

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

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22ND BATTALION NEWS

P.O. Box 13-058,
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CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE - - - - -

There have been times in my life when each Christmas has seemed like a photo-copy of the one that preceded it but no less enjoyable because of the repetition. On the contrary, the traditional thing about Christmas is that the day should be as much like all the other Christmas Days as we can make it. We do traditional things, eat traditional foods and wish everyone we see the traditional compliments of the season. My wife and I would start our Christmas Day by going to Church, then enjoy the excitement on the children's faces as they opened their parcels to see what 'Santa' had brought them, then eat the traditionally enormous Christmas dinner and spend the next few hours trying to get over the traditional bloated feeling. At some time during the day, we would visit some of our relations or they would visit us - more gifts would be exchanged and more food and drink consumed - wonderful!

In those years, I often used to think of the four Christmas Days I spent overseas during the war:- the first in a wadi near Tobruk, the next in a Convalescent camp in Palestine, the one after that in hospital in Bari and the fourth and last with some old friends of my parents in a small English town. Plenty of variety there but how we looked forward to going home and enjoying again the Christmas Days of happy memory. Christmas is first and foremost a family occasion and, if we are separated from our loved ones, it is never a real Christmas. This year, my wife and I have much to look forward to, for most of our expanding and often widely separated family will be together again. We will share Christmas Day with two of our children and their families and with some of our children's in-laws. Including an old friend who has no family of her own to share Christmas with, we will probably number twelve adults and five small children. It will be chaotic but it ought to be a day to remember. I hope that we and everyone else who is able to enjoy such a family-reunion type of Christmas will spare at least some thoughts for those who are lonely or sick or in any other kind of trouble this Christmas.

Our President, GEORGE MATTHEWS, joins with the editor in wishing every one of you and your families a joyful Christmas and good health and much else to be thankful for in 1982.

BRANCH NEWS

The Ladies Night that wasn't:- We announced with confidence in our last issue that we were holding a Ladies Night function on Saturday, 31st October. There had been a good response at our Branch Reunion in March to a suggestion that we hold another social function later in the year and your Committee dutifully fixed the date and made all the arrangements but the response was so pathetic that we had no option but to call the whole thing off a few days beforehand. We know that it is impossible to select a date that will suit everyone and several of our regular attenders had prior commitments for the date we did choose. But the response was b--- poor whichever way you look at it - the sort of response that makes the organisers of social functions

BRANCH REUNION & LADIES NIGHT - SUNDAY, 28TH MARCH.

BRANCH NEWS (CONTINUED)

wonder why they bother to keep on keeping on. As a long-time organiser of Branch social functions, I used to have a recurring nightmare in which I arrived at the venue to find the place in darkness and a crowd of angry people outside demanding to know when the doors would open. In my dream, I would realise with growing horror that I had forgotten to organise things with the caterers. Now I suppose I will have a different kind of nightmare in which the hall is open and the caterers at the ready but NOBODY turns up! But I guess we will try again. The show must go on and this Branch of 22nd Battalion Association is not dead yet, even if it sometimes seems that rigor mortis is about to set in.

CECIL SMITH is in Middlemore Hospital after a serious heart operation. After an initial spell in Intensive Care, Ces. was transferred to Ward 17 and was steadily improving until about a week ago, when he had a setback and went back into intensive care. He had been hoping to be home for Christmas and may still manage to do so - that would be the best possible Christmas present. Anyone planning to visit Cecil in hospital is advised to ring Leila first (Phone 563-331) to make sure that visiting is allowed. Home address:- 20 Harford Place, Pakuranga.

W.J.H. (BILL) WAKELIN:- We have just been advised by Mrs. Shirley Wakelin of 1216 Cameron Road, Tauranga that her husband died on 17th October and was given a memorable R.S.A. funeral. We express our deep sympathy to Shirley.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1981/82:- At the beginning of this month, we sent out about 120 accounts to Branch members who had not by then sent in a payment of the current year's sub. (\$3). The response so far has been pretty good:- at least 25 members have sent payments to date and the mail flow is continuing. If you are in any doubt as to how you stand, if you have not received an account this month, you are already paid up to 28/2/82, having paid earlier in the year or being in credit from an advance payment in a previous year. Many thanks to all those who have sent Welfare Fund and other donations with their subs. For future reference, the best time to pay your sub. is when we send out the March notice of the Branch Reunion and A.G.M. That marks the beginning of a new financial year and the payments that come in then save us a lot of work and expense later on. It costs well over 10 cents to send out an account and that makes no allowance for the hours of clerical work involved. For the same reason (escalating costs), we have stopped issuing receipts unless they are specifically requested. If you would like a receipt, please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your remittance.

BRANCH REUNION & LADIES NIGHT:- Your Branch Committee has decided on a new venue and a different night of the week for the Annual Branch Reunion & Ladies Night. It will be held on a Sunday (28th March), from about 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., and it will be cheaper without sacrificing quality of catering. Guests will be welcome. Full details in our next issue.

CRETE IN PERSPECTIVE

The editor was well aware that he was sticking his neck out a bit when he wrote that article headed "Crete in Retrospect" for the October issue of this Newsletter and fully expected that someone might wish to sever the said neck. In the event, I received only two comments in writing and no verbal communications. The first was from a well-respected officer of 22nd Battalion who took part in the battle of Crete and the fighting at Maleme airfield and wrote:- "Congratulations on a magnificent production. Your 'Crete in Retrospect' was the work of a master, while your quoting of those stanzas from Cleveland's 'Galatas' was indeed a fitting postscript."

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CRETE IN PERSPECTIVE (CONTINUED)

Any danger of my head being turned by such praise was quickly averted by the receipt later of a blistering criticism from JIM HENDERSON, the author of our Battalion History, who writes (in part):- "The word 'hindsight' is often used deprecatingly by those on the defensive. The word they should be using is 'PERSPECTIVE'. 40 years on - - - Good God! What documents, memoirs, diaries have become available, secret files opened, questions asked, revelations made, books printed! I was astonished at this sentence:- 'Controversy about Crete has arisen mainly from books written by men who have never been in action and are not old enough to have any personal recollections of the second World War.' Piffle! Similarly, the claim of a 'victory in defeat', an unthinking attitude condemning us to Gallipolis after Gallipolis, with asinine acceptance. What a destiny! "

Well now - that was telling me, was it not? But, with due respect for Jim, we are all entitled to our opinions and, in reading any kind of historical account, it is not easy to distinguish what is fact from what is opinion. I have been deeply interested in History, including the military variety, ever since I was at Varsity, where it was my major subject. I have read a great many historical books by able historians but I have also read many others that contained a great deal of 'piffle'. What is History after all but a record of events as remembered by the participants, inevitably coloured by personal feeling and prejudice and often amounting to a distortion of what took place. Facts, when fully known, can never be controversial but differing interpretations of the same set of facts do give rise to controversy. And when an historian attempts to draw conclusions, to 'put things in perspective' as he sees them, the field is wide open for further argument. To get a totally unbiassed picture, it is often necessary to read several conflicting accounts of the same events and hope that the truth will somehow emerge from a welter of opinions presented in the guise of factual reporting.

I have the greatest respect for those who carry out painstaking research into the records of long-past events but I suspect that quite a few of these latter-day historians are more concerned with sensationalism than with a dedicated search for truth. It is the sensational stuff, the 'startling disclosure' that sells books, just as it sells newspapers.

Let's take a brief look at Jim's argument about 'victory in defeat'. The only point of comparison that I can see between Gallipoli and Crete is that both gave rise to deeds of extraordinary heroism. As battles or campaigns, they were as different as chalk from cheese. Military history contains many examples of defeat in victory and a 'Pyrrhic victory' has long been the classic phrase to describe a victory gained at too great a cost. After the battle of Asculum, King Pyrrhus exclaimed:- "One more such victory and we are lost". Hitler evidently felt much the same after the battle of Crete, as witness the fact that Germany's crack paratroop regiments were never permitted to try for a similar victory over the defenders of Malta.

If there can be defeat in victory for one side, there can also be victory in defeat for the other side. In losing the battle of Crete, the New Zealand infantry also gained a victory in that they established conclusively that, in close quarter fighting, they were more than a match for elite professional soldiers of the German army or, as their own publicity described them, "the German warriors incarnate, as nimble as greyhounds, as tough as leather, as hard as Krupps steel".

I stand by what I said in 'Crete in Retrospect':- that mistakes and miscalculations were made by both sides but that this does not justify attempts to

CRETE IN PERSPECTIVE (CONTINUED)

place major blame on individual commanders for anything that happened in Crete in 1941. In writing those words, I was thinking especially of 22nd Battalion's LESLIE WILTON ANDREW and, on this point, Jim Henderson and I are in full agreement for Jim has, on more than one occasion, deplored the unjustified statements that say, in effect, that "the Battalion that lost Maleme lost Crete". If I read his letter correctly, Jim would like to shift the blame from 22nd Battalion to 5th Brigade but I can't agree with that statement either. It is undoubtedly true that the decision NOT to defend the area west of the Tavronitis River was a vital factor in the outcome of the battle of Crete but I would hesitate to blame those who made this decision without knowing a great deal more about the reasoning behind it. When the commander of a Brigade, Division or Army group is given many vulnerable localities to defend with resources that are inadequate for the task, he can easily be tempted to spread his defences too thinly and the attacking forces have the tremendous advantage of being able to probe for the weakly defended or undefended points. The remedy in such a defensive situation, provided of course that you have at least parity in the air, is to have a highly-mobile reserve force that can quickly be moved from one danger spot to another. No such force was available to the defenders of Crete. If blame there must be, it can only be directed at the M.E. command in Cairo and its failure to supply enough aircraft, enough armoured vehicles, enough artillery and anti-aircraft weapons, enough base-plates, tripods, picks and shovels and, above all, enough trained men.

Jim Henderson concluded his letter with a plug for Tony Simpson's new book:- "The Battle for Crete, 1941". I have not read the book but would like to do so and then review it in this Newsletter. Maybe Jim can arrange for a complimentary copy.

RETURN TO GREECE AND CRETE

When I requested leave of absence from Cedric for a 22 Bn. function earlier this year I gave as my reasons the selling up of my home in Pukekohe and my departure from New Zealand to attend the 40th Anniversary Commemorative Service of the Battle of Crete. Cedric gave me leave subject to my producing a report on my return to N.Z. And so, belatedly, here it is.

Five or six tour parties of New Zealanders left N.Z. in early May to attend this year's service. After studying the itineraries of the different tours I chose the one which would give the longest time in Greece and Crete - twelve days in the former and eight days in the latter. Our party numbered thirty-two, eighteen men and fourteen women. I must state here that these fourteen wives were absolutely wonderful. Their interest was inexhaustible. They never tired. They never complained.

The men were all from different units of the Division, Div. Cav, Arty., Sigs., ASC, Field Security, Engineers and most important, Infantry. There was only one rep from any unit except from 22 Bn.! From 22 Bn. there were Norm. Carter, Robin Sinclair, Gray Tennent and myself. We four adopted the Field Security man, Dick Wood, as a fifth member of the Bn., since he was working in the Maleme area and was R and Q with C Coy. on the airfield. As he explained, he was converted into an infantryman within five minutes of the battle starting, and he "tagged on" to the remnants of C Coy. when we left the airfield just before dawn the next day under the efficient guidance of Peter Butler.

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RETURN TO GREECE AND CRETE (CONTINUED)

In Greece we were able to see the country that we did not see in 1941, since this time we were able to make all our moves by day. We visited Katerini, the Olympus Pass, the Servia Pass - new to the 22 Bn. - and on South through Ellison, Larissa, Lamia and Thermopolae to the evacuation beaches in the South. In addition we visited Volos, Corinth, and places of ancient classical significance.

When the day arrived for our flight to Crete one could sense the increasing excitement of our party - both men and women. We were like a crowd of kids fighting to get the first view of the island and asking questions such as "Who will jump first?" At the Canea (?), Chania (?), Khania (?) airport we were given a very warm welcome by an official party which had sufficient authority to move on to the tarmac itself to greet us. A few of the members of this party attached themselves to us each day and evening of the six days we spent in the western part of Crete. They represented, I believe, Municipal authorities and the Crete Veterans' Association, the members of which had seen action either during the Battle of Crete or the resistance which followed during the German occupation.

During these six days, we visited the once well known sites from the Maleme airfield back through the 21st and 23rd areas, the Platanus, Galatos and Suda Bay. In this western part of the island, we were interested to observe the greater growth in vegetation. How we once would have welcomed this greater cover! But except in the very modern and apparently prosperous city of Canea there was no urban development. We were amazed to find the Maleme airfield looking just the same as it looked before it filled up with the JU 52s. Two or three buildings had been erected on the site of C Coy. HQ and just across the road on the airfield itself, and a five-storey, five star hotel had been built close to the eastern end of the field. While a new bridge had been built at Tavronitis, the old one remained still in very good condition.

On Hill 107, the site once of 22 Bn. HQ and A Coy., stands the German Cemetery. There are 5000 graves in this cemetery and a study of the head-stones revealed that the great majority of these men died on the 20th May, the first day of the Battle.

One day we drove in comfort in our excellent air-conditioned coach over the sealed 45 mile road from Canea to Sphakia. The road has not changed much except that it is now sealed and it descends right down to sea level. On this drive over the road which climbs to 6000 ft. and descends again to sea level, I took the "mike" and spoke of the fatigue and exhaustion 40 years ago when we started the march, already battle-weary and hungry, boots worn out, the gravel road, and the terrible scramble down the hill to Sphakia itself. I laid it on thick for the women and the few men who had not walked that damned route.

What a fool and how humble I felt when, after I had finished, another member of our party grabbed the "mike" and said "You blokes thought you had a tough walk! I tell you it was nothing compared with the walk some of us had returning a day later, still with no food, and this time prodded by German bayonets! "

At Sphakia itself I was astonished when I looked up the hill just West of the beach up which Les Andrew sent the remaining twenty-three members of C Coy. on that last day to watch for German intrusion from that flank. The hill is still as bare as the proverbial with the same two small buildings and the few stunted trees surrounding them, and with the same single file track up which we staggered and down which we hurried to our ship late that night.

RETURN TO GREECE AND CRETE (CONTINUED)

Not having seen the actual beach in the daylight in 1941, I was amazed to discover on this trip how small it was. It could not have measured more than one hundred yards. It belies belief to think of the thousands who were evacuated during the few hours on each of the three nights, but a memorial placed by the Greeks after the war tells the story.

Memories of the tour which will remain forever in my mind, and, I am sure, in the minds of all New Zealanders who have attended any of the Commemorative Services of the Battle of Crete, are the outstanding generosity and hospitality of the Cretans and their genuine friendship for all New Zealanders. Their generosity in many shops extended not only to offering Ouzo to the men while their womenfolk searched for mementos of their trip, but also to refusing to accept payment for such purchases! Their generosity at Galatos, a town with a population now of only one thousand people, where after a memorial service attended by between two and three thousand people lunch was turned on for everyone, with more than enough food and with almost too much liquor.

Many parades and services were held. One impressive service was at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Suda Bay, known officially as the English Cemetery. This is a beautiful cemetery and here all the British dead, numbering some five thousand rest in this quiet, tranquil and sacred spot.

Another impressive service, with Honour Guards, Wreath laying, National Anthems and Last Post was held at Alikianos, in what we once called the Prison Valley. It was here that the Germans showed themselves most ruthless. I believe the whole village was destroyed and its inhabitants killed. It was butchery at its worst. It is no wonder that the Cretan people - except in the popular and flourishing tourist areas of Heraklion - hate the Germans so.

For sacredness combined with friendliness and hospitality, the service at Galatos must rank as the outstanding one. As at Alikianos there were the Honour Guards, wreaths, prayers etc. There must have been at least two hundred and fifty New Zealanders on parade from the five or six tour parties. I have no idea how many Aussies, Brits., or Greeks, or Germans were present. I think that the N.Z. Returned Servicemen and the N.Z. Top Brass parties would have exceeded all but the Greeks. Our top brass party was one that we could be proud of. It consisted of Dave Thompson, our Minister of Defence, and a former member of 19 Bn., Bill Gentry a former C.G.S., Brian Poananga - our current C.G.S., Jim Burroughs, Tom Campbell, Charlie Upham, the CO of the 19th Bn. on Crete - his name temporarily evades me. In addition there was our N.Z. Honour Guard plus bugler from our N.Z. Battalion in Singapore.

For me, the highlight of all parades and services was the final function which was held on Maleme Airfield itself. There were no prayers and no wreaths this time. It was an assembly of thousands of Cretans plus guests like ourselves to honour the memory of the many who had resisted the German invasion. The function commenced with a parachute drop by Greek sky divers. This was followed by a lengthy address by a senior Greek (or Cretan) official on the Battle of Crete. For the ignorant, that is those unable to understand the Greek language (e.g. us) the speech had been translated into English, printed and presented to us. After the address, printed testimonials were presented to the mayors of those municipalities which had resisted the Germans either during the battle itself or later during the occupation.

RETURN TO CRETE (CONTINUED)

What astounded me about this service or assembly was the knowledge that it is held every year. Where could all these people have come from? Judged by the number of buses many had come from distant villages. I could not help contrasting the large number at Maleme with the small number of New Zealanders who attend our Anzac Day parades. Surely the Cretan authorities have not copied Les Andrew's famous Routine Orders in Hollingbourne in 1940 when his R.O.s would state "Voluntary Church Parade tomorrow. All personnel will attend".?

I must make some reference to the courage of some Germans, who, in addition to holding their own service at the German War Cemetery on Hill 107, attended respectfully our services. A few even had a sense of humour. I spoke with two Germans, one of whom told me that he had landed in a glider. When I asked where his glider had landed he replied that it had landed by the Tavronitis Bridge. I said "How the Hell did we miss you?". He burst out laughing. The second one said that he had come down by parachute and said "You didn't miss me! Look!" - and he hobbled off along the road.

The return to Crete was a great experience. I had thought of going before but I was afraid. There were too many memories - memories of grand men and grand soldiers who have remained there for ever. But I am happy now. These men lie in a warm and friendly land and are remembered with respect, affection and gratitude by Cretans of all ages.

Our tour party arrived in Crete to a very warm welcome - there was much smiling and hand shaking. It was different when we left. As well as smiles there were many moist eyes - as well as hand shaking there were many bear hugs and much kissing. Most embarrassing, but most sincere!

If any reader of this report should one day visit Crete, either during the Annual Service of Remembrance of the Battle of Crete in late May, or at any other time, please make sure that you identify yourself as a New Zealander. Please do not get mistaken for a German!

STAN JOHNSON.

ROLL OF HONOUR

36906	O.V. OXLEY	Wellington	19/7/81
108946	E. McNULTY	Gisborne	27/7/81
30567	R.I. LAMBERT	Hawera	13/8/80
36978	M.M. McKENZIE	Hastings	17/8/81
33206	J. DONOGHUE	Lower Hutt	23/8/81
31450	W.A. BEACH	Napier	20/9/81
37039	C.E. HATCHARD	Hawera	24/9/81
34196	J.P. FINNIGAN	Wellington	24/9/81
35850	B.W. MCKINNON	Wanganui	27/9/81
36944	A. (SANDY) KEITH	Palmerston North	30/9/81
44933	E.D. BOUGEN	Patea	10/10/81
	J.M. CLARKE	Eketahuna	1981
44778	W.J.H. WAKELIN	Tauranga	17/10/81
30608	J.J. McLAUGHLAN	Wellington	9/11/81

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WING COMMANDER HOWELL

Last year, the 22nd Battalion Association elected Wing Commander E.A. Howell (R.A.F. - Retired) an Honorary member of the Association in recognition of his close ties with the Battalion in Crete. He wrote a most appreciative letter to DENIS REIDY at the time:-

"Thank you for your letter of November 20th informing me of my membership of the 22nd Battalion Association and the enclosed tie and badge and pin. I appreciate very much the honour given to me by the Association. It was good to see some of your members in Crete last May and I had previously met several on the 30th anniversary of the Battle in 1971.

No one who fought in Crete is likely to forget it! And the associations made there on the battlefield are likewise unforgettable and precious. I shall always be proud to have served and fought alongside your justly-famous regiment. And it will always be a pleasure to keep in touch.

We so enjoyed welcoming HADDON DONALD and his wife here in our home this summer. The T.V. film will be interesting to see next May. I am seeing the Director, TOM STEEL, tomorrow as he and his wife are visiting St. Andrews. You will probably have heard that the Producer, JEREMY ISAACS, has been appointed the new head of the fourth T.V. channel in Britain.

Please express my sincere thanks to your members for the honour they have given to me. I appreciate it greatly."

Yours sincerely,

Edward Howell.

'TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS' DOES IT AGAIN

He came to me in my dreams last night, and once again I gazed into those steady eyes and watched that wiry moustache, as I had often done, across the orderly room table.

Only, this time, he did not say "Twenty-eight days" but said instead "Tom don't be so lousy - pay your sub."

So Cedric, a cheque is enclosed!

Vrai et Fort! Happy Christmas to all and Walk with ALLAH!

TOM DE LISLE.

BRANCH OFFICERS - 1981/82PRESIDENT:-VICE-PRESIDENTS:-SECRETARY/TREASURER:WELFARE OFFICER:-COMMITTEE:-

H.G. Matthews, 2 Cron Avenue, Te Atatu South.
D.R. Froggatt, 28 Freyberg Street, Tauranga.
M.H. Linklater, 9 Fordyce Avenue, Pakuranga.
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C.W. Randerson, P.O. Box 13-058, Onehunga.
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J. Allen
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G. Couchman
B.J. Galvin
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