

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

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22ND BATTALION NEWS

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MARCH ON, 1985

GEORGE ORWELL's year of 1984 has almost come to an end without any world-shattering developments. The BIG BROTHERS of the world have carried on their usual activities much as before and there has been the usual quota of wars, famines and associated misery. New Zealand has a new Big Brother and the citizens of this country are watching his performance as intently as he is watching theirs. Some members of this Association are reported to have gone into shock as a result of listening to ROGER DOUGLAS'S first Budget (2 to go?). Queen Street, Auckland has had its first major riot since 1932. Otherwise, it's been a pretty normal sort of year!

Branch President GEORGE MATTHEWS, the Editor and the other members of the Branch Committee wish all readers of this Newsletter the happiest of Christmases and all the best for 1985.

STEPHEN POLKINGHORN & FRIENDS

"Get off my bloody ship" roared the skipper of the river gunboat H.M.S. PETEREL, when confronted by a boarding party of senior Japanese officers and armed marines. The skipper was Lieut. STEPHEN POLKINGHORN, R.N.R., British-born but a New Zealander by adoption. The place was the Yangtze River at Shanghai; the date:- 8th December, 1941. On approximately the same date, perhaps a few days earlier, the skipper of the Italian submarine AMMIRAGLIO MILLO was taking aboard his vessel at BARDIA a group of about 30 8th Army officers who had been captured by the AFRIKA KORPS, including some of those captured at SIDI AZEIZ late in November, 1941. The Italian skipper was Lieut. FEDERICO ("FRITZ") TAMBURINI. When he learned that his P.O.W. guests were New Zealanders, he was quick to give them especially courteous treatment and took an early opportunity to enquire if any of them came from Hamilton and if, by any chance, they knew his wife, who was "a Hamilton girl". If you are wondering what possible connection there could be between a naval incident at Shanghai and the battle of Sidi Azeiz, please be patient and you will soon learn just how far the long arm of coincidence can stretch.

Stephen Polkinghorn served his apprenticeship as a seaman in the days of sail and has spent most of his life in the Merchant Navy, a good deal of it on the China Coast. At the start of World War 2, he was almost 53 years of age and is said to have falsified his age in order to wangle a transfer to the Royal Naval Reserve. As commander of PETEREL, a small shallow-draft ship of 310 tons, he had a good deal to do with the transmitting by ship's radio of "intelligence" about the movements of Japanese warships and about the vast quantities of arms and supplies passing through Shanghai to the Japanese armies in China. The nature of the information he was receiving probably alerted him to Japanese intentions in the wider war and prompted him to remain on board his ship one

STEPHEN POLKINGHORN & FRIENDS (CONTINUED)

night to be sure that code books and secret papers were destroyed. The Japanese officers who came aboard his ship in the early hours of 8th December informed him that Japan had declared war on Great Britain and called on him to surrender. Faced with his withering response, the Japanese party hurriedly left the ship and retreated to a safe distance. Two signal flares were fired and, almost instantaneously, three Japanese ships (a cruiser, a destroyer and a gunboat) opened fire at point blank range. PETEREL's armament normally included two 3 inch guns but their breech-blocks had been sent to Hong Kong and the crew defended their ship with the only weapons they had left - two machine guns. Even if all weapons had been available, the result of the brief battle would have been a foregone conclusion. But Polkinghorn and his crew 'bought' enough time to destroy the code books and other papers. It would, in any case, have been against all the traditions of the Navy to surrender the ship without a fight. PETEREL sank into the murky waters of the river in a ball of flame. Six of the crew were killed and several wounded, including the skipper, but they accounted for half a dozen Japanese with their machine guns. Stephen Polkinghorn spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Japanese, returning to New Zealand at the end of hostilities aboard H.M.S. GAMBIA to rejoin his wife and family, who were living in Mt. Albert, Auckland. He was awarded the D.S.C. in 1945 for his "great courage, determination and tenacity in fighting his ship when attacked by overwhelming Japanese forces." The investiture took place in 1946 at Government House, Auckland.

FRITZ TAMBURINI (he was always known as 'Fritz' because his mother was German) was descended from a long line of high-ranking Italian army officers. He had a short but distinguished career as a submarine commander in the Italian Navy. Not long before W.W.2, he was serving in Chinese waters with an Italian naval squadron. It was in China that he met and married "a Hamilton girl" named ELLA POLKINGHORN, daughter of Stephen. Ella was born in Shanghai but Hamilton became her home town. In December, 1941 she was living in LA SPEZIA, near Genoa and had a 9-month old daughter. Her husband, Fritz, had been decorated for conspicuous service in submarines, promoted to Lieut. Commander and given command of Italy's biggest and most modern submarine, the AMMIRAGLIO MILLO. As commander of that vessel, he was engaged in running supplies to the North African battlefields and taking back important allied prisoners of war. His "guests" in Bardia Harbour included 3 22nd men who had been captured when Rommel's 15th Panzer Division over-ran 5th N.Z. Infantry Brigade H.Q. at SIDI AZEIZ on 27th November, 1941. They were WYN MASON, who was Staff Captain at Brigade H.Q. at that time, Capt. STAN JOHNSON, O.C. B-Coy, 22nd Battalion, and his 2 I.C., Capt. HAMISH SIMPSON.

Stan Johnson takes up the story:- "When the captain of the sub. found that he had a Brigadier (JAMES HARGEST) aboard, he gave up his own cabin to him. To the eight officers of field rank, he gave the use, shared with his own officers, of the Wardroom. To us lowly captains, he permitted the visit each night, when we were on the surface, of one or two at a time to go to the Conning Tower for a cigarette and to listen to the B.B.C. news and take same back to the other P.O.W.s. Fritz Tamburini described his wife as 'a poor darling who is having a hell of a war, with her father commanding a British ship, with me commanding this modern Italian submarine, with her brother Jack commanding a unit of Gurkha soldiers, with her baby daughter and her inability to speak Italian.' Ella Tamburini did indeed have a hell of a war. Just 3 months after her father became a prisoner of the Japanese, her husband's submarine was torpedoed by a British submarine, H.M.S. ULTIMATUM, and sank with the loss of all hands. Ella had some small consolation later in the war when her brother Jack Polkinghorn was

STEPHEN POLKINGHORN & FRIENDS (CONTINUED)

able to visit her during the Italian campaign. She became known as the "girl of many flags". After the war, she returned to New Zealand, remarried and lives in Auckland as Mrs. Ella Murray.

Ella Tamburini (nee Polkinghorn) is very much the connecting link in this story. Stephen Polkinghorn was sure that the Japanese treated him rather better than the other prisoners because his son-in-law was a notable Italian submarine commander who was half Italian and half German. And we have already noted the V.I.P. treatment given to a group of New Zealand officers aboard an enemy submarine. Two other B Coy. officers captured at Sidi Azeiz, Lieuts. C.N. (Colin) ARMSTRONG and D.G. (Dave) BARTON were transported from Bardia a few days later on another submarine. Says Stan Johnson:- "I would doubt that they received the same kindness and hospitality as shown to us by Ella's husband and Lt.Commander Polkinghorn's son-in-law."

All the loose threads in this tale were brought together on 16th October, 1984 at the Auckland Officer's Club. The Club held a special function (THE POLKINGHORN EVENING) to honour its oldest member, Lt.Comdr. Stephen Polkinghorn, D.S.C., R.N.R., who has just celebrated his 98th birthday. As the result of an accidental fall, Stephen Polkinghorn is confined to a wheel-chair but is fit and very mentally alert despite his advanced years. He is now living in the 'Ranfurly' War Veterans Home at Three Kings. He was present at the function in October as also was Mrs. Ella Murray, now the wife of a former member of 18th Battalion, and her daughter, who married a Yugoslav and has two children of her own. Stan Johnson told the gathering his story about Ella's first husband and, for this tribute to a gallant sailor, he was warmly kissed by Ella. A booklet about Stephen Polkinghorn has recently been published by the New Zealand Military Historical Society Inc. and we freely acknowledge having cribbed parts of this story from that very interesting little book.

COMING EVENTS - AUCKLAND BRANCH

MT. MAUNGANUI GET-TOGETHER:- Two years ago almost, a most enjoyable and informal gathering was held at The Mount for Branch members and their ladies who were living in the Bay of Plenty area and for anyone else who wanted to be there, including members from Rotorua, Hamilton, Auckland and elsewhere. It was organised by Branch Patron DOUG. FROGGATT, with assistance from past Branch President GORDON COUCHMAN. The gathering was such a popular success that we have asked Doug. to arrange a repeat for February, 1985 and he has kindly agreed to do this. Here are the details:-

<u>The Date:-</u>	Saturday, 16th February, 1985.
<u>Venue:-</u>	Mount Maunganui R.S.A.
<u>Time:-</u>	5.30 p.m. onwards.
<u>Financial arrangements:-</u>	Usual R.S.A. charges for refreshments and evening meal.

Our Tauranga representatives would like to have some idea of the numbers of men and women likely to attend by about 9th February. Please ring Doug. or Gordon (their phone numbers will be in the Tauranga phone book) if you live in the Tauranga district, or send a note to the Secretary at Box 13-058, Auckland, 6.

COMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

BRANCH REUNION & SOCIAL:- Our usual annual 'do' in Auckland will be held at the Grey Lynn R.S. Club in the late afternoon and early evening of Sunday, 31st March, 1985. Full details will be given in our next issue but make a note of the date now and shun any other engagements for after 4 p.m. that day, including Bowling Green commitments.

ROLL OF HONOUR

54933	S.L. (STAN) CHONG	Papua-New Guinea - 2/6/84
6754	J. GALLICHAN	Palmerston North - 22/10/84
6706	C.J. (CHAS.) MERRYLEES	Waipu - 26/11/84
6563	R.C. (RAY) O'TOOLE	Auckland - 6/11/84
	A.E. (BERTIE) PARNELL	Tauranga - 19/8/84

BERTIE PARNELL had not enjoyed good health for some time when he died at Tauranga on 19th August. MERV. ASHMAN organised a good muster of 22 members to parade at the funeral. Bertie was an original member of the Carrier Platoon, as was GORDON COUCHMAN, so Gordon was deputed to speak at the service on behalf of the 22nd. Afterwards, all were dismissed to the Tauranga R.S.A., where afternoon tea, etc. was provided. On parade were:- MERV. ASHMAN, JOE BOYD, ALLAN BELL, VIC BLUNDELL, GORDON COUCHMAN, TOM De LISLE, LEO DONOVAN, DOUG. FROGGATT, BARRY HOULAHAN, KEN McLENNAN, JACK MORGAN & FRED PINNEY.

Doug. Froggatt

RAY O'TOOLE was another of the original members of the Battalion. He served on the Auckland Branch Committee for a time and was a 'regular' at Branch functions for a good many years but was not able to make it in the last two or three years of his life. Ray is survived by his wife, Mary, two daughters and 10 grandchildren.

CHAS. MERRYLEES was yet another of the 'originals' and a stout-hearted one at that. I remember him as the iron man who toted his heavy BOYES anti-tank rifle (in A. Company) as if it was a walking stick. Always a tower of strength and the best of company, Chas. lived a long and very full life until his death at the age of 75. Several members of Auckland Branch were able to attend his send-off and JACK STEWART recounted one or two of the more hilarious escapades in C.J.'s army career.

ORIGIN OF 22 BN. FUNDS

The Bn. were in a rest area in Italy and the powers that be thought that some organised form of entertainment was necessary. I don't know whose idea it was but the suggestion was made that we run a race meeting - rather a novel idea because to start off with we had no horses! With engineers tape a long course was marked out and hurdles provided and the wooden horses advance along the course as a dice was thrown. Jack Sullivan presided at a table and was the chief dice thrower. Usually there were six horses in a race and to jump a hurdle the horse involved had to throw a 6. Thus the horses were spread at intervals along the track. Probably about 6 races were run during the afternoon. The writer was secretary - treasurer and others involved in the money making effort were Bill Vaughan, Percy Yates, Mick Tatham and Jack Sullivan and George Sainsbury to name some of them. George Sainsbury, who was then O/C of Don

ORIGIN OF 22 BN. FUNDS (CONTINUED)

Company, who were possibly the ring leaders in arranging the meeting, suggested that on one race we run a Calcutta Sweep. I told him that I had no idea how to run one and he said that he would explain how to organise same. Tickets were sold at (again from memory) 200 Lira (10/-) and the result was quite fantastic and the pool prior to our taking out our commission was huge. Most of the blokes had plenty of cash as "hocking" to the Ities was commonplace.

The horses were drawn on the morning of the meeting and then auctioned. Two auctioneers whose abilities we used were Bill Sadler and Arthur Aldridge. From memory, as our share we took out 20% from both the sale of tickets and the sale of horses. Horses bought big prices because of the size of the pool. The attraction was that George Sainsbury had arranged with the paymaster at Div. that blokes who had winnings from the meeting could remit same to New Zealand. This gave blokes who had substantial sums from "hocking" to legally remit same. To do so in the ordinary course of events was extremely difficult. A tote was run at each meeting (in my time we had two) and the profits over remitted to New Zealand to establish a fund in the name of the 22 Bn. to be used "for future reunions". The first trustee of the fund was Reg. Haywood who was, according to Bill Vaughan, the original Orderly Room Sergeant of the Bn. but because of his age was returned to New Zealand. He invested same in a Post Office Savings Account. The profit from the race meeting was quite substantial and I remember that "L.W.A.", who knew of the meeting, was very impressed with the initiative of his old Bn.

I returned to New Zealand with a furlough draft on 21st April 1945 and later heard of the large sum of money which had been remitted to New Zealand for the credit of the Bn. funds. This money was very substantial and made our efforts with race meetings "chicken feed". In its advance North in the latter stages of the Italian Campaign the Bn. captured a town where a large sugar factory was located. H.V. Donald, the C.O., had the factory guarded and laid on 3 ton trucks to cart the sugar south where it was sold to very good advantage. All the funds from the sale were remitted to New Zealand for the credit of the fund. When all the troops had returned to civilian life the question of a Bn. Association was discussed throughout various places where branches had formed. Meetings of former CO's and some senior officers had been held in Wellington and a former officer and a practising solicitor in Wanganui, Colin Armstrong, agreed to draft a constitution for the proposed 22 Bn. Association. It was necessary to have a constitution because, unlike most units, we had very substantial funds. How were they to be used? Taranaki had formed a very strong branch - there were 56 at the original meeting, when a committee with the late Jim Sampson as president was formed.

A meeting of branch delegates was held in Wanganui on a Saturday evening - it would possibly be about 1947. Taranaki were represented by Bill Vaughan. Jack Shaw, Doug Froggatt and myself to consider the draft constitution which was presented by Colin Armstrong. An organisation was set up and a "standing" committee, one from each branch with a president and secretary, was appointed to run the affairs of the Association between reunions, which would be held every two years. It was arranged that to have a representative on the "standing committee": a branch had to be active, have an annual meeting and send to the National Secretary a copy of their annual accounts. I have no idea whether this is done - I rather doubt it. The real problem of course was what to do with the Bn. funds - how were they to be utilised? Branch delegates all had

ORIGIN OF 22 BN. FUNDS (CONTINUED)

different ideas - Taranaki for instance at one stage favoured a substantial grant to heritage. "Scotch" Paterson was strongly in favour of this proposal. Finally a scheme was approved as follows. The fund to be equally divided and used as follows:

1. As a reunion fund to reimburse any branch who put on the two yearly reunion and made a loss on same. I don't think that any branch has made a loss on a national reunion but I am not certain - only the books of the association will tell.
2. As a benefit fund to be administrated by the standing committee to assist members or their families who had encountered hardship or financial problems. I was the 2nd National Secretary - Jim Fraser from Wellington originally acted and I handed over to George McCormick from Masterton after the 2nd National reunion in New Plymouth. During my period as National Secretary we made a few grants. When a branch made a recommendation for a grant it was necessary to write to each member of the standing committee to secure his approval. It was somewhat unwieldy - probably over the years it has altered. Over the years probably other grants have been made. I have no idea of what still remains in the funds - neither the reunion or the benefit fund. Obviously these funds over the years have earned interest.

KAI THOMSON, Taranaki Branch

EDITOR'S NOTE:- Thank you Kai for a very interesting and comprehensive account of the origins of the Association's "sugar" money. As far as I know, there have been no losses on biennial National Reunions. Some of the profits have gone into the national fund, while some have been "dispersed" at Branch level, either to worthy causes or to enable Branches to subsidise travel to subsequent Reunions. Yes, the procedure for making grants was simplified some years ago. The Constitution is said to have been 'lost' by one of the Branches. At March, 1984, the Reunion Account held \$1,200 and the Benefit Account stood at \$2,345 - total \$3,545.

A WORD FROM THE TREASURER

Pressure of work in the Treasurer's office has so far prevented the sending of subscription accounts to Branch members who have not yet paid their subs. for the 1984/85 financial year. A rough check shows that we have about 145 members currently financial out of a total of 240 on the Branch Roll. Many thanks to the 20 members whose subs. have come in since the October Newsletter went out and for the advance subs. sent in and the generous donations, including one very large donation. If you receive a sub. account in the next week or two (or three), it will be for the year ending 28th February, 1985 and you may feel inspired to send in next year's sub. at the same time. If funds are tight, don't worry about sending anything.

PRISON CAMPS & PERSONALITIES (2)LIFE AT MODENA

Our life at Modena was an improvement on Bari. True, there were times when a boiled onion and two sardines made our winter meal but, towards the end of the Italian adventure, we had large bowls of pasta asciuta. Summer days we lazed in the sun; some of us studying, others in bridge tournaments; Flash Hodge of Wanganui and Norm Carter, Adj., 22 Bn., playing leads in Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men'; Thompson, M.C., who was Minister of Defence prior to the recent General Election, quietly pursuing his own way. Oddly enough, the member for Stratford, Polson, had recommended that P.W.'s should not be paid, a piece of news the Italians were quick to relay to us. As I recollect, Thompson was elected from Stratford but, to his credit, has made several statements which show that his P.W. experience has not been forgotten. He was sympathetic to conditions in our own gaols and recently declared that the N.Z. Army of the future would never again go into battle untrained and ill equipped.

It was at Modena that I received news of the death of my father. The padre passed on the news, the death having occurred a fortnight before, sent in a telegram through the Papal services. It was most distressing to receive a few days later a letter from my father which concluded, "Well old son, they think I have shot my bolt...". I crawled to a quiet spot and wept alone.

ON TO GERMANY

In Germany, we joined up with other N.Z.ers at Marisch Trubau, somewhere near the Sudetenland. Apparently, it had been a biscuit factory but the only biscuits we received we slept upon. The whole camp complex consisted of bungalows which housed senior officers. Outside were the Russian P.W.'s, living in wretched conditions. I had seen the graves of 40,000 Russians who had apparently died of typhus associated with crowded conditions and malnutrition. We did our best for the sick, sending food in from the Red Cross parcels: a tin of Canadian sardines may have saved a life.

At curfew, the Alsatian dogs were set loose and it was great fun for Germans to set them on weak and tottering Russians. One night, however, they met a N.Z. farmer! He was late in returning to barracks and the Alsatian was quick in pursuit. Evan Wilson, not only a farmer but a South Island mountaineer, rushed into his barrack and jammed the head of the Alsatian in the door. He called on the occupants for support, then climbed out of the window and 'kicked... out of the dog'. He and the dog became the best of friends. Evan Wilson just before this had escaped and met up with Yugo-Slavian partisans; his story of the treatment of captured German soldiers by the partisan groups was blood curdling. Many a night he awakened us with screams of nightmarish recollection. Bill Barlow, a tough speaking Englishman, was surrounded by an evil smell. We suggested that he wash his socks but, in his absence, we searched his bed to find that under his pillow he had a cache of evil smelling German cheese. Bill later came to the M.O., Wright (of Arnheim) to have a tooth removed, his face pumping with the effects of an abscess. The M.O. was allowed to give him pentathol. We waited outside the surgery to greet him; he came out with his face still pumping but his arm was bandaged tight and held aloof above his head. The M.O. had missed the shot and injected it into a wrong blood vessel. In the deep snow of Marisch Trubau, Bill would open the double glazed windows and yell encouragement to the Russians, who were then hundreds of miles away:- "Come on Joe, you wee..."

PRISON CAMPS & PERSONALITIES (2) (CONTINUED)ON TO GERMANY (CONTINUED)

The German sentries, in straw enwrapped boots, weren't very pleased. Inside we were warm as the camp had very efficient steam heating.

CHRISTMAS AT MARISCH TRUBAU

The first Christmas at Marisch Trubau was memorable because English officers organised a cabaret show. All our Christmas food was pooled, including Christmas pudding; we had several sittings for dinner; tables were laid in check mattress covers and dinner was served by English officers dressed like singing barbers. They came round to our tables and sang old time songs:- 'Clementine', 'Swanee River'.

As the Russians advanced, it was decided to move us further North, to Brunswick Oflag 79. We were marched through a village and our plan was to sing patriotic songs. 'Roll out the Barrel' was started in too high a key and we failed miserably. At the entraining point, we were handcuffed, probably as a reprisal for the Dieppe raid. Clem Le Livre, a farmer from Whakatane, a neat immaculate officer, put on his Kiwi hat, the Mt. Egmont type. Before he was handcuffed, he objected, took off his hat and jumped on it. The railway wagons were the usual:- 8 chevau or 40 hommes; However they were partitioned, our guards in one half separated by barbed wire. Butler-Shaw, Indian Army, remonstrated with the guards, shaking a long piece of wurst at them. 'Do you think this is enough for us?' The worst broke in half and dropped into a urine bucket. Butler-Shaw retrieved it, washed it in water, and ate it: I don't think anyone joined him. It was not long before the handcuffs were eased off, they were fastened on the hand by a ratchet, which we unscrewed. On our detraining, the handcuffs were given back to our guards. Some got to work with knives, which they had serrated, to cut holes in the wooden floors. This was stopped when, at a halt, Germans went round with tommy guns and shot through the floor boards. Meanwhile we had our fun, N.Z.ers were passing through stations cupped their hands and made mooing noises, like cattle.

ALLIED TERROR-BOMBING

German propaganda was making much of the terror-bombing of the Allied forces. A press report said that it was the intention to collect a representative number of Allied P.W.'s and place them on the edge of a strategic air field. This would test the accuracy of the bombing about which the Allies boasted. We heard that the House of Lords discussed this departure from Geneva Conventions.

And so we came to Brunswick. It was a dull misty day. The barracks on the outskirts had been heavily bombed and showed that they could not stand a direct hit. On entry, a giant air raid siren sounded, the 'all red'. We had faith. One night I went down to the cellars and, shaking with fear, sat alongside another who was shaking too. I reassured him by saying:- "the R.A.F. know we are here". He replied that I didn't know his brother who would not let a few miserable P.W.'s stand in his way to final victory. His brother was Air Marshal 'Bomber' Harris!

TO BE CONTINUED