warring factions. On return from Cambodia he was posted back to SME as the OIC Bridging Section.

Roger takes on the position as the Training Warrant Officer as of 4 Dec 95, and looks forward to meeting you all in the new year.

DANCE ! DANCE ! DANCE !

OLD SAPPERS' ASSOCIATION
TEA DANCE

OAKLEIGH BARRACKS

Sunday, March 24, 1996
at 2pm - 7pm

Admission: $12 per head
Buffet tea included.
Drinks available from bar.

Bookings or enquires to Jim Crosling
on 9438 2273.

CORPS NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION.

The Corps Newsletter will be distributed, in bulk, without charge, to Units and Sapper Associations.
It will be mailed direct to you, upon your request on the Army Form (ME2) below:

"""CUT 'N' RUSH"""""

The Editor
Corps Newsletter - Victoria
c/- Oakleigh Barracks
1318 North Road
Oakleigh South Vic 3167

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Please mail to me the 1996 issues of the Corps Newsletter - Victoria to the above address. My cheque for $3.00 to the Treasurer Corps Fund is enclosed as is the renewal subscription.

Name and Rank .....

LT COL J.T. RILEY ED