"SAPPER SUMMIT"
RAE CORPS NEWSLETTER
CHRISTMAS '93 EDITION

7

Seasons Greetings

Seasons greetings to all Victorian Sappers. As another eventful year draws to a close, I take the opportunity to wish all of you and your families a safe and happy Christmas.

E.J. WERTHEIMER, RFD
Colonel (Retd)
Colonel Commandant RAE
(Southern Region)

In this Issue

Editorial ..... Page 1

Sappers on Ambon and Hainan Island 1941-1945 ..... Page 4

55 Resources Squadron Open Day ..... Page 5

Puckapunyal's Quarry Reclaimed by 7 ESR ..... Page 6

"Flying Castles": 22 Construction Regiment Exercise in South Australia ..... Page 7

Castle Chit-Chat ..... Page 8

Corps Subscriptions ..... Page 9

Fighting Oil Well Fires in Borneo 1945 ..... Page 10

"Grovesnor" Nights ..... Page 12

Sir Clive Steele Memorial Lecture ..... Page 14

Editorial

Esprit de Corps in the Army Reserve

by
LTCOL W. Ross

WHAT is esprit de corps and what does it mean to and for the Army Reserve members of the Corps?

The Macquarie Dictionary defines esprit de corps as "*a sense of union and of common interests and responsibilities, as developed among a group of persons associated together.*"

This definition represents a fundamental requirement for any military organisation or for that matter, any successful endeavour involving more than a handful of people.

Esprit de corps in the Army Reserve is no less or more important than it is in Regular Army units. The only thing that varies is the importance of the various factors which contribute to or detract from esprit de corps.

In the last decade of the 20th century the factors influencing esprit de corps are complex and diverse. Social attitudes and the ability of the community at large to achieve and maintain esprit de corps is a key factor. The impact of a deep recession and the almost universal *(Continued on Page 2)*

approach to streamline and otherwise rationalise organisations have both had significant effect on the esprit de corps of the community at large. The most commonly felt impact of the rapid organisational changes currently experienced is the uncertainty and anxiety which this change has caused.

The effects of change and uncertainty are felt everywhere and the RAE units in Victoria are not exempt. The factors resulting from organisational change are numerous, but fall into two categories, these being: changes to the roles, tasks and even characteristics of units; and an ever increasing demand to manage limited resources effectively to obtain the greatest benefit for the Defence Force.

The changes of unit roles and tasks have had a positive effect on esprit de corps for all RAE units in Victoria. As a result of the recently conducted Force Structure review, 7 Engineer Support Regiment (formerly 7 Field Engineer Regiment) and 22 Construction Regiment have been grouped into the Logistic Support Force Engineers. This Engineer formation is commanded by HQ LSF Engineers (formerly HQ 6 Engineer Group and including 203 Works Section). The Logistic Support Force Engineers now have a real operational role to provide engineer support to the Logistic Support Force and to those units and formations supported by the Logistic Support Force. The implications of this include a requirement for both regiments to maintain a capability to deploy operationally at 180 days notice to move. 10 Field Squadron, now provides RAE support to 4 Brigade and, like the LSF Engineers, has a clear operational role and a good understanding of the nature of tasks it is likely to be required to undertake. These organisational changes have indeed had a positive effect on esprit de corps, in that they have provided a focus and a tangible reason for these units to strive to develop and maintain an operational capability.

A former Prime Minister is often quoted as saying "life wasn't meant to be easy". So it is for the RAE unit in Victoria. Economic constraints on the resources necessary for the units to develop and maintain their operational capabilities are limited. Units no longer enjoy the luxury of being able to parade as often as the would like to and when they do parade, there are difficult decisions to be made as to how the greatest value can be derived from the allocated resources. This extension of the drive to maximise the efficient use of resources does have some negative influences on esprit de corps. Some unit have modified their approach to training by abandoning the time honoured Wednesday night parade in favour of a monthly training weekend. This makes for more effective use of the training time available but deprives those units of the ability to maintain close and frequent contact with its members. The negative aspects of resource constraints are not new however and the challenge facing commanders at all levels is, as always, to maintain the interest and focus of Reserve soldiers and officers through demanding and relevant training.

Some aspects of resource constraints are not negative in their effects. Limited resources have always led Australian soldiers to improvise their way around the problem to get the job done. This simple statement of fact was reaffirmed most effectively in the Sir Clive Steele Memorial Lecture for 1993. The appalling conditions and paucity of resources which sappers building the Wau-Bulldog road in Papua New Guinea endured forced them to improvise and overcome their problems to achieve a truly remarkable feat of military engineering. By comparison, the resource constraints facing us in 1994 seem rather petty. Nevertheless, the same approach to improvising a solution is still used and must continue to be used to give our units the best possible opportunities to train for operational contingencies.

Esprit De Corps is what brings us out on wet, cold nights and what *(continued Page 3)*

makes us do our best even if the things aren't going as well as they might. It gives us a sense of belonging and of not letting our mates down. In these terms it is not a high blown theory but a time honoured tradition of Australian soldiers.

As the LSF Engineers we have a collective sense of purpose and increasingly we have challenging and interesting tasks to perform. Our job is to carry forward the traditions of the RAE by undertaking every task to the best of our ability so that we , and those who come after us, can share in the sense of pride in a job well done. ❖

BEATING THE RETREAT FORT QUEENSCLIFF

An excursion has been arranged to the above ceremony. Sunday 6th March 94

Tours to the Museum and the Fort sites can be undertaken.

A BBQ at about 1700 hrs is available.

For those proposing a one day trip, a bus will leave the Oakleigh Depot (numbers permitting) returning the same evening. Names of those wishing to use the bus to the Secretary (Bill Carlyle) on (03) 890 4363 by the 14 February 1994.

Sapper Summit is published by the Historical and Heritage Sub-Committee of the Royal Australian Engineers Corps Committee (Southern Region)

Editor in Chief - LTCOL R.F. Eastick MBE (Retd)
Layout - MAJ A. Smeaton
Distribution - CAPT D. Doyle ED (Retd)
Typesetting - Debbie Styles

OUR ILLUSTRATION

THE QUEENSCLIFF BATTERY.

As part of the scheme for the defence of the entrance to Port Phillip, approved by Sir W.F. Jervois and Colonel Scratchley, the construction and arming of batteries on important points of vantage are essential.
In this work the Victorian Defence Corps have been actively employed, and have been ably assisted by the Volunteer Engineers, who were encamped at Queenscliff for several days at Easter while engaged at the works in connection with the defences. The scene in our fronticepiece is the site of the battery near the lighthouse. It will be observed that the battery has been marked out on a sandy spot and the embrasures and inner walls are bags filled with sand. The men under the superintendence of the officers wrought heartily, and have constructed a work that will prove a powerful deterrent to the entrance of a hostile cruiser, as the eighty-pounder guns mounted therein command the narrow channel up which the enemy would have to pass.

SAPPERS ON AMBON AND HAINAN ISLAND 1941-1945

by
Bill Goodall

AMBON was one of the small outer possessions of Netherlands East Indies, roughly one thousand kilometres north of Darwin. Hainan is larger island adjacent to the coast of China.

Following the outbreak of war with Japan Gull Force following prior arrangements with NEI authorities disembarked at Ambon on 17 December 1941. Until such time it was standing by as part of 8th Division's 23 Brigade which was part of the garrison at Darwin.

Two Companies of 2/21 Battalion less one platoon with support troops including 13 sappers established themselves at Laha airfield for its defence, totalling 292 all ranks. The remainder of the Force was spread very thinly throughout the Island taking up defensive positions where it was believed the anticipated Japanese attacks would be launched.

The Force Commander acutely aware of his weaknesses in his defences, armament, equipment and troops in addition to his lack of defence policy awaited from RHQ Melbourne made frequent written demands to RHQ for rectification. His persistence was rewarded by being relieved of his command and recall to Australia for a non active posting.

Early January 1942 heralded the commencement of a regular series of daily devastating Japanese air raids without adequate protection by anti-aircraft artillery and fighter aircraft. This culminated in a seaborne invasion by a much larger Japanese force attacking simultaneously in several places with both air and sea fire power support. The Australian and Dutch garrison had neither air nor naval support. Furthermore no provision had been made for their evacuation.

The mission of Gull Force was to strengthen the Dutch garrison with a major responsibility for defence of the RAAF, Advanced Operational Base at LAHA.

The Dutch force capitulated after one day's resistance. The Australians fought heroically for four days faced with an impossible task particularly exhaustion of supplies of food, water and ammunition in addition to the weaknesses earlier referred to before surrendering.

The force had total strength of 1090, comprising the 2/21 Infantry Battalion and less then in additional 200 troops including Sappers, anti-aircraft gunners and others.

Sappers were 1 officer, 63 other ranks being 'B' Section, 2/11 Australian Field Company RAE...the unit raised in Queensland.

From this Force only 300 were to be repatriated back to Australia following their release as POW. A total of 52 all ranks escaped capture and found their way back to Australia in small groups.

At Laha, 11 Australians escaped captivity. The remainder about 180 within a matter of days were massacred by the Japanese troops - whilst POW. This number included the 13 sappers allocated to the airfield's defence. Earlier the sappers had destroyed all fuel and ammunition dumps and everything on land and sea considered to be of value to the enemy.

The remaining Australian POW were initially confined to their original barracks at Ambon such numbers including the remaining 51 sappers. During October 1942 a considerable number of POW including the Force Commander and 13 sappers were shipped to the island of Hainan to remain there for the duration of hostilities until August 1945.

Only 18 sappers from the original 64 taken POW were recovered - 9 from Ambon and 9 from Hainan. Death by illness brought about by inhumane treatment. Starvation diets, malnutrition, lack of life saving drugs accounted for the other fatalities apart from one further execution for the crime of stealing food and fatal injuries to the Officer and the Sergeant caught in a US bombing attack on the Ambon POW camp. (The unfortunate Sergeant was living in the officer's lines having assumed the identity of an infantry officer who had successfully escaped.

Sapper L.E. Hohl recently stated that he spent much of his time preparing buildings, hangers and other structures for demolition in anticipation

of a successful Japanese invasion. It has been recorded that at the height of the fighting that Lieutenant E.P. Campbell the Sappers' Officer had led a fighting patrol destroying an offending mortar crew and its mortar.

Furthermore Sappers were part of a composite platoon of rifles (including pay, postal and transport soldiers) located in the forward position facing a landing area of the enemy, vast numbers of Japanese troop advancing on them - engaging the enemy by rifle force. ■

Readers are referred to -

AMBON – Island of Mist
by Courtney T Harrison

GULL FORCE - Survival and Leadership in Battle
by Joan Beaumont

Available Soon!

The Swan Street Sappers

"A definitive sociological and military expose of the life and times of the Victorian Engineers at the Swan Street Depot, and other locales"

by

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBIN YOUL, RFD (Victorian Forester and Military Historian, currently CO 7 ESR)

This slice of Military History is not to be missed! Publication details will be issued in the next edition of Sapper Summit

55 RESOURCES SQN AFE OPEN DAY AT BEECHWORTH ON 10 OCTOBER

by
WOII Dave Davies (Retd)

FOR me to attend, my ex-Sapper mate GLEN MOIR of 39 E&M Sqn drove me to BEECHWORTH in his ex-Army, pre-loved, newly acquired Land Rover. On arrival at the work-site road-gate we met the Tp Comd JOHN PRITCHARD, who welcomed us as we tackled the meandering quagmire - normally called a road - into the camp site. As any good soldier knows, the first thing you do is make friends with the cook and the Q. We wandered into the cookhouse and we were greeted by 'Sarge' NEVILLE HANDLEY who was up to his elbows in the sausage mince preparing hamburgers to feed the visiting multitude. The cooks and their off-siders provided a wonderful array of salads, burgers, sausages and accompaniments for lunch, and presented it all very well. We had a good yarn to the medic BETH STEVENS and Pay SGT LYN HOLDING who told us all about timber and sawdust. Later we had a good yarn to SSM WO11 WAYNE KENNELLY on past, present and future doings of 91 Forestry.

Due to the mud-bath road camp access for visitors was cancelled, so all personnel shifted to the BEECHWORTH MUNICIPAL GARDENS for lunch. Thanks to BOB PARKINSON, the Prison Officer In-Charge of timber milling and forest work gangs, for his valued assistance generally and particularly for 'acquiring' the big gas barbecue which was set up in the beautiful, rock construction, visitors shelter in the Gardens adjacent to HM Corrective Services area, better known as the Beechworth Gaol. In this area we had stacks of Army vehicles and visitors cars. It wasn't long before the place was crowded (rough guess of 60) and with aluminium containers firmly grasped, lots of stories, past history anecdotes and probably a few untruths were swapped. A couple of 91 Forestry stalwarts appeared, namely ex-Sapper MAJ LES MALSEED and ex-Sapper CAPT GREG WALLACE, complete with tam-o-shanter. It was good to meet them again, as we worked together on setting up the first twin-generator electric portable sawmill. One does not wish to be

unkind but it must have been Artillery cordite that blackened SSGT GEORGE FACEY's boots. A halt was called to lunch proceedings as SQN OC MAJ BILL VAN REE addressed the multitude, welcomed the visitors, and gave a run-down on the functions of 107, 80, 91 Troops and 55 Resources Squadron. Then our CO Sapper LTCOL ROB YOUL spoke at length on Troop and Squadron duties and functions in Far North Australia - much applause followed.

As the weather looked menacing, it was cold and showers of rain were about, a call to arms went out and in about 5 minutes flat a tent was up (if this was an Olympic event they'd win gold). This provided the venue for the annual general meeting of 91 Forestry Association, ably conducted by LES MALSEED.

Having seen the campsite and the MOBILE DIMENSION SAW with piles of 4 by 2, 3 be, 6 be and a few other sizes I decided to seek facts and figures. I got these from CPL KEN HOWE who was leaning against the aluminium can distribution point. I inquired 'How much timber did you get out of it?' He answered 'It was a bulk order'. I didn't get much out of that question, but he was on the ball for all other queries.

The hours slid by and we heard the call, 'Pucka trucks leaving 3 pm'. One young Sapper bawled out 'You mean 1500 hours dontcha?! Good lad.

There's another group that need thanks for their work; the Plant Tp boys. A mill can't really exist without them.

Some others warmly thought of on this day were 'Sam' Bruton, Jim Barbour and Tom Chambers; they had made themselves easy to remember in earlier times.

The organisers are thanked for providing the opportunity to attend.

Puckapunyal's Quarry Reclaimed by 7ESR

by

LTCOL Rob Youl RFD

During its annual camp in October 1993, 55 Resources Squadron, a sub unit of 7 Engineer Support Regiment at Ringwood, took over the Puckapunyal quarry from the departing 21 Construction Squadron.Assisted by SPR Mick Attlier from 21 Construction Squadron, 80 Quarrying Troop (named after 80 Quarrying Squadron, a SR unit of the 1950s and 1960s) carried out extensive works to clear the quarry face, clean up around the crushers and create new areas for stockpiles.

As well they repaired the Hadfield primary crusher, which has not operated for many months. This was a great effort by the newly raised troop, assisted by 107 Plant Troop. It was very hard work over long hours each day.

We expect to receive many more orders for stone than we can handle, once the situation is publicised.

During the same period, 91 Forestry Troop logged radiata pine stands in wet conditions at Beechworth in Victoria's North East. (The region was severely flooded at the time, but the expected summons to the levees did not eventuate). Some of the logs have gone to Beechworth Prison's sawmill, and some to the 91 Troops mill at Puckapunyal.

Having operated for almost 18 months,
55 Resources Squadron is reassessing its roles and structure. It seems most unlikely that the Well Drilling Section can operate as originally envisaged, but the creation of a core of expertise should be possible just the same.

Meanwhile the Regiment keeps a log of the considerable financial value of the materials its sub-units produce for the Australian Army. The dollar value rapidly increases.

22 Construction Regiment Exercise Flying Castle

For two weeks in October this year, 22 Construction Regiment made it's temporary home in South Australia when it took the opportunity to concentrate as a Regiment and practice its new role as part of the Logistic Support Force Engineers.

The training activity, titled ***Exercise Flying Castle,*** involved the entire Regiment, along with contingents from a number of supporting units, moving to South Australia where a range of construction tasks were undertaken in Murray Bridge and in the Adelaide suburb of Warradale.

Alas! The famous wineries of the Barossa Valley and the excitement leading up to the Adelaide Grand Prix were deprived the Regiment's patronage as the unit tackled a demanding schedule to complete the seven major construction tasks they had undertaken to achieve.

105 Construction Squadron established themselves in the Warradale military area and started work immediately on the construction of road works and concrete slabs for a new Army petrol station, the demolition of two large but outdated factory sheds, and the construction of a large pre-fabricated aircraft hangar.

Approximately 80 km to the east, the township of Murray Bridge, nestled on the banks of the Murray River, hosted 106 Construction Squadron as it went about its tasks. These included the laying of some 6 kilometres of irrigation pipeline, running electric power supply to a range building and building an island (*see the next issue of Sapper Summit for details on the island building project which required 500 cubic metres of material and 10 days of hard work to complete*).

The members of the Regimental Headquarters made their home at a recently vacated Army Reserve depot in the Adelaide suburb of Alberton for the period of the exercise. From this location they maintained close contact with the Defence Facilities Branch "customer" and tested the unit's capacity to operate in dispersed mode.

The construction tasks completed by the members of the Regiment were not simply training tasks for the sake of training alone. They were undertaken in the Defence Facilities Branch in Adelaide. Most importantly, the construction tasks were typical of the work the Regiment may be required to perform as part of the Logistic Support Force.

The unit was visited on exercise by the Commander Land Command Engineers, Colonel Geoff Pearce and the Commander of the Logistic Support Force Engineers, Colonel Howard Ellis. The unit was able to present these visitors with the diverse range of vertical and horizontal construction tasks undertaken by the Regiment.

The construction projects were all successfully executed and the estimated value of the completed works was in the order of $200,000. Apart from the value of construction works completed, the exercise required the full range of trade skills available within the unit and provided a valuable opportunity to practice its new role.

Exercise Flying Castle formed a basis for future deployments at unit and sub-unit level and was an ideal activity to assist in the transition of 22 Construction Regiment from a Supplementary Reserve Unit to its new status as a "normal" conditions unit of the General Reserve. ■

"SO2 SNIPPETS" (Castle Chit Chat)

By Major Don Hughes

As another year draws to a close it's time to reflect on the achievements of Sappers in Victoria. At the national level the corps has continued to serve the country well, both at home and abroad. RAE has deployed Sappers to Cambodia, Western Sahara, Somalia and numerous other locations particularly in the Pacific.

Training

Training continues with vigour at home for not only the land component of the Corps but also in the supporting elements. Great re-structures have been in place for some time now. Sappers however, appear to thrive in this environment. It must have something to do with our adaptability and versatility!

Course Update

I recently visited the Corps Update at SME with Colonel Ellis. The atmosphere was most positive with the update honing in on the front line Sappers - the CER's. Not without their problems, the CER concept appears to be working extremely well. Practical demonstrations of proposed equipments was also a highlight of the update: a backhoe that does 107 km/h is quite a sight!

Annual Field Exercise

LSF Engrs have lived up to the challenges put in front of them since FSR, and have executed some excellent tasks and exercises this year. Of particular note was 22 Const Regt's AFE in South Australia and 55 Resources Sqn AFE in northern Victoria. 7ESR's "Newborough" Sqns; 38 Fd Sqn and 39 E&M Sqn continue to work and play hard and its always pleasing to feel the "esprit de corps" of the boys (and girls) from the Valley! These Sqns also had most successful AFE's at SME and in the valley.

Technical Ability

All AFEs demonstrated the incredible technical capability available from within the formation. When CPL "Blue" Beddles stated to the COMD he would drop this "humungus" radiata pine in the opposite direction of its lean, and further added; "it will land near that stump, but a bit to the left so the timber is not shattered". I thought "bull----!" Guess where it landed? I was also impressed with 55 Res Sqn's commitment to OH&S and environmental issues.

Puckapunyal

The Quarry at Puckapunyal has been enthusiastically taken over by 80 Quarry Tp with the assistance of 107 Pl Tp (HY). The sad departure of the Red Roosters (21 Const Sqn) has left a void at Puckapunyal which is part of LSF Engr's challenge to fill. 22 Const Regt has undertaken numerous tasks in the Puckapunyal area as has 7ESR.

Command and Control

The HQ too, along with 203 Wks Sect, are starting to "knock themselves" into shape. A most successful LSF ENGR TEWT at Portland and a CPX at Oakleigh (first time in how many years?) have meshed in well with our requirements to support the LSF in northern Australia.

Heritage Issues

If you have a chance over the Christmas period, a visit to Fort Nepean is recommended. A leaflet with information on some of the self guided walks available has been forwarded to you with this edition of Sapper Summit. You should be aware that BRIG "Ding" Bell is harnessing local support to assist with preserving the Pt Nepean area.

CORPS SUBS

By COL R.J. McKinnon

Other than by limited income received by Corps Shop sales, Corps Subscriptions are the only income available to Corps to maintain its heritage.

Subscriptions to the Corps Fund are voluntary but are expected to be made by all serving officers and senior NCOs. Junior NCOs and soldiers may also contribute. Retired officers and senior NCOs of the Corps are also invited to contribute.

1993 Corps Subscriptions are now due and should be paid to the Secretaries of Regional Corps Committees as soon as possible. Subscription rates for 1993 are:

	ARA	*ARes*
SGT	14.00	10.00
SSGT	17.00	12.00
WO2	19.00	14.00
WO1	20.00	16.00
LT	14.00	10.00
CAPT	19.00	15.00
MAJ	23.00	19.00
LTCOL	26.00	22.00
COL	30.00	25.00
BRIG	35.00	29.00
MAJGEN	40.00	34.00
LTGEN	48.00	34.00

Subscription rates for retired members are $20 for officers and $15 for senior NCOs.

1994 Corps subscription will be published in the first edition of *Sapper News* in 1994.

Contact details of the Regional Corps Committees are as follows:

Queensland Region RAE Corps Committee

CAPT M. Fairweather - (07) 354 7584

Eastern Region RAE Corps Committee

MAJ R. MacMurray - (02) 349 0338 or (02) 600 4213

ACT Region RAE Corps Committee

MAJ P. Horne - (06) 275 9501 until 30 Sep 93
MAJ T. Farrell - (06) 265 9100 from 1 Oct 93

Southern Region RAE Corps Committee

CAPT A. McVilly - (03) 282 6172

Central Region RAE Corps Committee

CAPT J. Bosker - (08) 293 9564

Western Region RAE Corps Committee

MAJ J. Nelson - (09) 311 2681

Tasmanian Region RAE Corps Committee

CAPT C. Massy - (002) 21 2246

Northern Region RAE Corps Committee

MAJ M. Hall - (089) 41 2355

Payment of Subscriptions or the lack thereof is a perennial item on the agenda of the Annual Corps Committee Meeting.

❑

Ubique

FIGHTING OIL WELL FIRES IN SERIA, BORNEO 1945

by

John E. Slee

The following comprises extracts from a paper by LT E.B. Underwood, 2/3 Field Company, RAE, AIF, with comments from the third volume of the history of the RAE by MAJGEN R.R. McNicoll, CBE, AM. The paper was prepared at the request of MAJGEN C.S. Steele, E-in-C, Australian Military Forces, and was published in the June 1946 issue of "The Journal of the Royal Engineers", for the Institution of Royal Engineers.

LT Underwood, by profession a chemical engineer, had never seen an oil well until he came to Seria. After three months he and his sappers were probably all fairly knowledgeable on the subject.

Introduction

The object of the campaign in North-West Borneo was based firstly on the naval and air base potential of Brunei Bay, and secondly on the economic importance of the oil fields of the Miri-Seria area, which was at the time the largest producing oil field in the then British Empire.

20th Brigade Group, 9 Aust Div, landed in Brunei Bay on 10 June 1945, and 2/17 Bn, supported by LT Underwood's platoon of 2/3 Field Company, advanced west along the coast to occupy Seria.

The enemy had taken advantage of the readily destructive nature of the field and the installations to carry out extensive demolitions. Destruction or immobilisation of machinery, mud pumps, fire pumps, oil pumps, water pumps and MT, coupled with the complete disregard by the Japanese for mechanical maintenance, meant that repairs were almost invariably necessary. A large number of wells had been set on fire, and because the field was relatively new with pressures high at the well heads, the roar from most could be heard from far way. The Official History describes it:

> *"From the broken pipes that formed the head of each well the burning oil was hosing as from huge, hissing Bunsen burners. The pressure was so strong that the oil, clear as petrol, did not begin to burn until the jet was a few inches from the pipe. The it became a tumbling cloud of flame and billowing blue-black smoke. At about 1000 feet the plumes from more than 30 fires mixed in a single canopy of smoke. Night and day this appalling waste continued. The men round Seria went to sleep to the hiss and grumbling of an entire oil field in flames and woke to the same din."*

(In the 1990s an interesting comparison with the situation in Kuwait at the end of the Gulf War can be made).

Various parties attempted to extinguish fires, and some were put out by beating, smothering with sand, etc. However the objective of the Force required a further eight miles advance, involving a wide range of sapper tasks with took priority. Therefore the Force Commander ordered the RAE platoon to take whatever action was possible against the fires, subject to other operational requirements. Eventually these other demands became less and the work of fire-fighting became the main job in hand.

Native personnel, eventually totalling some 200, who were former employees on the field, from many trades, were recruited as they made their way back to the coast from hiding inland. An oil field engineer of the Netherlands East Indies Civil Administration arrived to help, and provided a great deal of valuable information.

The native tradesmen were invariably up to the mark in recovery and repair of mechanical plant when fast work was called for. 1 Welding Platoon, RAE, arrived, under command and also mobile cranes and heavy transport.

Fire Fighting Methods

Thanks to Japanese demolitions almost no fire-fighting plant was available initially. A few well fires were put out by closing a gate valve, either by approaching it protected by wet blankets or by using a long specially fabricated two-pronged fork. The water supply was restored, boilers and steam pumps were repaired, the gas supply put back into service using one of the wells extinguished earlier, and the mud system restored. Improvisation and cannibalisation were the norm. Finally some twelve fires required major work to put out.

With steam available it was possible to set up batteries of boilers, tanks and pumps round the target well and when the wind was in the right quarter and fire was smothered with steam and water. The sappers displayed considerable fortitude: men laying ARC mesh for plant worked in relays behind shields, and bulldozer drivers in asbestos suits worked in five-minute relays. There was also quite an element of danger, with risk of fires re-igniting. Four major fires were put out in this way.

On 17 August two professional oil well fire fighters from Patton & Son arrived from the USA under contract to the British-Malayan Petroleum Company, a Shell subsidiary and the owners of the field. Underwood continued to be responsible, with his RAE team, for extinguishing the fires, but the newcomers advised, and introduced a patented Patton apparatus which was fabricated in the Seria workshops. This was essentially a 6-inch stack in which was a high pressure gate valve; welded to the lower end of the stack was a 6-in by 3-in swage with a machined taper so that it could enter the broken end of the tubing in the well "Christmas Tree". The stack was carried vertically at the end of a boom mounted on a crawler crane. There was a 3-in water line to the stack below the gate valve, and a means of closing the gate valve by remote control. The stack assembly was intentionally heavy. Before using the apparatus minor fires round the well head had to be suppressed, leaving one major fire. On some wells this was "killed" with steam and water before sealing; on others the main jet from the well head was extinguished in the process of sealing. In at least one case the "Christmas Tree" had to be removed to obtain a vertical opening: this was done by shooting off the top of the well with a 2-pdr. A.TK. gun using three rounds of AP at 100 yards. The fire was then approached from the windward side (using, on occasions, an anchored Wirraway aircraft fuselage to produce additional wind), to manoeuvre the crane to lower the swage into the end of the broken tubing. The oil jet, or the flame if still burning, was thus transferred to the upper end of the stack. When the seating was good enough the high pressure water was connected and the main valve in the stack closed. High pressure water was then pumped in until all gas and oil ceased to flow and the well was sealed off.

The main jet at several of these wells gave a flame, generally horizontal, of 12 to 15 metres long and 4 to 5 metres high.

After sealing, new "Christmas Tree" well-head fittings were screwed into place, the new master gate valve was closed and the well was then safe.

Summary of Work

LT Underwood summarised the work carried out at Seria as follows.

Of the thirty-seven wells set on fire by the enemy:

(Continued on Page 12)

a. Three small fires around well-heads were beaten out;

b. Eleven well fires were extinguished during the initial stages by turning off master gate valves and by smothering with sand;

c. One gas well was extinguished with water;

d. Two fires were put out by methods involving diversion of the main oil flow;

e. Three were extinguished with steam;

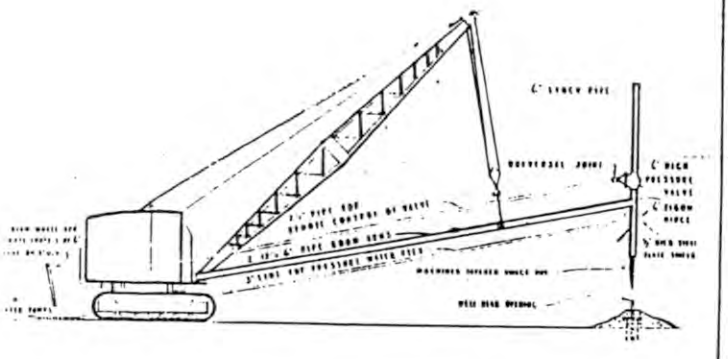
f. Twelve were put out using patented equipment;

g. Four wells sanded up, extinguishing themselves.

The work covered a period of three months, involving 7600 man-days worked including 2400 by Army personnel and the balance by civilians. An indication of the plant worked can be gained from the following:

Wheeled Transport	.. 4400 Plant Hours
Tracked Equipment	.. 2300 Plant Hours
Fire Pumps	.. 1400 Plant Hours.

The illustration below shows the configuration of the crane used to place the Patented Apparatus



Members of the Sapper fraternity may not be aware of a series of lectures referred to as "Grosvenor Nights", which could be of considerable general interest to them.

"Grosvenor Nights" are a weekly defence awareness program, piloted this year at "Grosvenor", 55 Queens Road, Melbourne. They are conducted on a weekly basis, over a period of approximately 6 months each year. Timings are: Mess open 1730 - 2200 hrs each Thursday. A quality presentation is made between 1800 and 1900 hrs, followed by question time: Serving and retired service personnel and their guests are invited to attend and enjoy the hospitality of the mess, as well as hearing an interesting presentation. The presentation is completed at an early hour to allow visitors to leave in time to attend any other activities they may be involved in.

Presentations made in 1993 covered a wide range of subjects, including such items as:

Presentation by the Chief of the Defence Forces

Presentation by David Horner

Dr James Dohaldson's Inaugural

Weary Dunlop Lecture on Leadership
Lectures on The Collins Class

Submarine Project

The Vietnam War in Retrospect

Aboriginal and Union Thoughts on Defence

Subject to the review of the 1993 programme, the proposed dates for the 1994 season of activities are set out below. If adopted, starting on the Thursday after ANZAC day would seem to be a good idea.

28 Apr 94	Debate between units
05 May 94	Leadership
12 May 94	New Developments
19 May 94	Military History
26 May 94	Issues
02 Jun 94	Leadership
09 Jun 94	New Developments
16 Jun 94	Military History
23 Jun 94	Issues
30 Jun 94	Debate:
07 Jul 94	Leadership
14 Jul 94	New Developments
21 Jul 94	Military History
28 Jul 94	Issues
04 Aug 94	Leadership
11 Aug 94	New Developments
18 Aug 94	Military History
25 Aug 94	Issues
01 Nov 94	Leadership
08 Nov 94	New Developments
15 Nov 94	Military History
22 Nov 94	Issues
29 Nov 94	Debate:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GETTYSBERG ADDRESS

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are ~~created equal~~.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war testing whether that nation or any other nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that War. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives / that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate - we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow - this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honoured dead. We take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain - that this nation, under god shall have a new birth of freedom - and that government of the people, by the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The Major General Sir Clive Steele KBE, DSO, MC, VD

Inaugural Memorial Lecture

The photograph above shows a team of Sappers dragging compressor components up a muddy slope. Compressors were used to drill bore holes for blasting charges. Often however, there was no compressor available and the bore holes were prepared using sledge hammers and hand chissels!

The inaugural Sir Clive Steele Memorial Lecture was presented at Oakleigh Barracks on 3 December 1993 and was greeted with a terrific response. An initiative of the Heritage and Historical sub-Committee of the RAE Corps Committee (Southern Region), the annual Memorial Lecture is scheduled on the first Friday of December each year with notable guest speakers presenting lectures on significant military engineering tasks This year's lecture, the inaugural , was given by Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) John Slee, Captain Reg Yates and Sapper Peter Wilson on the Wau-Bulldog Road. Many Sappers, of all ranks, who actually worked on the project were in attendance and were able to make the story come alive.

Major General Sir Clive Steele KBE,DSO, MC,VD
Engineer-in Chief at Land Headquarters
1942-45